Originalism and the Problem of Fundamental Fairness

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I. The Prominence of Originalism

Originalism is a prominent way of interpreting the Constitution and of deciding constitutional cases. As we shall see, there are a number of ways to develop the basic idea of originalism. We can begin with almost any formulation of the basic idea. Thus the constitutional historian Jack Rakove suggests, for example, that “advocates of originalism argue that the meaning of the Constitution (or of its individual clauses) was fixed at the moment of its adoption, and that the task of interpretation is accordingly to ascertain that meaning and apply it to the issue at hand.” For reasons we shall develop, however, originalism rests on fundamental unfairness, and should in crucial contexts be deemed morally unacceptable as a basic approach to constitutional decisionmaking.

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The author conveys his thanks to ________________.

1 See infra Section II.

2 Jack N. Rakove, Original Meanings: Politics and Ideas in the Making of the Constitution xiii (1997) (emphasis in the original) (posing the question of “[w]hat authority should [the Constitution’s] ‘original meaning’ (or ‘original intention’ or ‘understanding’) enjoy in its ongoing interpretation?”).
Originalism is today arguably dominant as a theory, if not in actual judicial practice. There are certainly dissenters from this belief in originalism’s dominance, including some originalists. Robert Bork, for example, writing in 1990, argued that “[w]hat was once the dominant view of constitutional law -- that a judge is to apply the Constitution according to the principles intended by those who ratified the document -- is now very much out of favor among the theorists of the field.” Several years later, Professor Jonathan Macey concluded that “[o]utside the comfortable confines of the Federalist Society, originalism is far from fashionable. . . . As Robert Bork discovered at his confirmation hearings, those who are originalists lack intellectual respectability.”

But the intellectual tides have arguably lifted originalism not only to prominence, but even to dominance. Thus the widely respected constitutional theorist Michael Perry has declared that “[a]s between the originalist approach to the interpretation of the constitutional text and any nonoriginalist approach, the originalist approach is the proper one.” Surveying the landscape, Professor Randy Barnett has concluded that originalism

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“has thrived like no other approach to interpretation.”⁶ Even more emphatically, it has been argued that “originalism has become authoritative, both inside and outside of courts . . .”⁷ Similarly, it has been held “originalism is the legal profession’s orthodox mode of justification.”⁸ And on another assessment, “[o]riginalism has become the prevailing approach to constitutional interpretation . . .”⁹ Or even more dramatically, “[t]he only jurisprudence that has made it into the public sphere is . . originalism.”¹⁰

In part, this reflects a broadening of the idea of originalism, so that the title of ‘originalist’ can be more widely adopted.¹¹ It is thus suggested that “we are all

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originalists now.”12 In at least a broadly inclusive sense of the term, originalism as a theory indeed seems well-established, if not utterly dominant.

We will make no attempt to account for the current popularity of originalism, beyond making one modest point: In matters of authority and legitimacy, a sense of tradition and continuity have a role to play. Originalism, in emphasizing reference to the

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historical document and the meaning or intentions of famous Framers, can evoke emotional responses that alternatives to originalism cannot directly match.

In this context, we may think of Walter Bagehot’s classic distinction between the “dignified parts”\(^\text{13}\) and the “efficient parts”\(^\text{14}\) of the institution of the English Constitution. Bagehot thought that the “dignified” elements of the Constitution tended to “excite and preserve the reverence of the population,”\(^\text{15}\) a necessary condition to the exercise of authority.\(^\text{16}\) Our Constitution and the Framers tend to evoke in many persons something of this reaction.

More recently, the sociologists Edward Shils and Michael Young developed this theme in noting that the British monarchy had “its roots in man’s beliefs and sentiments about what he regards as sacred.”\(^\text{17}\) As Shils and Young argue with regard to the Crown,\(^\text{18}\) so, to a degree, for American constitutionalism. Legitimacy and authority, in a behavioral sense, are arguably enhanced where criticism is directed not at the Constitution or the Framers, but against particular court decisions, particular judges, court


\(^\text{14}\) Id.

\(^\text{15}\) Id.

\(^\text{16}\) See id.


\(^\text{18}\) See id. at 148.
compositions, or even a particular court. Recognizing the emotional importance to many of the Constitutional text and of the Framers allows us to avoid a narrowly rationalistic view of legitimacy and authority in practice.\textsuperscript{19} The emotional and symbolic dimensions of originalism may thus help account for its popularity as the adoption of the Constitution recedes in time.

It is in any event fair to concede the current popularity, if not the dominance, of originalism as a theory of constitutional interpretation. Before we can evaluate originalism on the merits, though, we should further\textsuperscript{20} clarify the range of meanings of originalism itself.

To some extent, the merits of originalism may depend upon some much more general theory of interpretation. On the theory of interpretation of texts in general, however, we shall say little.\textsuperscript{21} However much the Constitution may share with a novel, a poem, sacred


\textsuperscript{20} For our beginning at such an understanding, see supra text accompanying note 2.

\textsuperscript{21} Meaning, we shall assume for the sake of making progress, is not entirely subjective. See Terry Eagleton, The Meaning of Life 124 (2007) (“[m]eaning . . . is something people do, but they do it with a determinate world whose laws they did not invent, and if their meanings are to be valid, they must respect this world’s grain and texture”). See
also Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory: An Introduction 64 (2d ed. 1996) (“[t]here is in fact no reason why the author should not have had several mutually contradictory intentions, or why his intention may not have been somehow self-contradictory . . .”).

The noted literary theorist, semiotician, and novelist Umberto Eco has interestingly opined that

> [o]n one side it is assumed that to interpret text means to find out the meaning intended by its original author or -- in any case -- its objective nature or essence, an essence which, as such, is independent of our interpretation. On the other side it is assumed that texts can be interpreted in infinite ways.

Taken as such, these two options are both instances of epistemological fanaticism.

scripture, a ransom note, a blueprint, a limerick, or a laundry list, there are other features, perhaps unshared with the above texts, on which we may profitably concentrate.

Originalism, we have already seen, comes in different strengths and flavors.\(^{22}\) We can elaborate on our introductory formulation\(^ {23}\) by invoking an exemplary originalist, Professor Raoul Berger. Professor Berger reported that “I understand by original intention, the explanation that draftsmen gave of what their words were designed to accomplish, what their words mean.”\(^ {24}\)

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(“the only coherent answer to the question ‘What does the Constitution mean?’ is that the Constitution means what its authors intended it to mean. The alternative answers just don’t work: the Constitution can’t mean what the text alone says because there is no text alone; and it can’t mean what present-day society needs and wants it to mean because any meaning under that imperative will not be the Constitution’s”). Professor Fish’s dichotomy, however, may not be exhaustive, as Ogden & Richards, supra, seem to suggest, id. at 195 (“we very often mean what we do not mean; i.e., we refer to what we do not intend . . .”).

\(^{22}\) See Sanford Levinson, supra note 12; Cass Sunstein, supra note 12.

\(^{23}\) See supra text accompanying note 2.

This formulation is controversial in its reference to drafters, rather than to the ratifiers, of the proposed Constitution.\textsuperscript{25} At least as importantly, Professor Berger apparently draws no important distinctions here among ‘original intention,’ ‘original meaning,’ and ‘original understanding.’\textsuperscript{26} Of late, some originalists have seen an important distinction between a more subjective original ‘intention’ and a more objective or more cultural original ‘meaning.’\textsuperscript{27}

Cutting across this latter distinction, according to Professor Ronald Dworkin, is a further distinction between “semantic originalism,”\textsuperscript{28} which focuses on what was

\textsuperscript{25} See, e.g., Robert Bork, supra note 3, at 143 (referring specifically to “those who ratified the document”); Randy Barnett, An Originalism For Nonoriginalists, supra note 6, at 620.

\textsuperscript{26} See Johnathan G. O’Neill, Raoul Berger and the Restoration of Originalism, 96 Nw. U.L. Rev. 253, 255 (2001). Whether genuinely consistent with his originalism or not, Professor Berger also disdained any appeal to natural rights or natural law in constitutional interpretation. See id. at 255-56.

\textsuperscript{27} See, e.g., Randy Barnett, An Originalism For Nonoriginalists, supra note 6, at 620 (citing Robert Bork and Justice Antonin Scalia, among others); Randy E. Barnett, Trumping Precedent With Original Meaning: Not As Radical As It Sounds, 22 Const. Comment. 257, 257 (2005) (“original intentions” versus emphasis on “original public meaning of the text”).

\textsuperscript{28} Ronald Dworkin, supra note 12, at 119. See also Keith E. Whittington, Dworkin’s “Originalism”: The Role of Intentions in Constitutional Interpretation, 62 Rev. Politics 197, 204 (2000).
intended to be said,\textsuperscript{29} and “expectation originalism,”\textsuperscript{30} which focuses on the expected consequences of the language in practice.\textsuperscript{31} It goes without saying, for example, that we sometimes fail to grasp all of the meaning and practical implications of our own language.\textsuperscript{32}

This is not to suggest that all forms of originalism must focus narrowly on something like ‘meaning.’ It is suggested, for example, that even some originalists may want to consider “principles of political morality, prudence, doctrine, [and] rule of law considerations,”\textsuperscript{33} in a subordinate way, in seeking constitutional meaning. At the very least, originalists of the public meaning variety will typically want to have access not only to (historic) dictionaries,\textsuperscript{34} but to the conventions of ordinary English

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{29} See Ronald Dworkin, supra note 12, at 119.
\item \textsuperscript{30} Id.
\item \textsuperscript{31} See id.
\item \textsuperscript{32} There is, for example, nothing in the public, semantic meaning of “the equal protection of the laws” that confines its application either to a particular race or to race in general, whatever anyone’s expectations may have been in adopting the Fourteenth Amendment.
\item \textsuperscript{33} Ethan J. Leib, supra note 11, at _____. See also Randy E. Barnett, Underlying Principles 9, available at \url{http://ssrn.com/abstract=954601} (endorsing recourse to “underlying principles,” but only for the sake of properly applying “the original meaning of the text interpreted in light of these principles” to present circumstances).
\item \textsuperscript{34} Caleb Nelson, Originalism and Interpretive Conventions, 70 U. Chi. L. Rev. 519, 519 (2003).
\end{itemize}
communication,\textsuperscript{35} and to the canons and conventions of legal meaning\textsuperscript{36} as well. Originalists, finally, may also “acknowledge that the original understanding of some clauses could be fairly read to have included a background assumption of further judicial development.”\textsuperscript{37}

All of these considerations add to the difficult of reducing all forms of originalism to a concise slogan, but they also enrich originalism, and add to the resources available to originalists in responding to some traditional criticisms\textsuperscript{38} of originalism.

\section*{II. Originalism and Historical Taintedness}

The developments sketched above allow for a variety of forms of originalism. But such developments cannot avoid crucial problems that inhere in any authentic version of originalism. Originalism is inescapably and crucially tainted as a normative theory. This essential taintedness will admittedly not be evident in the context of many constitutional questions. But there are, as well, matters of fundamental importance to constitutional jurisprudence where the taintedness of originalist theory is crucially relevant and

\textsuperscript{35} See id.

\textsuperscript{36} See id. at 519-20.

\textsuperscript{37} Henry Paul Monaghan, supra note 4, at 38.

ineradicable. The historical circumstances on which any standard\textsuperscript{39} originalism relies are themselves tainted in such a way as to disqualify originalism as a primary method of constitutional interpretation in vital legal contexts.

The taintedness of the history on which originalism relies is well known. In adopting the Constitution, the actual majority of American adults constituted “a majority that never was.”\textsuperscript{40} We all recognize that “a majority of adults -- women, non-whites, and some

\textsuperscript{39} This qualification is meant to address two closely related possibilities. First, any theory can be so diluted, or so extensively incorporate crucial elements of rival theories, that only the name, rather than the substance, of the original theory remains. To the extent that an originalist is willing to dilute, if not abandon, what is distinctive about originalism, the originalist may fare better with critics, but at the cost of conceding the substance of the debate.

Second, and as a particular instance of the first, one could, technically, adopt an ahistorical, merely hypothetical form of originalism, focusing on idealized circumstances, events, and agreements. This approach could minimize what we refer to as the problem of tainted history. But it would be originalism in only a nominal sense. In substance, such a merely hypothetical originalism might more closely resemble the development by John Rawls of hypothetical agreements from his original position, transferred to a constitutional context. See John Rawls, A Theory of Justice (1971). Whatever the merits of such a theory, it would not most usefully be classified as a form of genuine originalism.

white males -- . . . were excluded from active participation in making [the] laws, whether
directly or through their elected representatives.”\textsuperscript{41} With regard to the Constitution and
its adoption, “[t]he majority of the population -- women, slaves, free blacks, persons
without substantial property -- had no voice in ordaining the Constitution.”\textsuperscript{42} In the
aggregate, the Constitution “received far from overwhelming consent even from those
who participated or were eligible to participate, much less from the eighty percent of the
population that was ineligible.”\textsuperscript{43}

Our focus is not on details or on bare percentages. Our focus is instead on the
intended virtual exclusion from any meaningful role in the constitutional adoption
process of significant identified groups with basic interests at stake.\textsuperscript{44} This systematic

\textsuperscript{41} Robert A. Dahl, On Removing Certain Impediments to Democracy in the United

\textsuperscript{42} Louis Henkin, The United States Constitution As Social Compact, 131 Proc. Am. Phil.

\textsuperscript{43} Larry G. Simon, The Authority of the Framers of the Constitution: Can Originalist
Interpretation Be Justified?, 73 Cal. L. Rev. 1482, 1498 (1985). See also id. at 1498 n.44
(“roughly 2.4% of the population voted in favor in the Constitution’s ratification”). See
also Alex Kozinski & Henry Sussman, Original Meanderings, 49 Stan. L. Rev. 1583,

\textsuperscript{44} While we will not press too closely into details of legitimacy, we should also not attach
undue significance to the influence, for example, of even particular women such as
Mercy Otis Warren, who after all was an Anti-Federalist. See generally Linda K. Kerber,
virtual exclusion was intended to have particular results, and in any event has systematically skewed constitutional law over time.

Of course, most of the excluded groups were at various later points incorporated into the electoral process. But by then, the basic nature and substance of the Constitution had been established. A late enfranchisement does not undo history. The ripples on the pond continue to radiate outward. A powerful bias, if not a realistic irreversibility, still obtains. A judicial precedent is only the most formal manifestation of this developing bias. American constitutional history, and our present constitutional law are, as we shall briefly suggest, what is called ‘path-dependent.’ These exclusions, the systematic skewing, and the path-dependency jointly raise serious questions of constitutional legitimacy in important contexts.

In this light, we must recognize originalism as relying on and maintaining, rather than solving, the problem of constitutional legitimacy. Originalism is actually part of the problem. We can make progress on the problem of constitutional legitimacy not by adhering to originalism, but only by adopting some alternative that better addresses the systematically exclusionary history crucial to constitutional originalism.

Consider specifically that while specific franchise rules varied from colony to colony, generally, “‘the people’ included only those adult males who possessed certain amounts

\[\text{\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{45} See infra notes 73-76 and accompanying text. The popular idea of the “butterfly” effect in changing the weather over time is a more extreme case. See infra note 186.\textsuperscript{46} Many of the problems of negotiation, bargaining strength, strategy, super-majoritarianism, and priorities are common to most approaches to constitutional interpretation.}}}\]
and kinds of property.”

In some colonies, perhaps a $50.00 freehold of 25 to 100 acres would suffice. These and similar limitations were clearly intended to reduce the potential scope of the franchise, in important and systematic ways.

The various racial, gender, and property-holding or class status limitations supposedly aimed at reducing electoral irresponsibility. But ‘irresponsibility here quickly loses its status as a neutral criterion, and instead suggests bias and important conflicts in vision and interest.

In particular, it was assumed by the well-off that those with little property, lacking independence of means, would lack also a meaningful stake in society and would therefore tend toward electoral irresponsibility. More specifically, it was feared, those


48 See id. at 26.

49 See id.

50 See id.

51 See id. One might imagine that the greater a person’s economic dependence on others, whether for charitable alms or modest wages, the greater their stake in the society’s economic productivity and security. Perhaps those with the greatest wealth would also tend to have the greatest independence, including international mobility. But our point is not to critique the Framers’ theory of the franchise, constitutional or otherwise.

52 See id.
without an economic stake in society would be drawn toward economic ‘leveling’ and redistribution.\(^{53}\)

Differences along these lines cannot be neutrally resolved by labeling ideological opponents as too irresponsible to vote. Given this and other forms of systematic exclusion from the drafting and ratifying of the Constitution, it is not surprising that the Constitution became “an aristocratic document designed to curb the democratic excesses of the Revolution.”\(^{54}\) Nor is it surprising that the Framers anticipated that the composition of Congress would largely mirror the general franchise requirements.\(^{55}\)

Our point does not address any differences in interests or voting patterns among substantial property owners.\(^{56}\) We instead focus on the general exclusion of free and

\(^{53}\) See id. See also the underlying conflict of visions in the poll tax case of Harper v. Virginia State Bd. of Elections, 383 U.S. 663 (1966) (rejecting wealth, property, or ability to pay as a legitimate limitation on the franchise).


\(^{56}\) Cf. the debate over Charles Beard’s particularized economic analysis of the Constitution, as referred to in, e.g., Shlomo Slonim, supra note 54; Forrest McDonald, We the People: The Economic Origins of the Constitution (1958); Neil K. Komesar, Paths of Influence -- Beard Revisited, 56 Geo. Wash. L. Rev. 124, 124-25 (1987);
enslaved blacks, women, and those white males falling below some specified property minimum. These sorts of exclusions would of course be morally objectionable in themselves, even if the exclusions had no effect on the text and development of the Constitution itself. The moral bindingness, legitimacy, and authority of the Constitution, at least in certain crucial respects, could on this basis alone be called into question.

But it is also important to think through possible consequences of these exclusions for constitutional law, as enshrined in the text and in the resulting interpretive case law. It is impossible to reconstruct with certainty what would have happened constitutionally given a much more inclusive group of constitutional drafters and ratifiers. Even if we assume that one purpose of the exclusions was to discourage “irresponsible”\(^\text{57}\) redistribution, we have nevertheless thereby opened the door to the idea that the influence of the excluded groups would have made some generally predictable difference, along economic lines.

If the systematically excluded had enjoyed some meaningful say in the drafting and ratification of the Constitution, they perhaps would have attended to their most basic interests, including their most basic economic and survival interests. This is not to guess at the bargaining strength that the already economically disadvantaged would have been able to exercise.\(^\text{58}\) But any coercion or duress by the relatively well off in the course of

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\(^{57}\) See Forrest McDonald, Novus Ordo Seclorum, supra note 47, at 26.

\(^{58}\) For general theoretical discussion, see, e.g., James M. Buchanan, The Limits of Liberty (1975); David Gauthier, Morals By Agreement (1987); Jean Hampton, Hobbes and the
articulating and bargaining over constitutional provisions could certainly impeach the moral legitimacy of any resulting Constitution.\textsuperscript{59}

It is also possible that no Constitution inattentive to the basic economic and survival interests of the excluded would have been ratified by a more inclusive group of ratifiers. And there is no reason to suppose that if the disenfranchised had been allowed free and equal scope for participation, they would have ignored their basic interests across the board, focusing entirely on less crucial matters.\textsuperscript{60}

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\textsuperscript{59} For the voidability even under positive law of contracts obtained through economic duress, coercion, or overreaching, see, e.g., Cabot Corp. v. AVX Corp., 448 Mass. 629, 637, 863 N.E.2d 503, 511 (2007) (citing Barnette v. Wells Fargo Nev. Nat’l Bank, 270 U.S. 438, 444 (1926); International Underwater Contractors v. New England Tel. & Tel., 393 N.E.2d 968 (Mass. 1979)).

\textsuperscript{60} While a Constitution at the national level must provide for structural matters where the resolution can be arbitrary within limits, as in the specified ages of elected officials, we may assume that the excluded groups would have noticed their own relevant basic interests, whatever their degree of altruism, as much as did those actually enfranchised. The Tenth Federalist Paper focuses on group interest as a political motivator. See Alexander Hamilton, James Madison & John Jay, The Federalist 40-46 (Terence Ball ed. 2003) (1787). Much of this general logic seems to be shared by the majority and the
\end{footnotesize}
Even today we see significant differences on basic economic and welfare policy along lines paralleling the group exclusions from the constitutional adoption process. Merely for example, the frequently encountered “gender gap”\textsuperscript{61} on social welfare policy\textsuperscript{62} has been widely discussed.\textsuperscript{63} Significant racial differences on employment and welfare policy are also well established.\textsuperscript{64} Much of the logic of these policy differences, as in the minority in the later poll tax case of Harper v. Virginia State Bd. of Elections, 383 U.S. 663 (1968).


\textsuperscript{62} See id.


\textsuperscript{64} See, e.g., Angus Campbell, et al., The American Voter 178-79 (1980); Warren E. Miller & J. Merrill Shanks, The New American Voter 368-69 (1996). This is not to suggest that the effects of race and economic class are easily disentangled. See Robert C. Smith & Richard Seltzer, Race, Class, and Culture (1992).
case of enslaved and freed blacks, would seem to translate to the historical circumstances of both the constitutional founding and the ratification of the Civil War Amendments.65

It seems clear that the constitutional adoption process was dramatically skewed to promote not just the neutral quality and integrity of the process, but particular group interests and preferences as well. This impeaches the supposed neutrality and fairness of the adoption process and the adopted Constitution. Since originalism as a theory of constitutional interpretation relies especially heavily on this systematically skewed, exclusionary process, originalism inherits the taintedness of the underlying history.

III. **Does Time Dispel the Historical Taint?**

Is the taintedness of history that is inherited by originalism washed out, however, by the possibility of later constitutional amendment or even by ordinary statute? All of the originally excluded groups referred to above have by now been granted the power to vote. Does the possibility of new constitutional amendments and statutes undo the objectionable history upon which originalism distinctively relies?

This argument is made by the originalist Robert Bork in the following terms:

> The dead, and unrepresentative, men who enacted our Bill of Rights and the Civil War amendments did not thereby forbid us, the living, to add new freedoms. We remain

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entirely free to create all the additional freedoms we want by simple legislation.66

The argument thus seems to be that whatever fundamental illegitimacies may have tainted the original Constitution can be readily neutralized, and thereby remedied.

Professor Bork’s analysis, however, understates the realistic difficulties involved in obtaining majority recognition for minority rights. It is doubtless impossible to tell what precise constitutional text, if any, would have resulted from an inclusive constitutional ratification process that required fair bargaining and some form of supermajority for adoption.67 It is also impossible to tell whether today’s amendment processes68 are more or less demanding in one sense or another than the original ratification vote.

What Professor Bork’s analysis most underemphasizes, however, is the combination of the difficulty at any point of obtaining supermajority support for legitimate minority interests, along with the rather delicate ‘path-dependency’ of American constitutional history. If there were indeed a miraculous ‘reset’ button controlling the nature and scope

67 For discussion of the original ratification requirements, see, e.g., Joseph Story, Commentaries On the Constitution of the United States 105-09 (Ronald D. Rotunda & John E. Nowak reprint ed. 1987) (1833) (nine state convention votes required for ratification pursuant to U.S. Const. art. VII).
68 For several amendment routes, all requiring supermajorities at more than one stage, see U.S. Const. art. V. For a broad theoretical discussion, see Responding to Imperfection: The Theory and Practice of Constitutional Amendment (Sanford Levinson ed. 1995).
of recognized constitutional rights, persistent minorities of various kinds would be generally last to have access to that reset button.

More importantly, though, there simply is no such reset button. American constitutional history cannot be readily erased and re-run. Some events can be atoned for, but not readily undone, with their effects then somehow rapidly and entirely dissipated. Some events, including basic injustices, have consequences that tend to persist, and to directly, indirectly, and even unrecognizedly influence the future.

In general, the Constitution as adopted, with no influence from the excluded groups, becomes the baseline. Any amendments from that baseline require multiple supermajorities.\textsuperscript{69} The Constitution, even insofar as it can be said to be morally tainted, gradually accrues additional sociological legitimacy in the sense of unchallenged status and in terms of cultural symbolism.\textsuperscript{70} Thus it is said that “the drafting, ratification, and amendment of the 1787-89 Constitution continue to be seen as events that express the will of a properly empowered American ‘people’ to set and define the character and limits of the polity.”\textsuperscript{71} At a more personalized level, “the constitutional Founders still seem to enjoy a regard, if not reverence, that has not significantly diminished over time.”\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{69} See id.

\textsuperscript{70} See supra notes 13-19 and accompanying text.


\textsuperscript{72} Id. Consider also the continuing tide of popular biographies of the various Founders and Framers.
Despite Professor Bork’s suggestions, a minority that seeks to even partially redress basic injustices through a constitutional amendment or statute that redistributes power or wealth faces at best a steep uphill climb, rather than level ground. These circumstances speak to the moral legitimacy of the Constitution, at least for substantial numbers of persons in crucial respects.

We can use the idea of ‘path dependence’ to refer to part of the problem with Professor Bork’s argument. In a non-technical sense, the idea of path dependence recognizes that while, say, each coin toss in a series may be independent of the others, our political and legal future may, in contrast, be crucially limited if not realistically dictated by previous political and legal decisions of varying degrees of justice.73 The

familiar judicial doctrine of stare decisis or respect for precedent\textsuperscript{74} is only one element of this process.

From the perspective of those disadvantaged at the time of drafting the Constitution, even their later enfranchisement does not mean that they are now restored or “back on track,” in the sense of being as well positioned in substantive constitutional rights and influence as they would have been had they been allowed to appropriately influence the constitutional process from the beginning. Some of the effects of the original exclusions can to a degree become “locked in.”\textsuperscript{75} The scope of rights recognized today and tomorrow may well indirectly reflect in traceable and untraceable ways past procedural and substantive exclusions. To put the matter another way, “what might do best today could have been selected out for extinction in the past.”\textsuperscript{76} Justice today may have been precluded by the continuing, if always shifting, influences of decisions and power relationships as they existed in the past.


Can we still hear today any echoes in our constitutional law of the original systematic exclusion of particular groups? Below, we will briefly consider as an example the Supreme Court’s judicial treatment of a claim to any sort of constitutional right to minimal housing. In a time in which some advocates on all points of the political spectrum advocate for one right or another not expressly referred to in the constitutional text, there has been surprisingly little interest in endorsing the idea of even minimal economic constitutional rights for the poor and disadvantaged. It is often at just such economic or survival claims that a theorist draws the line between his or her own political preferences and what the theorist is also willing to claim that the Constitution requires. It is sometimes claimed that for many non-originalists, there is a remarkable correspondence between their own independent policy preferences and what they take the Constitution to require. In response, a number of non-originalist theorists have pointed to important differences between their own policy preferences and what the Constitution can reasonably be said to mandate.

Thus Professors Laurence Tribe and Michael Dorf, for example, write that “[i]f we were writing a Constitution . . ., we might well favor . . . a constitutional provision setting a ceiling on the intergenerational transmission of wealth . . . . But . . . it is quite

77 See infra Conclusion.

78 See, e.g., the rights of privacy, intimacy, or autonomy recognized in Griswold v. Connecticut, 381 U.S. 479 (1965), or the various liberty rights referred to in Meyer v. Nebraska, 262 U.S. 390 (1923).

impossible to read our Constitution as including [such a provision].

Professor Cass Sunstein similarly endorses President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s vision of economic security or basic welfare rights as a matter of a vital public commitment, but specifically not as a matter of a judicially enforceable constitutional right.

Most elaborately, consider the distinction drawn by Professor Ronald Dworkin:

If I were trying to answer the question of what equal citizenship means as a philosophical exercise, . . . I would insist that citizens are not treated as equals by their political community unless that community guarantees them at least a decent minimum standard of housing, nutrition, and medical care. But if the Supreme Court were suddenly to adopt that view, and to announce that states have a constitutional duty to provide universal health care, it would have made a legal mistake, because it would be

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attempting to graft into our constitutional system something
that (in my view) doesn’t fit at all.\footnote{82}

Each of these theorists thus sets aside even the most vital and least costly claims to
economic provision from the realm of enforceable constitutional law. This line is drawn
regardless of any consideration of fault, desperation, public affordability, and ease or
difficulty of eligibility determination and enforcement. We know that this exclusion of
any economic subsistence element from the Constitution, including the later-adopted
Civil War amendments, is in some sense personally undesired by the theorists cited
above. We can responsibly speculate, however, that many of those persons who were
excluded from direct influence on the Founders’ Constitution, or on the Civil War
amendments, would have been sympathetic to some culturally-appropriate minimal floor
of economic provision as a matter of last resort.\footnote{83}

\footnote{82} Ronald Dworkin, The Arduous Virtue of Fidelity: Originalism, Scalia, Tribe, and
Nerve, 65 Fordham L. Rev. 1249, 1254 (1997). See also Ronald Dworkin, Freedom’s
Law: The Moral Reading of the American Constitution 36 (1996) (rejecting “a degree of
economic equality as a constitutional right”). See also Raoul Berger, Ronald Dworkin’s
(recognizing the above limitation).

\footnote{83} We might begin the backward extrapolation from the historical and chronological data
available in the materials referred to supra notes 61-64. By analogy, consider the scope
and limits of the “fruit of the poisonous tree” doctrine that often excludes evidence based
on causally-related “tainted” police activity at an earlier time. See, e.g., Hudson v.
Today’s leading non-originalists would no doubt uphold the equal protection interests of groups such as of women, even though women were not generally enfranchised when the equal protection language of the fourteenth amendment was being drafted and adopted.\(^{84}\) Economic or survival rights are another matter. But those who are reluctant to read the Constitution to include minimal economic rights today might well hold otherwise if all the originally systematically excluded groups had exercised fair initial influence on the Constitutional text and case law. The constitutional text and case law that the influence of excluded groups might have generated could well have tipped the balance toward a Constitution interpreted to protect at least some minimal economic subsistence rights.\(^{85}\)

IV. Legitimacy, Continuing Effects of Past Injustice, and Interpreting the Constitution

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\(^{84}\) See U.S. Const. amend. XIX (adopted 1920).

\(^{85}\) For an intriguing take on the purported absence of economic subsistence rights from the Constitution, see Robin West, Constitutional Fidelity and Democratic Legitimacy, American Constitution Society Issue Brief of July 2007, available at http://www.acslaw.org/files/Ro

How, then, does the drafting, ratification, and adjudicated history of the Constitution, given the group exclusions we have noted, affect the claims to universally morally binding authority and legitimacy of the Constitution? In particular, we will want to consider whether methods of interpreting the Constitution and adjudicating constitutional cases make a significant difference on matters of moral legitimacy. Our focus will be on whether constitutional originalism compounds the problems of legitimacy, where some alternative approach to constitutional interpretation tends to mitigate such problems.

It is important to recognize, to begin with, that there is a vital difference between the sociological legitimacy of the Constitution86 and the moral or morally binding legitimacy of the Constitution.87 These two senses are not entirely separate, in that a Constitution that is unknown or universally ignored, and thus sociologically illegitimate, is likely to not be genuinely morally binding as well. But we will argue that a Constitution can be legitimate in the former sociological sense yet not legitimate in the latter, and for our purposes more important, moral sense.


87 See id.
Let us merely assume that the current Constitution, in itself\textsuperscript{88} and as authoritatively interpreted, carries the former sort of sociological or behavioral compliance legitimacy. Thus rightly or wrongly, most legal actors and ordinary citizens take the Constitution to be legitimate, authoritative, and binding, on the basis of anything from unthinking acceptance to prolonged reflection. It is accordingly said to be a “legal tradition in the United States”\textsuperscript{89} that “government officials and citizens are obligated to abide by the regime of legal rules that govern their conduct.”\textsuperscript{90} If it is a slight overstatement to say that “this nation has always treated the Constitution as law,”\textsuperscript{91} opposition to the Constitution itself, as distinct from particular interpretations thereof, receded in the period after 1800 and again after the Civil War.\textsuperscript{92}

If we move the focus to moral, rather than sociological or compliance, legitimacy, we begin to step beyond purely empirical claims. Consider, for example, the still largely

\textsuperscript{88} For a sense of how this might operate, see supra notes 13-19 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{89} Brian Z. Tamanaha, How an Instrumental View of Law Corrodes the Rule of Law, 56 DePaul L. Rev. 469, 469 (2007).

\textsuperscript{90} Id.


sociological claim that “the drafting, ratification, and amendment of the 1787-89 Constitution continue to be seen as events that express the will of a properly empowered American ‘people’ to set and define the character and limits of the polity.”93 This may, we assume, be descriptively accurate. But the popular beliefs referred to may or may not be normatively well-justified. Persons may be more or less mistaken in believing in the moral legitimacy of a constitutional regime.

For originalists, the legitimacy of the constitutional founding process and the resulting constitutional text are crucial to their claims.94 Thus Professor Bork argues that “only the approach of original understanding meets the criteria that any theory of constitutional adjudication must meet in order to possess democratic legitimacy. Only that approach is consonant with the design of the American Republic.”95

Now, there may well be a sociological sense in which the original Constitution, as amended, and as interpreted in some originalist way, is commonly treated as legitimate. But if we are to take originalism as properly interpreting a genuinely morally binding Constitution, some persuasive argument must be offered. And it is not obvious why a

93 Richard S. Kay, supra note 71, at 337. See also Ethan J. Leib, The Perpetual Anxiety of Living Constitutionalism, 24 Const. Comment. _______ (2007) (“[m]any people would have no trouble with originalist mechanics because they take for granted that the document is binding”).

94 See Lillian R. BeVier, supra note 79, at 286 (“[o]riginalists tend to ground their arguments primarily on a foundation of legitimacy”).

95 Robert Bork, supra note 91, at 143.
constitutional ratification process that was deliberately so remarkably narrow in
demographic and class terms96 should be thought of today as “democratic.”97

Despite any sociological legitimacy of the original Constitution, the question of the
moral legitimacy of that Constitution remains. It would be morally irresponsible for any
conscientious citizen, including those who decide constitutional issues, to casually
assume the universal moral bindingness of the Constitution. We need not endorse the
mainstream current school of thought, known as “philosophical anarchism,” that denies a
general moral obligation to obey the law simply as law.98 It may be that some
constitutions and laws are legitimate and morally binding, even universally, but that
others are not. The question is one of where our own Constitution falls. To the extent
that our Constitution has been or remains tainted by any illegitimacy, originalist methods
that validate such illegitimacy are equally morally objectionable

96 See supra notes 43-48 and accompanying text.

97 Robert Bork, supra note 91, at 143.

98 For sophisticated work along these lines, see A. John Simmons, Moral Principles and
Political Obligations 192-95 (1979); Robert Paul Wolff, In Defense of Anarchism (1970);
Heidi M. Hurd, Moral Combat ch. 3 (1994); David Lyons, Moral Judgment, Historical
Reality, and Civil Disobedience, 27 Phil. & Pub. Aff. 31 (1998); M.B.E. Smith, Is There
a Prima Facie Obligation to Obey the Law?, 82 Yale L.J. 950 (1973). For commentary,
see R. George Wright, Legal and Political Obligation: Classic and Contemporary Texts
and Commentary ch. 27 (reprint ed. 2000).
We have throughout our discussion above noticed the undemocratic exclusions from constitutional influence,99 and their general continuing influence.100 These considerations form much of the foundation of a critique of originalism, but the argument can certainly be more fully developed on both sides. It is thus sometimes suggested that originalism allows the constitutional judge some perspective, some independent criteria, or some distancing from his or her own ideological preconceptions. Originalism is thus said to provide “ground to debate hard questions at some remove from our personal political and moral preferences.”101 More ambitiously, it is claimed that “in principle the textualist-originalist approach supplies an objective basis for judgment that does not merely reflect the judges’ own ideological stance.”102

99 See supra section III. It should be noted that in referring to the various constitutional exclusions as undemocratic, unjust, or morally unjustified, we do not mean to judge the Framers in their time and place, or to compare the constitutional franchise with the franchise in other late 18th century governments. Instead, it is we, including today’s originalists, who must decide whether the broad constitutional exclusions are morally objectionable, in the sense of relevantly “tainting” the fairness and legitimacy of the constitutional adoption and subsequent history, including case law development. What was politically viable or realistic two hundred years ago is relevant only insofar as it may bear upon what we now take fair inclusion to require.

100 See supra section IV.

101 Ethan J. Leib, supra note 93, at _______.

We shall briefly address some potential limits on non-originalist decisionmaking below. More directly relevantly, we can concede that in at least some respects, the original Constitution provides sufficiently unambiguous language to give the originalist useful guidance. For our purposes, the major problem is not the ambiguities of the Constitution, but almost the opposite. It is entirely clear that the drafting and ratification was essentially unaffected by major economic and demographic groups whose rights were nonetheless thereby determined.

This is a matter of crucially skewed exclusions rather than of exclusions skewed on some merely insignificant basis. If the process had begun with broad inclusiveness, then excluding even eighty percent of that broad group, with the exclusions being made randomly, would not have been as morally objectionable as the actual process. Even systematic exclusions would not have been so bad if those exclusions had been made along lines that do not track significant political and economic interests and divisions.

Thus systematically excluding, say, all those born before 6:00 p.m. on any given day, however objectionable for other reasons, would not have reinforced and worsened a

103 See infra section VI.

104 Thus we set aside ambiguities associated with terms such as commerce, due process, privileges and immunities, the freedom of speech, cruel and unusual punishment, the Ninth Amendment, and the equal protection of the laws. For some relatively early interpretations, see Joseph Story, supra note 67. For some complications, see Akhil Reed Amar, America’s Constitution: A Biography (2005); Akhil Reed Amar, The Bill of Rights: Creation and Reconstruction (2000).

105 See supra text accompanying note 43.
major political or economic conflict. The interests of those born before and after 6:00 p.m. tend to be parallel. The interests of slave owners and enslaved, property owners and propertyless, free whites and free blacks, and such may overlap in varying respects. But such a congruence of interests cannot be counted on in all important contexts. History records few expressions by white males to the effect that they need not be allowed to vote, as long as the vote of free black males exists to speak for them and uphold their shared interests.  

The problem, in a nutshell, is not that the Constitution offers no determinate guidance to a judge beyond the judge’s own moral and legal reflections. The main problem is instead that in certain important contexts, to ground one’s decision in the constitutional text and subsequent history is to ground one’s decision in evident fundamental unfairness, carried forward in a path-dependent way.  

Consider a simple analogy. The value of a road sign is not in its longevity or its publicness and visibility alone. A familiar road sign that we can see as pointing in the wrong direction should not be followed. In our key contexts, originalism asks us to follow road signs pointing in an acknowledged wrong direction.

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106 Those actually enfranchised might argue that those left unenfranchised would tend to vote redundantly or else irresponsibly. See supra text accompanying note 49. But there is a problem of suppressed symmetry at work here. We can imagine that enslaved persons, freed blacks, and propertyless whites might, if given the chance, have argued in contrast that the votes of the privileged classes would tend, disproportionately, to be morally irresponsible on key issues.

107 See supra notes 73-76 and accompanying text.
Some have argued that the Constitution should generally be followed because enactment of the Constitution required “supermajorities,” and the need to obtain a supermajority for various reasons tends to lead to better textual outcomes or better consequences than does pure majoritarianism, whether among voters or among Supreme Court Justices. 108 But constitutional supermajoritarianism should be placed in the context of the estimate that perhaps 2.5% of the population voted in favor of ratification. 109 Even so, we can stipulate to the general logic of supermajority requirements producing better results, even for permanent minorities. 110 The problem, in our context, begins with the crucial systematic exclusion from the electorate of various important demographics and classes. 111

Professors McGinnis and Rappaport, the primary exponents of constitutional supermajoritarianism as yielding better consequences over time, recognize that, in their words, “the desirability of supermajority rules requires that all interests be reflected in the electorate.” 112 They recognize that the exclusion of African-Americans in particular,

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109 See the sources cited supra note 43.
among other groups, was a violation of this requirement, and may well have rendered the Constitution as a whole non-binding on African-Americans.

At this point, Professors McGinnis and Rappaport respond, ambiguously, that “these defects in the Constitution have been corrected” through the Civil War amendments and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. They recognize possible complications. But with these and analogous constitutional amendments in place, the defects of the founding process are thought to have been thereby “eliminated.” This, however, will not do.

Let us consider an analogy or two. Suppose an open bottle of wine had been tipped over for a time, with wine slowly spilling out of the bottle until, some time ago, the bottle was righted, ending further spilling. Whether we want to say that righting the bottle, even some time ago, has “corrected” the problem depends on what we take the problem to be. Righting the bottle, and leaving it upright for years, does not clean up the mess. It does not restore the initial conditions, or the conditions of a continuously upright bottle. The staining effect of the spilled wine remains.

113 See id. at 394-95.
114 See id. at 395.
115 See id.
116 Id.
117 Id.
118 See, e.g., id. at 396 n.55.
119 Id. at 395.
120 See supra text at note 116.
Or to sharpen the issues of fairness and alternative histories a bit, consider possible sports analogies. A golfer who is forced to tee off an hour after an opponent may not be at any real disadvantage if both must simply play the same course under no time constraint. Even a later starting marathoner may be at no real disadvantage if given credit for the late start. But a two hour delay where the goal is to catch more bass by the shared deadline of noon is in contrast a severe handicap. Letting the delayed competitor merely do some fishing, with a two-hour handicap, leads to a different history and perhaps a different outcome than otherwise would have occurred.

A closer, if both fanciful and invidious, analogy could involve two marathoners, where one marathoner, from the very start of the race, is required to run with ropes tied about the ankles. At roughly the midpoint of the race, it is decided that fairness and equality require that the thus-bound runner be freed, and the bound runner’s ropes are at that point removed. After a substantial period of attempting to run in the ropes, the runner’s form and efficiency suffer, naturally, for a time. And the runner in question is, due to the handicap of the ropes for half the race, well behind.

Should we be willing to say that removing the ropes halfway through the race has “corrected” the problem? Perhaps the effects dissipate only gradually over time, if at all. Does the history of the race while the ropes were in place quickly dissipate, or does that history radiate forward? Does what has unfairly happened not threaten to in various way significantly affect what will happen, even long after the bonds are loosed?

In the constitutional context, we may today have well-established skeptical thoughts about, say, any federal constitutional right to minimal shelter. Certainly, no such
minimal federal constitutional right has been recognized. Many of us may feel quite certain about the matter. But if the enslaved, free blacks, women, and the propertyless and near-propertyless had been allowed a free and equal opportunity to fairly negotiate and vote on the text of the original Constitution, and to exercise ordinary political influence indirectly affecting how the Constitution is read today, constitutional common sense today might well be different. Such an alternative history of the Constitution, and of its later originalist jurisprudence, might differ in areas affecting the survival interests of the descendents of those originally excluded from influence.

None of this is to suggest that federal constitutional survival rights, as they might earlier have been envisioned by their supporters and perhaps reluctantly agreed to by others, for the sake of ratifying the Constitution as a whole, would have been akin to 21st century welfare state programs. Instead, the minimal survival rights language appropriate for the late 18th century could have come from a variety of classic and contemporary

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122 It is certainly possible that if our constitutional drafting and ratification had been much more inclusive, originalism as a normative theory would be even more popular across the political spectrum, even with its need for supplementation remaining.

123 We may fairly assume that some original provision for minimal survival rights could have been agreed to, even by supermajority, if the rights were sufficiently minimal and thus not so expensive as to significantly reduce overall welfare, and many of those sympathetic to such rights made their approval of the Constitution contingent upon some such provision.
sources. Such ideas seem marginal in the context of the Framers only because we, like the Framers, assume away nearly all those persons whose interests would place a relatively high priority on such rights.

For rationales for variously enforceable basic welfare rights, one might cite Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica II-II, qu. 66, art. 7, respondio (Fathers of the English Dominican Province trans.) (2d rev. ed. 1920) (online ed. Kevin Knight 2003), available at http://www.newadvent.org/summa/30607.htm; Condorcet, Sketch For a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind, in Selected Writings 209, 279 (Keith Michael Baker ed. 1976) (1793); Thomas Paine, Agrarian Justice, in The Thomas Paine Reader 471 (Michael Foot & Isaac Kramnick eds. 1987) (1795). Most significantly, though, see John Locke’s reference to the natural obligation, prior to and in political society, to affirmatively and not merely negatively attend to the minimal well-being of others, as in John Locke, Second Treatise of Civil Government § 6, at 6 (Gateway ed. 1955) (1689) (“[e]very one, as he is bound to preserve himself, . . . by the like reason, when his own preservation comes not in competition, ought he, as much as he can, to preserve the rest of mankind”). Consider also the Kantian “imperfect” moral duty of promoting the welfare or happiness, given our limited means, of other persons, in light of the pressingness of their needs. See, e.g., H.J. Paton, The Categorical Imperative: A Study in Kant’s Moral Philosophy 172 (4th ed. 1963); Roger J. Sullivan, Immanuel Kant’s Moral Theory 208 (1989). More politically, see Immanuel Kant, The Metaphysics of Morals 202-03 (Mary Gregor trans. 1996) (1797); id. at 101 (“the government is therefore authorized to constrain the wealthy to provide the means of sustenance to those who are unable to provide for even their most necessary natural needs”). Kant could not
The idea of enforceable welfare rights was not unknown or anachronistic at the end of the eighteenth century. It was, however, relatively important mainly to those excluded from the constitutional process.\textsuperscript{125} Minimal welfare rights could realistically have been adopted without undue burdens on the well-off, and without undermining future economic development. So the originalist cannot claim that the only realistic choices for an inclusive electorate in the late 18\textsuperscript{th} century would have been either a Constitution without any minimal welfare rights, or no new Federal Constitution at all.\textsuperscript{126}

\textsuperscript{125} This is again not to argue that the Constitution would have been substantially different, across the board, if the Constitution’s text had been drafted and agreed to by a broader range of society, including but not limited to the historical participants. That might well be, but it is not what we need to claim herein. Perhaps negotiations would have broken down. The more inclusive alternative Constitution might have failed of supermajority ratification. Our argument goes mainly to the moral illegitimacy of the important demographic and class exclusions, and to originalism’s reliance on and validation and furtherance of that process.

\textsuperscript{126} Our argument herein is not that individual state Constitutions throughout American history could not have themselves guaranteed a right to minimal welfare, or housing. Indeed, states and localities might in some respects have seemed the more natural places
V. Constitutional Decisionmaking As

Moral Decisionmaking

Originalism in its standard forms is thus vulnerable to the objection that it validates morally defective drafting and ratification arrangements and the ensuing path-dependent legal culture and case law. Broader theories of constitutional legitimacy that emphasize some form of genuine consent or free agreement to be bound by the Constitution are of no help to originalists in this context. We do not validly bind persons to a contract by excluding them from any participation, in the absence of their unequivocal, knowing, and free consent at any point. Nor can the assumed higher quality of supermajority to turn in the Founding Era. Our argument is merely that if states did not more or less universally write such guarantees into their own constitutions, a new federal Constitution could have been envisioned as a guarantor of last resort. And it is fair to say that the historical track record of the states in constitutionally guaranteeing such rights has been mixed at best. For a sample of some relatively recent litigation, see R. George Wright, Homelessness and the Missing Constitutional Dimension of Fraternity, 42 Louisville L. Rev. _____ n.3 (2008).

constitutional ratification\textsuperscript{128} legitimize the systematic group exclusions to which we have referred.

Originalists might gain some ground, however, by supplementing their originalism in the right way. It may not be plausible to argue that the group exclusions eventually paid off for even the excluded groups themselves. Randy Barnett, however, raises the possibility of legitimizing a Constitution through determining whether that Constitution, interpreted in light of its original meanings,\textsuperscript{129} creates a system of lawmaking\textsuperscript{130} that is “good enough,”\textsuperscript{131} and that allows only for “necessary and proper”\textsuperscript{132} lawmaking, and more specifically, for laws that among other things do not violate the background natural rights\textsuperscript{133} of those persons required to follow the Constitution.\textsuperscript{134}

This is promising in a general sense, but it is certainly hard to see the group exclusions as a necessary element of a system of lawmaking that respects the background natural rights of those excluded.\textsuperscript{135} For the directly affected groups, it would be far easier to argue that the drafting and ratification process, as well as the Constitution itself in

\textsuperscript{128} See supra notes 108-126 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{129} See Randy E. Barnett, supra note 127, at 642-43.

\textsuperscript{130} See id.

\textsuperscript{131} Id. at 643.

\textsuperscript{132} See id. at 639, 642.

\textsuperscript{133} See id.

\textsuperscript{134} See id.

\textsuperscript{135} See id.
crucial respects, along with the rigorous amendment processes,\textsuperscript{136} violated rather than respected the assumed natural rights at stake.

The idea of natural rights in general,\textsuperscript{137} as well as the articulation and defense of particular natural rights,\textsuperscript{138} will of course be controversial, as will the theory’s application in context. But natural rights theory, whatever weight it attaches to original intent, could be said to be on the right track. In fact, there is a sense in which a much more generalized such approach literally must be on the right track. Let us briefly consider how.

We have seen that a judge ought not be impressed by originalist theories of constitutional interpretation as applied to matters affecting the most basic practical interests of the major excluded groups. But this conclusion prompts further questions. If a judge faces, say, a claim of some minimal welfare rights, to what extent, if any, should the judge give weight to originalist methods, or to established case precedents perhaps based on originalism? Should a judge in such a case take a guess at what a fair and democratic constitutional adoption process could have set in motion, down an alternative

\textsuperscript{136} See supra note 68 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{137} See, classically, H.L.A. Hart, Are There Any Natural Rights?, 64 Phil. Rev. 175 (1955); Richard Tuck, Natural Rights Theories: Their Origin and Development (1982).

\textsuperscript{138} See H.L.A. Hart, supra note 137 (discussing a natural equal right to liberty); Randy E. Barnett, Restoring the Lost Constitution 53-61 (2004).
historical track? As well, the judge has taken an oath to uphold the actual Constitution,\textsuperscript{139} and not some shadow Constitution, or no Constitution at all. What weight should an oath be given? How should these and related questions be answered?

In a way, the answer is easy. The judge is faced with a moral decision, in the sense that some possible decisions and rationales may be somehow morally better than others. The judge’s decisionmaking is thus within the zone of coverage of the moral. This means, on a common understanding, that the judge’s decision must be morally satisfactory, even if not precisely the morally right or best decision. Typically, for the judge, considerations of morality are in a sense ultimate or overriding.\textsuperscript{140} Even some possible exceptions, as when a judge decides that the overall morally best decision must

\textsuperscript{139} See U.S. Const. art. VI, cl. 3. More specifically, see 5 U.S.C. § 3331 (2000) and 28 U.S.C. § 453 (2000), the net effect of which requires the federal judge to, among other things, “do equal right to the poor and to the rich.” Id.

\textsuperscript{140} See, e.g., Kenneth Einar Himma, Substance and Method in Conceptual Jurisprudence and Legal Theory, 88 Va. L. Rev. 1119, 1166 n.125 (2002) (“[i]t is usually thought, as a conceptual matter, that moral obligations override all other obligations”) (citing leading philosopher William K. Frankena, The Concept of Morality, 63 J. Phil. 688 (1966)); Alan Gewirth, Reason and Morality 1 (1978) (moral requirements not overridable in the core sense of the term ‘morality’); R.M. Hare, Freedom and Reason 168-69 (1963) (a sense in which morality is overriding). Perhaps most pointedly, see D.Z. Phillips, Do Moral Considerations Override Others?, 29 Phil. Q. 247, 247 (1979) (“one distinguishing mark of moral considerations is that if a person cares for them, he cannot . . . say that they should be overridden by considerations of any other kind”).
be set aside on, say, religious or aesthetic grounds, may depend upon an unduly narrow
idea of morality, or be otherwise publicly unacceptable.\footnote{\textsuperscript{141}}

Generally, a judge deciding a constitutional case and a legislator deciding a
constitutional matter should choose only from among the morally acceptable outcomes
and rationales. Morality binds legislators deciding constitutional matters as much as
judges. We note this here only because it is sometimes claimed that an advantage of
originalism is its superior capacity to justify judicial review.\footnote{\textsuperscript{142}} We take no position on

\footnote{\textsuperscript{141}} Someone might object to water pollution mostly on aesthetic grounds, perhaps, but
most if not all of what is objected to in such cases can be reasonably taken up under a
broad conception of morality.

\footnote{\textsuperscript{142}} See, e.g., Antonin Scalia, Originalism: The Lesser Evil, 57 U. Cin. L. Rev. 849, 854
(1989) (non-originalism as incompatible with the logic of judicial review); Frank H.
(“\textasciitilde{}nothing beats originalism in court, because nothing else is capable of supporting a
judicial veto”). For a recent defense of judicial review, see Louis Michael Seidman, Our
Unsettled Constitution (2001). For recent critiques of strong or traditional judicial
review, see Larry D. Kramer, The People Themselves: Popular Constitutionalism and
Judicial Review (2004); Mark Tushnet, Taking the Constitution Away From the Courts
(1999); Jeremy Waldron, The Core of the Case Against Judicial Review, 115 Yale L.J.

The claim that only originalism can justify judicial review seems doubtful.
Originalists may prefer broad popular majority rule today, but they do little to
compensate for the suppression of broad majority rule at the time of the founding.
judicial review, or on the alleged superiority of originalism in this respect. We refer below to judges simply for the sake of convenience. Our logic would apply equally to legislators, Presidents, or anyone else making a constitutional decision.  

This does not mean that there will always be some single objectively best and clearly evident outcome and rationale in any particular case. Further, judges are not required by morality to pretend that they possess boundless powers of moral imagination, empathy, and calculation. Judges may, where appropriate, rely on simple moral

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143 Originalist theorists can, certainly, make important contributions to the overall theory of originalism without raising any questions of morality, in the sense of the moral merits or demerits of orginalism. See Gary Lawson & Guy Seidman, Originalism as a Legal Enterprise, 23 Const. Comment. 47, 54 (2006) (focusing on a hypothetical reasonable American as of 1788 as the touchstone for interpreting the text of the Constitution even today, but explicitly setting aside the question of any moral defense, legitimacy, or morally binding authority of the Constitution).

144 For some skeptical arguments regarding aspirations to moral objectivity or moral realism in the constitutional context, see Note, Original Meaning and Its Limits, 120 Harv. L. Rev. 1279, 1287 (2007).

145 See id.

rules. As well, the idea of morality itself is neutral as among emphasizing moral rules, consequences, or virtues and vices.\textsuperscript{148} Considerations of natural right,\textsuperscript{149} natural law,\textsuperscript{150} or something like utility, wealth maximization, or pragmatic payoffs\textsuperscript{151} may or may not play a part.

A judge who is properly guided by morality may, at least to some degree, consider not just the judicial oath,\textsuperscript{152} but the judicial context, including the judge’s place in a vertical hierarchy, deference and comity, and the weight of judicial precedent. More broadly, context can be morally relevant, including the more or less legitimate


\textsuperscript{148} For a concise but authoritative introduction to Kantianism, utilitarianism, and virtue theory, see Marcia Baron, Phillip Pettit & Michael Slote, Three Methods of Ethics: A Debate (1997).

\textsuperscript{149} See Randy E. Barnett, supra note 138, at chs. 2-3.


\textsuperscript{152} See supra note 139 and accompanying text.
expectations of other persons. Role morality\textsuperscript{153} may thus be relevant. Awareness of the judge’s own limits, fallibilities, and biases of various sorts,\textsuperscript{154} including what is called confirmation bias,\textsuperscript{155} may all play a role in judicial decisionmaking.

None of this, of course, is very specific or definitive, because by itself the idea of morality as overriding leaves open many possibilities. While judges deciding constitutional cases are bound by morality’s requirements, this does not make judicial decisionmaking, as a species of the former, any easier. Morality in general does not tell us how to specifically apply itself.\textsuperscript{156}

A requirement of thinking in terms of following the dictates of morality, however, is not without real practical value in our context. Consider a judge who is asked to decide some question of a possible constitutional right to, let us say, some minimal shelter, 

\textsuperscript{153} See, e.g., Rob Atkinson, Beyond the New Role Morality For Lawyers, 51 Md. L. Rev. 853 (1992).

\textsuperscript{154} See, e.g., Antonin Scalia, supra note 142, at 863 (“[i]t is very difficult for a person to discern a difference between those political values that he personally thinks most important, and those political values that are ‘fundamental to our society’”).

\textsuperscript{155} For a concise summary, see Raymond S. Nickerson, Confirmation Bias: A Ubiquitous Phenomenon in Many Guises, 2 Rev. Gen. Psychology 175 (1998) (on the “seeking or interpreting of evidence in ways that are partial to existing beliefs”).

sufficient to sustain life otherwise vulnerable to the elements. Now, we need not attempt to answer this constitutional and moral question.157 Nor need we settle upon some specific method of reaching a morally defensible result in such a case.158 Our focus is instead more modestly on originalism and on fundamental fairness. We need only ask about the degree, if any, to which a judge should, in order to reach a morally sound result and rationale in such a minimal shelter case, rely on any originalist theory.

Whatever the virtues of originalism elsewhere, originalism seems poorly adapted to generate a morally defensible result and rationale in this minimal shelter case and any similar cases. Relying on originalism in this context, given our constitutional history, would ratify the morally indefensible group exclusions and their later effects to which we have referred throughout. Consider Professor Randy Barnett’s question: “[W]hat about the majority of inhabitants who were not permitted to vote for any [Constitutional Convention] delegate?”159 Professor Barnett observes that “[t]hough voting requirements varied with local jurisdictions, in no place could women, children, indentured servants, or slaves vote. Moreover, it was not uncommon to have a property requirement that limited the voting rights of white males or free black males.”160

If we quite reasonably assume that the excluded groups would tend, out of sympathy if not direct interest, to care somewhat more about shelter and survival than would those

157 For discussion, see R. George Wright, Homelessness and the Missing Constitutional Dimension of Fraternity, 42 Louisville L. Rev. ______ (2008).

158 See supra notes 148-151 and accompanying text.

159 Randy E. Barnett, supra note 138, at 20.

160 Id.
with established property interests, originalism would lead us off in a morally unjustified
direction in deciding such a case. In this sort of case, originalism validates and extends
the practical effects of what even originalists recognize as indefensible on any plausible
moral theory. In our contexts, originalism relies on what virtually any mainstream
moral theory would recognize as fundamental unfairness, worked forward over time.

Can an originalist make progress, though, by compromising originalism? Justice
Scalia, for one, has referred to himself as only a “faint-hearted” originalist. The
problem in Justice Scalia’s case, however, is that his departures from originalism do not
match up well with the problem of fundamental unfairness we have outlined above.
Justice Scalia seems willing to depart from originalism if solidly entrenched case-
precedent, and thus stare decisis, stand in the way of an originalist result, or if

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161 It is of course technically possible to try to defend the major group exclusions on
grounds of natural right, natural law, pragmatism, Kantianism, utilitarianism, virtue
theory, or any other approach to morality. But the originalist would have to show that
such exclusions, and their consequences for law and culture carried forward in some
path-dependent way, deserve to be defended on the moral merits. Yet the anti-
democratic nature, basic inegalitarianism, and fundamental unfairness of doing so pose
substantial obstacles to such an attempt.

162 Antonin Scalia, supra note 142, at 861-64.

163 See id.
circumstances have changed so that an originalist result would be plainly impractical or unrealistic.\textsuperscript{164}

But the problem in our fundamental unfairness cases, and in the minimal shelter right context in particular, is not one of a choice between originalism and any entrenched pro-housing right case precedent. Unsurprisingly, the most widely cited case in that general context, Lindsey v. Normet,\textsuperscript{165} apparently rejects any such constitutional right claim.\textsuperscript{166} And the Lindsey case itself shows that in the modern era, Justice Scalia need not concern himself with whether denying minimal shelter rights at the constitutional level is somehow unrealistic or simply impractical.\textsuperscript{167}

The more basic problem for compromise versions of originalism is that to be moved by considerations of fundamental unfairness in the constitutional adoption process does more than merely supplement, or even create an exception from, constitutional originalism. This is because a broad and central departure from fundamental fairness is inescapably central to originalism. The fundamentally unfair group exclusion problem does not merely call for compromise with originalism, but crucially undermines the moral logic of originalism.

There are admittedly many areas of constitutional law where the original exclusions either were not originally significant, beyond the inherent and profound group insult, or

\textsuperscript{164} See id. For further discussion, see Bruce Ackerman, The Living Constitution, 120 Harv. L. Rev. 1737, 1755 & 1755 n.42 (2007).

\textsuperscript{165} 405 U.S. 56 (1972).

\textsuperscript{166} See id. at 74.

\textsuperscript{167} See supra note 164 and accompanying text.
where later developments may well have dissipated any initial adverse effects, as far as we can tell. The Constitution has from the beginning, for example, prohibited the granting of titles of nobility.\textsuperscript{168} On the assumptions immediately above,\textsuperscript{169} there is no further direct moral harm in interpreting this and similar constitutional provisions through some form of originalism.

Our argument is thus not that originalism too often merely reaches a legally or morally objectionable result, or that the method of originalism is indeterminate or subjective and open to manipulation. Instead, we have argued that especially in matters of basic practical interest to those historically excluded from the ratification process, the exclusions amounted to fundamental unfairness. This procedural\textsuperscript{170} unfairness typically

\textsuperscript{168} U.S. Const. art. I, sec. 9 [8].

\textsuperscript{169} It might be possible to tell a story about how the excluded groups might actually have benefited from a protective sense of noblesse-oblige felt by American nobles. For the sake of the argument, we assume instead that few if any members of the excluded groups would have been elevated to the nobility themselves, or would otherwise have benefited from a hereditary aristocracy.

\textsuperscript{170} We have emphasized the procedural injustice in excluding a number of significant groups from the creation of the Constitution and of constitutional law. Originalism, in relying on this procedural injustice, is thus procedurally undemocratic. It is thus misleading to suggest that originalism relies on fair representation and majority rule, and is thus procedurally democratic, while also being substantively undemocratic, or undemocratic in some more advanced sense. This unnecessary concession is made in
continues to radiate in some fashion across time, even with the adoption of the Civil War and other amendments. Originalism in such crucial cases thus validates, relies on, and is inseparable from fundamental unfairness.

VI. Conclusion

With originalism largely disqualified on moral grounds, we are initially left with the vague requirement that constitutional decisionmakers must reach some morally permissible outcome in some morally permissible way.\textsuperscript{171} The question of which of the various alternatives to originalism, alone or in combination,\textsuperscript{172} best meets this underlying moral requirement is well beyond our scope. Our focus has been on originalism.

Merely for the sake of suggestion, though, let us briefly consider what we might call a highly idealized offshoot of originalism, as articulated by the early constitutional theorist, Justice Joseph Story. Story wrote that

\begin{quote}
A constitution of government, founded by the people for themselves and their posterity, and for objects of the most momentous nature, for perpetual union, for the
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{171} For discussion, see supra notes 140-158 and accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{172} Interdependence among the various major approaches to constitutional interpretation is a continuing theme of R. George Wright, Dependence and Hierarchy Among Constitutional Theories, 70 Brook. L. Rev. 141 (2004).
\end{footnotes}
establishment of justice, for the general welfare, and for a
perpetuation of the blessings of liberty, necessarily
requires, that every interpretation of its powers should have
a constant reference to these objects.173

This amounts to what we might call a “basic purpose” approach to constitutional interpretation. Crucially, though, we should take the references to democracy and justice in a full, modern, inclusive sense. And then we must apply this modernized democratic purposivism to not only federal governmental powers, but to the scope and even the nature of constitutional rights as well. Once we reject the various broad group exclusions at our original founding, however, we clearly have something other than originalism.

Consider, though, this basic purposivism in the context, say, of a claimed minimal right to shelter. The closest the Supreme Court has come to such an issue is, again, the case of Lindsey v. Normet,174 addressing the merits of a state’s Forcible Entry and Wrongful Detainer Statute.175 In rejecting the tenants’ assertion that greater than mere rational basis equal protection scrutiny should apply,176 the Court declared that

[w]e do not denigrate the importance of decent, safe, and
sanitary housing. But the Constitution does not provide
judicial remedies for every social and economic ill. We are

175 See id. at 58-60.
176 See id. at 73-74.
unable to perceive in that document any constitutional
guarantee of access to dwellings of a particular quality.\footnote{Id. at 74. For contemporaneous discussion, see Gerald Gunther, Foreword: In Search of Evolving Doctrine on a Changing Court: A Model For a Newer Equal Protection, 86 Harv. L. Rev. 1, 13-14 (1972).}

The Court here seeks to draw a clear distinction between what may be practically important, or even vital, to some, and what is constitutionally protected.\footnote{See Lindsey, 405 U.S. at 73-74.} The Court apparently views involuntarily homeless persons’ death from exposure as for constitutional purposes within a broad category of all social and economic ills.\footnote{See id. at 74.} General social rudeness, or declining vocabularies, might presumably also count as less acute social ills similarly not subject to constitutional remedy. The Court notes\footnote{See id.} that at some point, lines of constitutional compliance regarding a minimal shelter right would have to be drawn,\footnote{Any minimal housing right would generate borderline cases, but homeless persons would, presumably, be typically better off with access to even a borderline facility. It should be noted that the Court does not abandon the idea of, say, implied substantive due process privacy rights because it finds the constitutional borderline in such cases to be shifting or unclear. Compare, e.g., the contrasting methodologies and results of Justices Scalia and Brennan in Michael H. v. Gerald D., 491 U.S. 110 (1991).} as would also be true of various sorts of recognized rights.
Most important for our purposes, though, is the Court’s failure to consider how constitutional history, including recent constitutional history, might well have been different if the process of drafting and ratifying the Constitution had been more inclusive, fairer, and more democratic.\textsuperscript{182} We can easily imagine that for the typical constitutional drafter, avoiding having troops quartered in his home during time of peace\textsuperscript{183} was indeed a higher realistic priority and more to be provided against than was the risk of involuntary homelessness. We can also easily imagine that many of the systematically excluded groups, including those not meeting property-ownership requirements,\textsuperscript{184} would, if asked, have ranked sheer survival and avoiding homelessness as a higher priority, whether we think of such groups as especially risk-averse or not.\textsuperscript{185}

What precisely the excluded groups would have asked for, or would have had the voting leverage to extract, cannot possibly be known. Nor do we know how the Civil War amendments might have been phrased or interpreted -- still assuming both a ratified

\begin{footnotes}
\item[182] Recall our clarifications supra note 99.
\item[183] As duly enacted into our fundamental law, U.S. Const. amend. III.
\item[184] See supra notes 42-43 and accompanying text.
\end{footnotes}
Constitution and a Civil War -- if the constitutional adoption process had been more democratic.

It is often suggested that the gentle flapping of a butterfly’s wings in South America could eventually result in a tornado in the Northern Hemisphere.\textsuperscript{186} We need not go so far as to claim that a slight difference in the initial context would by now have led to a dramatically different judicial Constitution. But we should bear in mind that what from our current perspective would have been a minimally fair expansion of the electorate at the Founding would have been far more dramatic than any number of butterfly wing-flappings.

It would be implausible to argue in response that a dramatic expansion of the Founding franchise would have been politically infeasible, and yet that the effects of an expanded franchise on constitutional history would have been only minimal. If a fairly chosen electorate had, perhaps by some miracle, been made eligible, it is difficult to believe that this would have led to no systematic differences in the constitutional argumentation of their and our day.

\textsuperscript{186} This “butterfly effect” has been described as “sensitive dependence on initial conditions,” such that only a slight difference in initial conditions becomes exponentially amplified over even a short period of time, leading to dramatically different futures. For a visual display, see http://www.its.caltech.edu/~cc/chaos_new/Lorenz.html (visited August 10, 2007).
The excluded groups would, like other groups, have held some range of views, expressing some mixture of public-spiritedness and group interest.\textsuperscript{187} No group would have been unanimous as to how to promote the group’s interests or on their attitudes toward risky personal outcomes over the course of one’s life. Few would have imagined what a right to shelter might have involved centuries later, in a rich and technologically advanced society. But basic self-interest and sympathy might well have inspired many among the excluded groups to place some sort of culturally-appropriate emergency or last-resort housing right on the agenda for discussion.\textsuperscript{188} A similar logic would apply as well to various other potential constitutional rights-claims associated with survival, basic subsistence, basic opportunities, and perhaps to the meaning of privileges and immunities of citizens,\textsuperscript{189} the Ninth Amendment,\textsuperscript{190} and eventually the equal protection clause.\textsuperscript{191} On

\textsuperscript{187} In this sense conforming to the predicted pattern of the famous Tenth Federalist Paper. See Alexander Hamilton, James Madison & John Jay, The Federalist with Letters of “Brutus” 40-46 (Terence Ball ed. 2003) (1787).

\textsuperscript{188} This is not to deny any of the differences between real property prices, incomes, the nature of housing, and cultural expectations then and now. Presumably any of the familiar “positive” constitutional rights claims, as to subsistence, education, or health care, would have changed importantly in their meaning over two hundred years.

\textsuperscript{189} See U.S. Const. art. IV, sec. 2 (“[t]he Citizens of each State shall be entitled to all Privileges and Immunities of Citizens in the several States”).

\textsuperscript{190} See U.S. Const. amend. IX (“[t]he enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people”).
each of these matters, then, constitutional originalism unfortunately grounds itself, as we have seen, in unredeemable historic illegitimacy.\textsuperscript{192}

\begin{flushright}
191 See U.S. Const. amend. XIV (“[n]o state shall . . . deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws”). See also the Privileges and Immunities reference, id.

192 The idea of any sort of “positive” constitutional right, apart from a right to appointed criminal counsel, or to more ambitious interpretations of the equal protection clause, may seem unnatural, unfamiliar, and ahistorical today. See, e.g., DeShaney v. Winnebago County, 489 U.S. 189 (1989); San Antonio School Dist. v. Rodriguez, 411 U.S. 1 (1973) (featuring a narrow 5-4 division of the Court). But these are natural responses to our constitutional history in its most directly tainted and fundamentally unfair respects. It is simply not plausible to claim, for example, that the educational spending case of Rodriguez could not have been decided 5-4 the other way if our constitutional founding and subsequent history had been much more democratic.
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