THE DEADWEIGHT OF FORMULAE:
WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN THE SECOND GERMANIZATION
OF AMERICAN EQUAL PROTECTION REVIEW

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I. OCCASIONS FOR MISUNDERSTANDING

Judicial ingenuity is not assured by a rule of inalienability. On the contrary, as a public good, judicial doctrine is subject to a kind of non-rival consumption. Often, courts sense that it may be beneficial to adopt solutions or standards invented by judicial bodies in other countries, and they may then decide to incorporate these foreign standards into their own jurisprudence. This relationship is seen in the interaction between truly inventive judges and more cautious judicial bodies. For instance, it seems as if the common vocabulary of modern human rights jurisprudence would not have been possible without examples from courts such as the German Federal Constitutional Court (the "German Court") and the mediating European Court of Human Rights. These courts more or less set the tone that other courts, sometimes reluctantly, followed.

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1 The Supreme Court of the State of Israel is the most impressive example of such constitutional borrowing. Reading the opinions, one cannot but acknowledge that it is the most important comparative constitutional law institute of the world. Partly, this success stems from the Court’s practice of employing clerks from all over the world, who do the research work on their country of origin. On the development of the Court’s basic rights jurisprudence, see David Kretzmer, Democracy in the Jurisprudence of the Supreme Court of Israel, 26 ISRAEL YEARBOOK ON HUMAN RIGHTS 267-88 (1996).


It must not be overlooked, however, that uninvited doctrinal takings, as an important subclass of constitutional borrowings, are subject to intrinsic constraints. After all, at least some requirement of national “fit,” or specificity, ought to be expected. It is difficult to imagine, for example, that any court in the world could adopt the unique Austrian doctrine of “petrification” in allocating powers. The “petrification” doctrine is a truly esoteric doctrine arising from Austrian history and, as such, any foreign court flirting with its adoption would find itself, to say the least, exposed to great bewilderment. Conspicuous incommensurabilities aside, even feasible doctrinal takings arise from a specific tradition. A two-fold effect, therefore, is to be expected. First, as a result of grafting a piece of doctrine onto an established jurisprudential scheme, the latter must be restructured in order to introduce the new element. Second, by reacting to what is taken into it, the restructured jurisprudential context must also assimilate the alien doctrinal element. In this respect, doctrinal takings are subject, by their very nature, to reception failure, or, “creative destruction.” The element taken from one constitutional tradition is reinterpreted from the perspective of the other. Ironically, the constitutional lender is compensated for its ingenuity by the borrower’s lack of understanding, which is owed to the fact that the latter must carry the burden of its own constitutional past.

The above insights should be relatively familiar to those who have reflected on the basic insights of hermeneutics. As we shall see, however, the subject matter becomes more engaging when constitutional borrowings involve simultaneous external and internal references. Such dual references exist where a court uses a foreign example to expand the scope of its own evolving doctrine. From the outset, then, the reference to an external example is intended to bridge the gap in the development and clarification of internal, homemade classifications. The external element provides what appears to be a missing link, or, borrowing from bio-technical jargon, the genetic “vector” required for the transmission.

The interaction of external and internal references involved in the process of doctrinal evolution opens a field of new possibilities, the results of which may be remarkable. With constitutional borrowing,
the original, once-singular doctrinal context of the lender transforms into a maze of interpretations by the borrower, resulting in communication between sometimes incommensurate categories. It is no wonder that academic observers are sometimes left in a quandary. Such observers might be forced to admit that a constitutional borrowing may render an entire doctrinal context obscure.

II. THE MALAISE OF A PECULIAR GERMAN ESTEEM FOR A SPECIFIC COMPONENT OF AMERICAN CONSTITUTIONAL LAW

Even inventive judicial bodies, such as the German Court, occa-

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6 For heuristic purposes, this article will distinguish three effects that we are likely to attribute to constitutional borrowing. First, there is the happy case, clearly cherished by Whig historians and their modern successors. In such a happy case scenario, constitutional borrowings are depicted as instances of a world-wide expansion of liberty and the rule of law. Hence, once borrowings attain a certain level of consolidation they are referred to as “historical influences” or lines of historical development. One of the most obvious examples, the Eighth Amendment to the United States Constitution, corresponds almost word-for-word with an existing provision in the English Bill of Rights of 1689 “that excessive bail ought not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishment inflicted.” As is well known, a similar comparison could be made between the Second Amendment to the United States Constitution and the provision of the English Bill of Rights granting the right to “have arms to their defense, suitable to their conditions and as allowed by law.”

Second, there is the more complicated case. This represents the standard or default case of constitutional borrowing. Not surprisingly, it is marked by an interaction or even a conflict between different constitutional cultures. One need not be a student of philosophical hermeneutics in order to understand that the borrowing of a certain component of constitutional law does not leave its meaning unaffected. On the other hand, the integration of a foreign component into a domestic constitutional context also has an impact on the latter. There is a subtle and, indeed, unpredictable interaction between the borrowed element and the receiving context. However, what distinguishes this second case from the third is that, after a period of mutual adaptation, a constitutional culture may finally arrive at novel and, more or less, stable meanings. The transformation of the American rational basis test into the German arbitrariness standards exemplifies this process of mutual adaptation and subsequent consolidation.

Third, there is what I would like to refer to as the unremittingly confusing case. In this third type of case, constitutional borrowing may eventually give rise to settled practice of constitutional law, but this practice cannot be conceived of as a practice of constitutional interpretation. This article does not claim that the resulting practice of constitutional law does not lend itself to description; yet it cannot be described in the terms of the application of a legal rule, since the borrowing is the source of a relentless conflict of interpretations. As is well known, a practice of following a normative directive exists only if it is fortified by a unified account of what it means to follow such a directive. There is, however, no straightforward way to follow a rule, since the communal practice of following a rule, as we are told by the champions of legal positivism, presupposes a critical reflective attitude on the part of those monitoring its application. If, however, the accounts given from such a reflective perspective are invariably in opposition to each other, we are committed to embrace the conclusion that, even in spite of an incessant reference to certain directives, there is no single rule governing the practice. Although the ongoing practice may be described in various ways and involves certain regularities, it cannot be described in the terms of following a rule of law. If constitutional borrowing is involved in bringing about such a situation, we are confronted with an unremittingly confusing case. It is not just that the borrowed element and the receiving context change their meanings in the process of merging into a different kind of practice. Instead, in such a case, both the borrowed element and the receiving context are in danger of losing their meaning altogether.

sionally use foreign examples in their decisions. One specific example concerns the apparently straightforward design of different standards of general equal protection review. In the 1980s, the German Court began borrowing from the United States Supreme Court's equal protection jurisprudence. This instance of borrowing is particularly intriguing since what initially was perceived to be an Americanization of German doctrinal standards now may be understood as a mere extension of one of the most prominent principles of the German Court's homemade jurisprudence.

At least on its own account, with an eye to "quasi-suspect" differential treatment of groups, the German Court now applies the proportionality principle to equal protection review. This doctrinal transformation, however, was mainly carried out on the formulaic level of judicial review. Upon closer inspection, it appears that there is a shrouded disparity between what the German Court claims to do and what it actually does.

In the end, a borrowing that was meant to consolidate a confounded field of precedents is now open to at least three conflicting interpretations. According to the first interpretation, the German Court successfully engaged in an Americanization of German doctrine. For the sake of distinction, this article will refer to this first interpretation as the "comparative account." According to the second interpretation, the German Court did indeed introduce the proportionality test into its equal protection review. This article terms this second interpretation the "official account," for it conforms to what the German Court, at least its First Senate, claims to be doing. According to the third interpretation, which this article terms the "die-hard account," nothing (or only very little) has changed.

This article will defend a version of the die-hard account that resonates with a justifiable skepticism for the process of constitutional borrowing. Such skepticism stems from the inherent inconsistencies in the application of borrowed constitutional doctrine as revealed by a critical reading of relevant precedents. In practice, the German

(1994) [hereinafter CURRIE, THE CONSTITUTION] (discussing the implementation of competing interests in German constitutional jurisprudence).

8 See infra section III.
9 See infra text accompanying notes 169-172 (explaining that the reasons for a differential treatment of groups must have sufficient weight).
10 See infra text accompanying notes 169-172 (explaining that the reasons for a differential treatment of groups must have sufficient weight).
11 See infra text accompanying notes 169-172 (explaining that the reasons for a differential treatment of groups must have sufficient weight).
13 See notably BVerfGE 88, 87 (97). For hornbook expositions of that account, see BODO PIEROTH & BERNHARD SCHLINK, GRUNDBUCH RECHTE STAATSGESETZ 103-04 (RZ 438-40) (Heidelberg: C.F. Müller 13th ed. 1997); GERRIT MANSEN, 2 STAATSGESETZ: GRUNDBUCHSDOGMATIK 207-09 (RZ 700-11) (Franz Vahlen 1995).
15 See infra section XV.
Court has attempted to apply borrowed constitutional provisions in such a manner that routinely falls short of meeting the German Court’s idealized approach to equal protection review. Thus, the following analysis of the evolution of equal protection review doctrine is in essence a story about formulae and their failure to instruct. A close reading of the German Court’s tinkering with purportedly different but nevertheless similar standards of equal protection review reveals that constitutional borrowings based on generalities are likely to miss their target. The article also strives to offer a better understanding of the implications of the judicial administration of formulae regarding the power it confers on those who substitute self-made guidelines for what the people, however naively, take to be higher law.

For our purposes, it is most convenient to begin with the comparative account in order to most effectively contrast the die-hard account with the other two other accounts.

III. THE COMPARATIVE ACCOUNT

According to most commentators, general equal protection review in the Federal Republic of Germany has undergone significant changes in the last few years. The German Court’s review method appears to shift from the traditional arbitrariness standard (Willkürverbot) to a two-tiered form of review that resembles the American model established and sustained in such leading cases as Korematsu v. United States and Regents of the Univ. of California v. Bakke. Konrad

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15 See id. at 127, 135 (emphasizing the influence of the U.S. Supreme Court’s powerful “style of expression” on people’s interpretation of authority).


18 See 323 U.S. 214 (1944) (evaluating the constitutionality of an exclusion order). On the
Hesse, a former member of the German Court, suggests that the Court's evolving equal protection doctrine is best understood by considering the basic American pattern.20 According to Hesse, the long-established standard, similar to the principle governing American rational basis review, that the legislature should not act arbitrarily vis-à-vis its citizens is now supplemented with a more searching inquiry in cases where government action "threatens to upset basic conditions of human existence and conduct."21 According to the comparative account, the German Court adopted the United States Supreme Court's distinctive levels of scrutiny as its model for review analysis.22 Recent judicial decisions reinforce this account.23 Undeniably, the comparative account has its virtues; one being the sense of unity it lends to an otherwise confusing body of precedents.24 It seems as if the German Court, in particular its First Senate,25 repeatedly employs a "formula" that explicitly distinguishes between normal and heightened equal protection scrutiny.26 However, the German Court, at least according to its official account, assimilated the "American" distinction between different levels of equal protection scrutiny into its matrix of domestic constitutional doctrine by incorporating the proportionality principle (Verhältnismäßigkeitsprinzip) into its upper tier.27 It therefore appears as if the borrowing of a prominent theory developed by the United States Supreme Court was superseded by the amendment of a domestic principle alien to the American strict equal protection scrutiny based upon suspect classifications.28 Rather than...
importing the distinctive level of scrutiny model, the new standard, instead, is similar to the American "fundamental interest" approach.\footnote{See Plyler v. Doe, 457 U.S. 202, 216 (1982) ("[W]e have treated as presumptively invidious those classifications that . . . impinge upon the exercise of a 'fundamental right.'"). One may have reason to doubt, however, whether the relevant string of precedents is adequately understood by claiming that it represents equal protection scrutiny. See Michael J. Perry, Modern Equal Protection: A Conceptualization and Appraisal, 79 COLUM. L. REV. 1029, 1078, 1081 (1979) (discussing cases that had nothing to do with equal protection and the imposition of a negative condition).}

To date, because implementation of the new standard has not yet become a routine practice of the German Court, despite its statement of formulae, the importance of the standard has also not been firmly established.\footnote{See Hesse, Der Gleichheitssatz, supra note 10, at 191.} According to defenders of the die-hard account, characterizing the new standard as an "Americanization" of general equal protection review encourages the myopic views of those who cling to formulae.\footnote{See, e.g., Heun, supra note 12, at 246.} Thus, a great deal of German substantive equal protection doctrine is still inclined to downplay the impact of the more recent formula of review\footnote{See id. at 243. See also Paul Kirchhof, Der allgemeine Gleichheitssatz, in 5 HANDBUCH DES STAATSRECHTS DER BUNDESREPUBLIK DEUTSCHLAND 837, 934-36, 947-48 (Josef Isensee & Paul Kirchhof eds. 1992); Ekkehart Stein, Art. 3 (Gleichheit vor dem Gesetz), in 1 ALTERNATIV-KOMMENTAR ZUM GRUNDGESETZ FÜR DIE BUNDESREPUBLIK DEUTSCHLAND 306 (E. Denninger, et al., Neuwied: Luchterhand, 2d ed. 1989) [hereinafter Stein, Art. 3]; Christoph Gusy, Der Gleichheitssatz, 41 NUEJE JURISTISCHE WOCHENSCHRIFT 2505 (1988). As Currie correctly observes, the list of suspect classifications is longer than the United States' list. See Currie, The Constitution, supra note 7, at 324.} and to propose review standards that are only partially supported by precedent.\footnote{See Stefan Huster, Rechte und Ziele. Zur Dogmatik des allgemeinen Gleichheitssatzes 226-42 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot 1993) [hereinafter Huster, RECHTE UND ZIELE]. For a brief exposition of the basic ideas expressed in this book, see Stefan Huster, Gleichheit und Verhältnismäßigkeit: Der allgemeine Gleichheitssatz als Eingriffsrecht, 11 JURISTENZEITUNG 541 (1994) [hereinafter Huster, Gleichheit und Verhältnismäßigkeit].}

A remarkable facet of this conflict in interpretation is the fact that the development of the new formula of review took shape from within an Americanized field. Although German constitutional law already reflected the different strands of equal protection review, the German Court reintroduced the American distinction into a field already built on the American model. In sections four through nine, this article will first provide a brief sketch of the period before the alleged second Americanization took place, then the article will turn to the evolution of what is now known as the "New Formula." The two final sections will address why the skeptical version of the die-hard account is the most convincing.

IV. THE ESTABLISHED UPPER TIER: ARTICLE 3(3) OF THE BASIC LAW
In cases pertaining to Article 3, § 3 of the German Constitution, termed the Basic Law (Grundgesetz) of the Federal Republic of Germany, the German Court has, more or less consistently, appealed to heightened scrutiny. In contrast to the German Equal Protection Clause of Article 3, § 1, which provides generally that "all persons shall be equal before the law," Article 3, § 3 expressly prohibits, in particular, any adverse or preferential treatment on the basis of sex, birth, race, language, national or social origin, faith, or political opinion. An amendment passed in 1994 affords special protection to persons suffering from mental or physical disabilities. In addition to Article 3, the Basic Law contains additional, special equal protection clauses, including provisions for the following: equality of the rights and duties of citizenship (Article 33, § 1); a guarantee of the equal access to public office (Article 33, § 2); voting equality (Article 38, § 1); and equality of religious confessions and congregations (Article 4, §§ 1 & 2). The German Court does not immediately consider legislative classifications in violation of these provisions to be facially invalid, but instead, subjects such classifications to a more


55 See THE BASIC LAW, supra note 34, at 14.

56 See id. at 14 ("No one may be disadvantaged or favoured because of his sex, his parentage, his race, his language, his homeland and origin, his faith, or his religious or political opinions.").

57 The second sentence of Art. 3 § 3 of the Basic Law reads: "No one may be disadvantaged because of a handicap."

58 See THE BASIC LAW, supra note 34, at 28 ("Every German shall have in every Land the same political (staatsbuergerlich) rights and duties.").

59 See id. ("Every German shall be equally eligible for any public office according to his aptitude, qualifications and professional achievements.").

60 See id. at 30 ("The deputies to the German Bundestag shall be elected in general, direct, free, equal and secret elections. They shall be representatives of the whole people, not bound by orders and instructions, and shall be subject only to their conscience.").

61 See id. at 14-15 ("Freedom of faith, of conscience, and freedom to profess a religion or a particular philosophy (Weltanschauung) shall be inviolable[]. The undisturbed practice of religion shall be guaranteed."). See also, CURRIE, THE CONSTITUTION, supra note 7, at 323 (offering an overview of the Basic Law). For an extensive commentary, see Günter Dürrig, Art. 3 § 1, in 1 GRUNDEGESETZ 301-30 (RZ 30-196) (Theodore Maunz et al. eds., Munich: C.H. Beck, 7th ed. 1994). On the affirmative duty of treating men and women alike, see the study by Ute Sacksofsky, DAS GRUNDRECHT AUF GLEICHBERECHTIGUNG. EINE RECHTSDOGMATISCHE UNTERSUCHUNG ZU ARTIKEL 3 ABSATZ 2 DES GRUNDEGESETZES (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1991).

62 If such legislative classifications were considered automatically invalid on their face, Art. 3, § 3 would amount to what Sunstein refers to as a "rights-constraint" on government's preferences. See Cass R. Sunstein, Naked Preferences and the Constitution, 84 COLUM. L. REV. 1689, 1704 (1984).

Under this approach, the category of rights would create a shield of private autonomy into which the government could not intrude, regardless of the reasons for the attempted intrusion. As a result, invalidation would be automatic, and heightened scrutiny unnecessary.
penetrating review. This closer scrutiny is applied by the German Court, in particular, where legislative classifications draw on the essentially immutable characteristics enumerated in Article 3, § 3. With respect to gender discrimination, Article 3, § 3 is generally construed as strictly prohibiting all differential treatment and, therefore, the provision is understood to screen out some illegitimate ends of government action. When faced with a legislative classification that involves the immutable characteristics listed in Article 3, § 3, the German Court regularly subjects the "suspect" classification to a means-ends test. This test is designed to ascertain whether the differential treatment either follows from the application of a different criterion that would turn the suspect classification into a "proxy." Alternatively, the test seeks to determine whether the differentiation follows from a reflection of differences firmly rooted in the "nature of things," rather than from prejudice or "archaic and overbroad generalizations." The latter test was applied in a case dealing with a stat-

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Id. Strict scrutiny is applied because the Basic Law itself seems to have established the relevant criteria for equal treatment. See e.g., Hesse, Der Gleichheitssatz, supra note 10, at 184. For cases and commentary on the equal right to vote and political participation, see, for example, BVerfGE 4, 375 (384); BVerfGE 51, 222 (235-296); BVerfGE 71, 81 (96). See also, Huster, Rechte und Ziele, supra note 33, at 352-56; Hans Herbert von Arnim, Der strenge und der formale Gleichheitssatz, 37 Die Öffentliche Verwaltung 85-92 (1984). No clear doctrine governing all kinds of cases can be articulated, however. Initially, what may be termed "causality review" provided a common theme, indicating that a regulation is constitutionally void only if the trait mentioned in Art. 3, § 3 is the "cause" of discrimination. See Jarass & Pieroth, supra note 16, at 113, 121; Gubelt, supra note 16, at 294-95. On the severe problems and, hence, gradual demise of this kind of review, see Heun, supra note 12, at 286-87 (RZ 105-110).

See Currie, Lochner Abroad, supra note 17, at 364 n. 239. Currie correctly attests that scrutiny has been truly strict only with respect to gender classifications, even though not always "fatal in fact. For commentary on the relatively low level of protection afforded to political opinion, see Heun, supra note 12, at 290 (RZ 119); Currie, The Constitution, supra note 7, at 325-28.

See Pieroth & Schlink, supra note 11, at 106 (RZ 447); Gubelt, supra note 16, at 294. Some commentators place the emphasis on the means and hold that some criteria of differentiation are prohibited by the Constitution. See, e.g., Stein, supra note 32, at 342; Gusy, supra note 32, at 2508. See generally, Sunstein, supra note 42, at 1715.

See, e.g., BVerfGE 3, 225 (241); BVerfGE 57, 355 (342-343). It remains unclear whether this principle applies only to statutes that are discriminatory on their face or also to statutes that are facially neutral (and therefore involve an "indirect discrimination"). For an account of this discussion, see Heun, supra note 12, at 281. The U.S. Supreme Court has applied different standards to facially-neutral statutes with a racially disproportionate impact and to statutes that contain provisions of equal, but separate treatment for each race. Compare Washington v. Davis, 426 U.S. 229 (1976) (holding that a racially disparate impact does not render a statute per se unconstitutional) with Loving v. Virginia, 388 U.S. 1 (1967) (noting the fact of equal but separate application of a statute to different races does not immunize a statute from the heavy burden of justification that the Fourteenth Amendment requires of state statutes drawn according to race).

See, e.g., Weinberger v. Wiesenfeld, 420 U.S. 686 (1975) (invalidating the social security system provision that differentiated among covered employees based solely on sex. The distinction was based on the archaic and overbroad generalization not tolerated under the U.S. Constitution, that male workers' earnings, unlike those of female workers, are vital to their families' support); Califano v. Goldfarb, 430 U.S. 199 (1977) (striking down a gender-based provision in
ute that banned women from working during the night.\footnote{See Currie, Lochner Abroad, supra note 17 (noting that a "compelling" reason is required to justify sex discrimination); Galotto, supra note 17 (detailing the development of intermediate scrutiny). For a more detailed analysis, see Hartwin Bungert, Gleichberechtigung von Mann und Frau im amerikanischen und im deutschen Verfassungsrecht, 89 ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR VERGLEICHENDE RECHTSWISSENSCHAFT 441-465 (1990).} At the outset of the opinion, the German Court proclaimed that Art. 3, § 3 forbids the attachment of unequal legal consequences to gender-specific classifications.\footnote{On the problems resulting from the resort to "functional differences," which are likely to engender traditional stereotypes, see Currie, Lochner Abroad, supra note 17, at 365 and Heun, supra note 12, at 283 (RZ 99).} In marked contrast to previous decisions in which regulations, discriminatory on their face, were upheld unless there was proof of a discriminatory purpose,\footnote{The idea is that such a compelling interest, such as protecting the pregnant or regulating birth, can only be pursued by making a gender-specific distinction. See Heun, supra note 12, at 282.} the Court has inaugurated the principle that differential treatment of men and women cannot pass constitutional muster, even if such differentiation functions as a means in pursuit of some beneficial and legitimate goal.\footnote{Since the purpose for the gender-specific differentiation must be narrowly tailored, it follows that it may concern problems arising "by their very nature" only with respect to women or
In a case before it, the German Court conceded that banning employees from working during the night would promote the end of protecting employee health; the means chosen, however, exempted men, and due to that underinclusive "fit," the statute, the Court held, had a discriminatory impact on women. Moreover, the additional arbitrary purpose of preventing women from bearing the double burden of working during the night and taking care of children during the day, was sought by an inappropriate means, since this additional burden would also fall on men who were raising children. It should be noted that this is not the only case in which the Court's arguments focused on whether the means chosen by the legislature were rationally related (geeignet) and, in light of less burdensome alternatives, necessary (erforderlich) in order to advance the policy in question. This article will return later to the conundrum in which the rational relationship requirement, in addition to the requirement of necessity of the means used toward the attainment of the end, represent two components of the proportionality principle (Grundsatz der Verhältnismäßigkeit) employed by the German Court. However, the third component of the proportionality principle, the requirement of proportionality in a narrow sense, which would apparently require balancing the weight of the governmental interest against the constitutional standard on non-discrimination, was conspicuous by its absence in the case reviewing the law banning women from working at night. Unlike a decision by the Austrian Constitutional Court,
which upheld a similar over- and under-inclusive statute on the ground that under present conditions, the objective of protecting working-class women carried more weight than the desire to treat them like men, the German Court performed no such balancing. Instead, the German Court merely scrutinized whether the statute established a "tight fit" between a compelling interest and the means utilized to satisfy it. Finding that the relationship was too loose, the German Court struck down the statute.

V. ALWAYS AND ALREADY AMERICAN: THE ARBITRARINESS STANDARD

Aside from the strict scrutiny test applied in cases pertaining to Article 3(3), it seemed for a long time as if the general Equal Protection Clause found in Article 39(1) would, for reasons of judicial restraint, support nothing other than a rational basis test. The rational basis test was first introduced by the German Court under the tenet of constitutionally safeguarding against legislative "arbitrariness." The German Court's first decision in 1951 established what later came to be known as "the arbitrariness standard" (Willkürverbot). The standard provides that the Equal Protection Clause is violated if a sound reason—a reason that reflects the nature of things or is otherwise substantially plausible—in favor of a legislative differentiation cannot be discovered. In short, the Equal Protection Clause is violated if the provision must be regarded as arbitrary.

Before turning to a discussion of the arbitrariness standard, it is important to note that the American doctrine of Equal Protection, as

articulated. Sometimes, it is simply held that there be a "proportional relationship" between the goal and the criterion of differentiation. See, e.g., Gubelt, supra note 16, at 240; Stein, supra note 32, at 328-29. Huster alone has consistently examined what is really going on behind the veil of formulae. See Huster, Gleichheit und Verhältnismäßigkeit, supra note 35, at 543-44.


65 This strategy of avoiding the delicate issue of directly pitting the governmental purpose against some standard of non-discrimination, as examined in Gunther, In Search of Evolving Doctrine, supra note 26, at 22-23, might even be present in the "painstaking" review deployed by Justice O'Connor in City of Richmond v. J.A. Croson, 488 U.S. 469 (1989). Although putting enormous strain on the prior discrimination requirement, Justice O'Connor never attacked affirmative action as an exception to equal treatment, however passionately she may have scrutinized the means giving it effect. It should be noted, however, that the principle implicit in Wygant v. Jackson Bd. of Educ., 476 U.S. 267 (1986), that remedial action may be taken in response to past discrimination by the state, provided such action does not impose too heavy a burden on innocent victims, is in the course of Justice O'Connor's argument transformed into a principle of retribution, under which the extent of past discrimination determines the remedial measure to be taken.

67 For the same conclusion, see Hesse, Der Gleichheitssatz, supra note 10, at 184.

68 See id. at 197; Hesse, Der allgemeine Gleichheitssatz, supra note 16, at 127.

69 For an historical account, see Hesse, Der Gleichheitssatz, supra note 10, at 178, 186; Huster, RECHTE UND ZIELE, supra note 35, at 45-48.

70 See 52 BVerfGE 1, 14 (52).
developed at the turn of this century, had some impact on its gestation. The arbitrariness standard originally appeared in writings of the constitutional scholar Gerhard Leibholz, first published during the period of the Weimar Republic. Although his ideas gave rise to a heated debate among constitutional scholars, they had no impact on the practice of the State Court (Staatsgerichtshof), which refused to submit acts of the legislature to judicial scrutiny on Equal Protection grounds. After the Second World War, however, Leibholz himself was appointed to the German Court, and there can be no doubt that his early scholarship left a discernable imprint on the judicial practice of the 1950s. In fact, it seems almost as if the German Court had simply transferred his early interpretation of Art. 109(1) of the Weimar Reichsverfassung to Article 3(1) of the new Basic Law. Leibholz's seminal conception was influenced to some degree by comparative studies of the relevant Swiss and American doctrines. Thus, it appears, at least in retrospect, that the Americanization of German equal protection review preceded the enactment of the Basic Law.

Leibholz's account of general equal protection rests on the distinction between “inaccurate” and “arbitrary” legislation. A statute is “inaccurately” drafted if the resulting unequal or equal treatment of persons or states of affairs is over- or underinclusive. Mere inaccuracy, as Leibholz explains, is not violative of equal protection; it amounts to nothing more than a question of legal policy. Under certain conditions, however, a classification or distinction must be regarded as arbitrary, meaning that the statutory provision is unconstitutional and void. According to Leibholz, some of the instances in which a statutory classification is unmistakably arbitrary may have a familiar ring to Americans. A statute is arbitrary if: (1) no sound reason can be discovered in support of the classification; (2) the relevant state of affairs is incompatible with the legal consequence attached to it; or (3) there is no “internal relationship” between the unequal treatment and the goal pursued by the legislature or if that relationship is too tenuous as to warrant a rational relationship of

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74 For the articulation of the rational basis test, see Lindsley v. Natural Carbonic Gas Co., 220 U.S. 61, 78-79 (1911). “One who assails the classification in such a law must carry the burden of showing that it does not rest upon any reasonable basis, but is essentially arbitrary.” Id. (citations omitted). See also, F.S. Royster Guano Co. v. Virginia, 253 U.S. 412 (1920) (explaining that a classification must not be arbitrary and must be based on a difference having a “fair and substantial relationship” to a legislative objective).
75 See GERHARD LEIBHOLZ, DIE GLEICHHEIT VOR DEM GESETZ: EINE STUDIE AUF RECHTSVERGLEICHENDER UND RECHTSPHILOSOPHISCHER GRUNDLAGE (1959) [herinafter LEIBHOLZ, DIE GLEICHHEIT VOR DEM GESETZ]. For the influence of Heinrich Triepel's ideas, see Hesse, Der Gleichheitsstaat, supra note 10, at 178, 186.
76 See THE BASIC LAW, supra note 34, at 14 (“All persons shall be equal before the law.”).
77 See LEIBHOLZ, DIE GLEICHHEIT VOR DEM GESETZ, supra note 72, at 36-38, 79-81.
78 See id. at 75.
79 See id.
80 See id.
means and ends. The similarity of this arbitrariness test to the American rationality review is fairly obvious.

VI. A COMMON THEME: MERE RATIONALITY

To be sure, in the hands of the German Court, the arbitrariness standard has taken on a life of its own. Although influential, Leibholz's text did not acquire a canonical form. The narrow focus on arbitrariness, however, has in effect likened the arbitrariness principle to rational basis review. A reading of the arbitrariness standard as based on American rational basis review is supported by a considerable string of precedents to be found in the practice of the German Court.

Above all, one may construe the rational basis requirement and the arbitrariness standard in such a way so as to define the ultimate limits of the legislature's freedom to sort out relevant characteristics of persons in its pursuit of some constitutionally-permissible goal. This interpretive option is endorsed by those German constitutional scholars who contend that the German Court is not authorized to interfere with legislative value choices based on arbitrary considerations of justice. According to this view, the legislature faces few obstacles in furthering legitimate purposes via statutes based on some rational criterion of unequal treatment. Inasmuch as the use of certain criteria (such as race or gender) is not proscribed by the German Constitution itself, they argue, the only limitation afforded by general equal protection doctrine consists of the appropriate, though loose, fit between such a criterion, the classificatory means, and the permissible goal.

See id.

For a discussion of how this type of review operates in the context of several clauses of the Constitution, see Sunstein, supra note 42, at 1695-98 (discussing the baseline requirement prohibiting naked preferences). See also Robert W. Bennett, "Mere" Rationality in Constitutional Law: Judicial Review and Democratic Theory, 67 CAL. L. REV. 1049 (1979) (discussing the limits of legitimate legislative purposes).

See Heun, supra note 12, at 247 (RZ 29). Accordingly, any unequal treatment has been supported by "the nature of things" or some other plausible reason. See BVerfGE 1, 4 (52); 61, 158 (147); 89, 132 (141); 81, 1 (23).

These characteristics include the "role" according to which human beings are treated differently. See, e.g., Gusy, supra note 32, at 2506; Stein, supra note 32 at 320.

See, e.g., BVerfGE 9, 201 (206).

See Stein, supra note 32, at 322; Gusy, supra note 32, at 2506.

See Stein, supra note 32, at 327-29.

See Gusy, supra note 32, at 2507-08; see also, Gubelt, supra note 16, at 235-37 (emphasizing that according to this approach the rational basis test can identify three legislative failures; the choice of a constitutionally impermissible goal, the use of an impermissible criterion, and the inappropriateness of the means with respect to the purpose). For an earlier account, see Adalbert Podleich, Gehalt und Funktion des allgemeinen Verfassungsrechtlichen Gleichheitssatzes 110-117 (1971).

See Wolfgang Rüffer, Art. 3 § 1, in 1 Bonner Kommentar zum Grundgesetz 26-27 (RZ 31) (Dolzner & Vogel, eds., Heidelberg: C.F. Müller, 73rd ed. 1995); Kirchhof, supra note 32, at
guidance from such ambiguous concepts as “the basic values of the Constitution,” eventually likens this restrictive reading of equal protection to the broader approach taken in the German Court’s decisions.

Nevertheless, such a perspective on equal protection can find support in jurisprudence on both sides of the Atlantic. Accordingly, the boundary drawn by general equal protection is marked by what is “evidently” arbitrary, or, to use the terms of the United States Supreme Court in Mathews v. DeCastro, by what is “clearly wrong, a display of arbitrary power, not an exercise of judgment.” Put in positive terms, legislation will be upheld if one can reasonably conceive of a set of facts which constitute a distinction and the fit between means and ends is “at least debatable” or can conceivably be supported by one sound reason, regardless of the quality of that reason.

Both the German Court and the United States Supreme Court announced that the question of control over whether the legislation has settled on the most rational and just solution is not of their concern. Accordingly, just as the German Court has been criticized for relaxing the arbitrariness standard, likewise, in the United States, rational basis review has been attacked for lacking the appropriate “bite.”

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845 (RZ 34); Stein, supra note 32, at 323-24; Gusy, supra note 32, at 2508.
89 See Gubelt, supra note 16, at 239; Stein, supra note 32, at 327-28.
90 For a thoroughly deferential approach, see Gusy, supra note 32, at 2507-08.
91 See infra, section IX.
92 See BVerfGE 12, 326 (333); BVerfGE 17, 318 (330); BVerfGE 18, 121 (124); BVerfGE 23, 50, 60); BVerfGE 50, 176 (191); BVerfGE 52, 277 (281). For an account, see Dürig, supra note 41, at 238-45 (RZ 275-284).
94 Id.
96 See Minnesota v. Clover Leaf Creamery Co., 449 U.S. 456 (1981) (“Here the discrimination against residents is not invidious . . . because . . . it rests . . . upon a state of facts that reasonably can be conceived to constitute a distinction, or difference in state policy, which the state is not prohibited from . . . classifying.” (referring to United States v. Carolene Prods. Co., 304 U.S. 144, 153-54 (1938))).
97 See, e.g., BVerfGE 17, 122 (130); BVerfGE 33, 44, (51). For further references, see Kirchhof, supra note 32, at 945-44 (RZ 236).
98 See, e.g., United States R.R. Retirement Bd. v. Fritz, 449 U.S. 166, 175 (1980) (explaining in dictum that, in cases involving social and economic benefits, the Court has consistently refused to invalidate on equal protection grounds legislation that is deemed unwise or inartfully drawn); New York City Transit Authority v. Beazer, 440 U.S. 568 (1979); BVerfGE 17, 311 (330); BVerfGE 33, 44, (52); BVerfGE 50, 177 (191); BVerfGE 53, 313 (330).
99 See Huster, Rechte und Ziele, supra note 33, at 51-53.
100 See, e.g., McGowan v. Maryland, 366 U.S. 420, 425-426 (1961). For a more recent case, see Nordlinger v. Hahn, 112 S.Ct. 2596, 2599 (1992) explaining that the “Equal Protection Clause does not demand for purposes of rational-basis review that a legislature or governing decision-maker actually articulate at any time the purpose or rationale supporting its classification.”
101 See LAURENCE H. TRIBE, AMERICAN CONSTITUTIONAL LAW 1445-1446 (2d ed. 1988) (criticizing the Court’s reluctance to explicitly recognize new categories of classifications and discussing the danger of leaving them to be determined by rational basis review). For a political criticism of German practice, see DIETER-DIRK HARTMANN, WILLKÖRVERBOT UND GLEICHHEITSGEBOT 41-43 (1972); see also, Hans-Peter Schneider, Eigenart und Funktionen der
In the United States, notable exceptions, however, include Reed v. Reed and Metropolitan Life Insurance Co. v. Ward. As Cass Sunstein observed:

It merely requires something other than raw political power to justify an exercise of authority. In most respects, this is a trivial constraint, for almost any decision can be justified by reference to some public value. One might, for example, support preferential treatment of the poor on the ground that they have a special need for public assistance; preferential treatment of the rich might be justified on the ground that it provides incentives for more work and investment . . . . Everything, in short, is at least potentially lawful.

In practice, however, subject matter also impacts whether or not a low level of scrutiny is applied. Generally, courts are more reluctant to examine legislative decisions in areas involving economic policy, public spending, and budgetary planning than in other areas.

Nonetheless, considering the vast array of subject matters open to equal protection examination, it is quite reasonable to demand that the arbitrariness standard and rational basis review be raised to some

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100 Reed v. Reed, 404 U.S. 71 (1971) (holding a probate provision giving preference to men over women violated the Equal Protection Clause).
102 Sunstein, supra note 42, at 1698.
103 See generally, Heun, supra note 12, at 247 (RZ 29); BVerfGE 88, 87 (96); BVerfGE 91, 346 (363).
104 See Nordlinger v. Hahn, 505 U.S. 1 (1992) (applying rational basis scrutiny to legislative decisions to increase property taxes and noting the presumption of constitutionality of such decisions); Metropolitan Life Ins. Co. v. Ward, 470 U.S. 869, 885 (1985) (O'Connor, J., dissenting); United States R.R. Retirement Bd. v. Fritz, 449 U.S. 166 (1980) (notwithstanding classifications created by legislative decision to change eligibility criteria for pension benefits, the decision only triggers low level scrutiny); Madden v. Kentucky, 309 U.S. 83, 88 (1940); BVerfGE 11, 50, at 60; BVerfGE 18, 315, (331); BVerfGE 29, 402, (411); BVerfGE 60, 16, (42-43); BVerfGE 61, 43, (63); Rümelin, supra note 86, at 109 (RZ 198); Konrad Hesse, Grundzüge des Verfassungsrechts der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 190, n. 89 (RZ 439) (Heidelberg: Müller Verl., 20th ed. 1995) [hereinafter Hesse, Grundzüge des Verfassungsrechts]; see also, Gubelt, supra note 16, at 237-38; Brugger, supra note 61, at 162-71. As the Supreme Court has recently affirmed in FCC v. Beach Communications Inc., 113 S.Ct. 2096, 2101-2 (1993):

In areas of social and economic policy, a statutory classification that neither proceeds along suspect lines nor infringes fundamental constitutional rights must be upheld against equal protection challenge if there is any reasonably conceivable state of facts that could provide a rational basis for the classification . . . . [W]e never require a legislature to articulate its reasons for enacting a statute.

Currie, however, correctly observes that in the area of taxation and welfare benefits judicial review by the German Court is far less moderate than it is by the Supreme Court. See Currie, Lochner Abroad, supra note 17, at 369. Apart from the protection of the family afforded by Article 6, Article 3 § 1 of the Basic Law also ensures the most important basic rights for the control of legislation in the area of taxation. See also Heun, supra note 12, at 265 (RZ 65).
higher level of scrutiny as well. In light of the general elusiveness of means-ends relationships, the bite of equal protection may be reinforced by introducing what Justice Stevens has described as the "requirement that an impartial lawmaker could logically believe that the classification would serve a legitimate public purpose that transcends the harm to the members of the disadvantaged class."\footnote{City of Cleburne v. Cleburne Living Ctr., 473 U.S. 432, 452 (1985) (Stevens, J., concurring). For a reconstruction of the conception of deliberation at the bottom of modern representative systems, see Cass Sunstein, *Interest Groups in American Public Law*, 38 STAN. L. REV. 29, 49-55 (1982).} A collapse into a more or less outspoken balancing\footnote{See generally, Tribe, supra note 99, at 1444-45 (explaining that the majority in *Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U.S. 202 (1982), "treated the rationality standard as a balancing test of sorts"). For an interesting account of the fundamental rights branch of American equal protection review, see Cass Sunstein, *Sexual Orientation and the Constitution: A Note on the Relationship Between Due Process and Equal Protection*, 55 U. CHI. L. REV. 1161, 1168-69 (1982). Sunstein argued: The 'fundamental rights' branch of Equal Protection is self-consciously designed to prohibit states from drawing impermissible lines with respect to rights that the Due Process Clause does not substantively protect. For example, discrimination with respect to the right to vote and the right to appeal is prohibited, even though the states may eliminate both rights. Similarly, the Court has barred distinctions affecting the right to marry and the right to procreate while assuming that those rights are substantively unprotected by the Due Process Clause. Id.} is one of two conceivable paths of which a more resolute enforcement of the arbitrariness standard might conceivably take, and, indeed, has taken, at least in the Federal Republic of Germany.\footnote{See infra section VII.} The other conceivable path introduces substantive justice as one of the components of the means-ends test. The first path, as adapted in Germany, assesses the overall appropriateness of legislation, despite the fact that the Court cannot officially resort to superlegislating, whereas the second path represents a preferred version of the resolute arbitrariness standard.\footnote{See infra section VIII.}

VII. THE CLOSET RESOLUTE ARBITRARINESS STANDARD: BALANCING

One can readily observe balancing at an early stage in the life of the arbitrariness standard,\footnote{See BVerfGE 9, 20 (31) (establishing the relevant standard after an assessment of the consequences); BVerfGE 50, 177 (191). On striking the right balance between administrative convenience and the burden imposed, see BVerfGE 29, 402 (411); Heun, supra note 12, at 248.} although the German Court has not followed this course of decision making consistently. For example, in 1964, the German Court reviewed a statute that deprived tenants of the usual protection against a landlord’s capricious lease terminations in situations where the tenants’ building was devoted for such “public purposes” as supplying a workplace for public officials. The German Court held that the statute did not violate the Equal Protec-
tion Clause of Article 3, § 1. The argument supporting the statute stated simply that the public interest must be balanced against the tenants’ interest in remaining in their residences. When government officials need office space, the Court held, the public interest will prevail. In crafting this argument, the Court looked to civil law, which provided that landlords could recover rented apartments for their own residential use. Interestingly, the Court reasoned that landlords and the state, as the owners of public buildings, with respect to the civil law standard of “own residential use,” were analogous. Hence, the situation involving tenants who were adversely affected by a landlord’s decision to terminate their leases was to be regarded in the same manner.

While the comparison made in this case was elusively and unsoundly argued, it demonstrates how the factors the German Court purports to determine as relevant criteria of equal treatment indeed can be forged from balancing, or by engaging in review of “proportionality in a narrow sense.” Instead of reasoning in the manner it did, the Court first should have introduced a general criterion which grants landlords a right to recover premises for their own residential use. The Court then should have asked the question whether the circumstances of private landlords and the state can reasonably be compared. Yet in this case, the facile appeal to equality, although initially based on an appealing desire to balance public gains and private burdens, obscured a manifest difference in the interests affected. Substantively, the Court never asked the critical question of whether public and private landlords are truly analogous. Instead, the Court merely assumed that such a criterion of equal treatment existed. In doing so, the Court failed to recognize that the criterion itself was constructed from the process of balancing the state interest against the burden imposed on tenants.

There is a reason why some judicial arguments that begin by following the “balancing path” occasionally end up by following the second, or “adoption of a criterion of substantive justice” path. The long dominant idea that equality, in contrast to basic liberties, is devoid of a yielding baseline reflects this shift in analytical transition. Against this background, a judicial approach to equal protection, which balances the benefits of government action against the burdens imposed by such action seems out of place. Therefore, prior to the emergence of the New Formula, precedents such as the case dis-

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110 BVerfGE 18, 121 (124).
111 See id. at 124-25.
112 See id.
113 See id.
115 See id. at 585-86 (making a similar observation).
116 See id. at 562-64.
cussed, if the balancing test had been detected at all, were likely to be discounted as mere aberrations. The following section seeks to explain why this perception would have prevailed.

VIII. THE RECEIVED DISTINCTION BETWEEN BASIC LIBERTIES AND EQUAL PROTECTION

According to well-established German, as well as American constitutional doctrine, almost all rights and liberties—the noteworthy exception being “human dignity” in Article 1 of the German Basic Law—may lawfully be infringed or compromised by the legislature if the legislative action is based on a legitimate government interest. Even basic rights, therefore, are not absolute. As discussed above, however, in order to survive judicial review, the legislative infringement of such rights must satisfy the proportionality principle. The third component of this principle, “proportionality in a narrow sense,” is generally understood as requiring the Court to balance the weight of the governmental interest against the interests protected by the constitutional right. Basic constitutional rights, according to the third component of the proportionality principle, avail over a specific “scope of protection” (Schutzbereich). A determination of the right’s “scope of protection” with respect to a particular individual is arrived at by evaluating the individual’s interest in the state of affairs in question or by evaluating the individual’s opportunity to engage in certain forms of conduct. As it is understood, the scope of protection is susceptible to a description that refers to some prototype of human activity or makes reference to some state of affairs or legal institutions protected by the right. In the process of balancing, the scope of protection afforded an individual’s basic right may ultimately need to surrender to the opposing governmental interest. Provided that the governmental interest is pursued by rational means, the scope of protection for an individual’s basic right is taken to de-

117 See BverfGE 18, 121 (124).
118 See CURRIE, THE CONSTITUTION, supra note 7, at 335. According to Currie, however, there is a long-standing tradition of exercising strict scrutiny in the area of taxation. Moreover, statutes were struck down on the ground of the severity of impact. See id. at 333-34. Currie overlooks, however, the fact that the appearance of strict scrutiny is owed to the means-scrutiny exercised in the application of criteria of justice, such as the principle of “ability to pay” (Leistungsfähigkeitsprinzip). See Heun, supra note 12, at 266.
120 See PIEROTH & SCHLINK, supra note 11, at 83.
121 See Wendt, supra note 62, at 448-74.
122 See id. at 436-38.
fine the "yielding baseline" of the right. Accordingly, in the sphere of rights and liberties, the "yielding" and the "definite" baseline (Schutzbereich and aktueller Garantiebereich) may legitimately differ. The "definite" baseline of the right is determined through the application of the principle of proportionality. The protection of rights and liberties does not presuppose any comparisons between persons and groups, since with respect to the yielding baseline one can ascertain whether the government has infringed upon, or indeed violated, a right. Within this context of yielding and definite baselines, proportionality in a narrow sense—proportionality proper—demands that any adverse impact of a legislative action be proportional to the beneficial ends of that action.

Against this conceptual background, the perceived distinction between rights and liberties on the one hand, and equality on the other, amounts to the following: Regardless of the interests, activities or state of affairs adversely affected, equality is relevant to all kinds of governmental activity. Hence, equal protection analysis differs from the basic tripartite structure of right, burden, and proportionality.

First, unlike other basic rights and liberties, the right to equality does not have a scope of protection that would lend itself to a description of a naturally given or legally constituted state of affairs or some prototype of human activity. The right to equality at its core is a claim to be treated equally whenever the government implements certain classifying criteria in the pursuit of legislative goals. Equality demands that certain government behavior be determined with respect to how that government entity acts in relation to others. The right to equal treatment, therefore, can only be specified in the general context of governmental action (or inaction).

Second, one cannot plausibly say that the right to be treated alike or unalike is the same as being burdened. Since, unlike other basic rights and liberties, the right to be treated equally has no pre-

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126 See id.
127 See Wendt, supra note 62, at 460; EKKEHART STEIN, STAATSRECHT 242-43 (Tübingen: Mohr, 14th ed. 1993) [hereinafter STEIN, STAATSRECHT].
128 See, e.g., Heun, supra note 12, 239 (RZ 15).
129 See Kirchhof, supra note 32, at 911-12.
130 See Rüffer, supra note 86, at 85-86 (RZ 66, 148). A similar observation can be found in Kenneth L. Karst, Equal Citizenship Under the Fourteenth Amendment, 91 HARV. L. REV. 1, 39 (1977) ("The problem of limits is inescapable in any effort to deal with a principle of equality.").
131 See Rüffer, supra note 86, at 57 (RZ 96).
132 See Pieroth & Schlink, supra note 11, at 112-14; Jarass & Pieroth, supra note 16, at 96-97; Lübbe-Wolff, supra note 125, at 236-46.
133 See Heun, supra note 12, at 244 (RZ 25); Kirchhof, supra note 32, at 912 (RZ 164); Michael Ch. Jacobs, Der Grundsatz der Verhältnismäßigkeit. Mit einer exemplarischen Darstellung seiner Geltung im Atomrecht 40 (Carl Heymanns Verlag KG 1983).
determined scope of protection against governmental action, an immediate clash of this right and the public interest cannot occur. In the absence of any conflict, there is nothing to be resolved by a balancing process. Given that the right of equal treatment has no scope of protection against governmental action that would easily lend itself to description, this right amounts to an assertion that the government should not fall short in meeting certain criteria of substantive justice. By accounting for certain criteria of substantive justice, rules may be introduced for the comparison of persons and states of affairs by highlighting relevant qualities of each person or state of affairs. Normative principles then may establish whether it is just to treat particular persons differently, even though in other contexts such persons might be deserving of equal treatment. If criteria of substantive justice are applied consistently, persons are given "their due," and treated alike or unalike according to the normative principles that govern what they "deserve." Accordingly, the right to equal treatment, which "by its very nature" is not susceptible to balancing, has inherent limitations. Equality has no yielding baseline, but there is always a pre-established definite baseline that is defined by various criteria of substantive justice.

Given this doctrinal context, it is clear that balancing could not provide a framework for a more resolute application of arbitrariness standards. Conversely, submitting legislation to criteria of substantive justice, such as the "ability to pay" in matters of taxation, offers a means for devising a truly resolute arbitrariness standard. It is the reference to criteria of substantive justice that marks the second path of the resolute arbitrariness standard, which will be examined in the next section.

IX. THE PREFERRED RESOLUTE ARBITRARINESS STANDARD: THE NATURE OF THINGS AND ITS SUBSTITUTE (SYSTEMATIC CONSISTENCY)

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134 See, e.g., Peter Lerche, Übermass und Verfassungsrecht: Zur Bindung des Gesetzgebers an die Grundsätze der Verhältnismäßigkeit und der Erforderlichkeit 29-31 (Cologne: Carl Heymanns Verlag KG, 1961); Lübke-Wolff, supra note 125, at 258-60; Kirchhof, supra note 32, at 911 (RZ 161-162).

135 See Westen, supra note 114, at 548-49 ("To say that two people are 'equal' and entitled to be treated 'equally' is to say that they both fully satisfy the criteria of a governing rule of treatment.").

136 See id. at 557 (reducing justice to a statement, and equality to a statement of justice).

137 This view is widely held in German constitutional doctrine. See e.g., Huster, Rechte und Ziele, supra note 33, at 226-42. The basic import of the German conclusion, namely the lack of a yielding baseline on the part of equality, is often confounded with its modal indifference. For a clarification, see Lübke-Wolff, supra note 125, at 244-45. The latter ("modal indifference") means that even though government may be at liberty to impose burdens or to distribute benefits, it still must comply with the additional constraint set by criteria of justice. See id.

138 See Lübke-Wolff, supra note 125, at 18.

139 See Heun, supra note 12, at 266 (RZ 66).
As an alternative to the first path, which entails an absolute balancing of the governmental interests against the individual rights at stake, the second path leading to a more resolute arbitrariness test involves the implicit identification of a substantive criterion of justice within the context of either the means or the ends components of governmental action. To refine this point, one might say, moreover, that resorting to means rather than ends focused analysis represents a distinct characteristic of the arbitrariness standard. If the second path is assumed, judicial inquiry focuses on whether differential or equal \(^{140}\) treatment caused by legislative action conforms to a criterion of justice, \(^{141}\) rather than, as required in absolute balancing, focusing on whether governmental treatment imposes an excessive burden on the individual. Judicial reasoning, thus, essentially becomes an examination of a classification, and the legal consequences attached to that classification. The examination of the classification and its consequences is conducted against the background of a particular criterion of substantive justice, which is either alleged to have been established by the legislature itself or is understood to be an intrinsic feature of the “peculiarities” of the social situation subject to regulation. \(^{142}\) Judicial reasoning which recognizes the latter amounts essentially to an appeal to the nature of things. Judicial reasoning which recognizes the former, in contrast, seems to display a more deferential attitude toward the legislature. \(^{143}\)

By assuming the second path, the German Court developed a double standard that reintroduced the arbitrariness standard into its own doctrine. In a well-known line of cases, the German Court has held that the legislature may select the differences relevant to unequal treatment, \(^{144}\) provided that it not ignore a similarity of social situations and positions so significant that the similarity must be taken into account from the “standpoint of justice.” \(^{145}\) In practice, in most cases it is imprudent for judges \(^{146}\) to assert that the legislature has overlooked a similarity of social situations, even when the quasinatural normative force of the similarity is “evidently” rooted in the

\(^{140}\) See BVerfGE 4, 144, (155); BVerfGE 86, 81, (87); Heun, \emph{ supra} note 12, at 239-240 (RZ 17)

\(^{141}\) Therefore, this conformity-test is to be distinguished from assessing proportionality in a narrow sense. \See Huster, \textit{Rechte und Ziele}, \emph{ supra} note 33, at 170-71.

\(^{142}\) See BVerfGE 17, 122, (130); see also, \See Kirchhof, \emph{ supra} note 32, at 929-37 (RZ 205-21). It comes as no surprise to learn that this approach has been criticized as being too activist. \See Huster, \textit{Rechte und Ziele}, \emph{ supra} note 33, at 386-88; Hesse, \textit{Der Gleichheitssatz}, \emph{ supra} note 10, at 188 n. 52.

\(^{143}\) See Huster, \textit{Rechte und Ziele}, \emph{ supra} note 33, at 390-92.

\(^{144}\) See, \emph{ e.g.}, BVerfGE 25, 371 (400); BVerfGE 35, 263 (272).

\(^{145}\) See, \emph{ e.g.}, BVerfGE 48, 346 (357); BVerfGE 53, 313 (329-30); BVerfGE 55, 11 (25-26). This principle was originally established by BVerfGE 1, 264 (276). This article will resume an examination of “significance” and the “standpoint of justice” as components of the arbitrariness standard below. \See infra section XI.

\(^{146}\) For an example of a brave resort to social reciprocities, see BVerfGE 75, 108 (25-26).
"peculiarities of the regulated subject matter." As a consequence, as we have seen, the German Court has emphasized that the legislature has broad discretion when selecting the standard of equal or unequal treatment. Despite the practical limitations on the power of the Court to assert that the legislature has overlooked a similarity of social situations, it may, nevertheless, require the legislature to adhere to the principles of its own regulation.

For example, the German Court upheld a statutory provision allowing dependents of an insured to receive only sixty percent of retirement benefits after the insured has passed away. The German Court found that this system of retirement benefits rested on two principles: (1) the principle of insurance; and (2) the principle of care (Fürsorge). The German Court reasoned that the legislature complied with the principle of insurance when it provided for payment of one hundred percent of retirement benefits to the insured during his or her life. The Court also reasoned that the legislature complied with the principle of care when it provided that the dependents of an insured deceased were entitled to receive only sixty percent of the insured’s benefits. Although one might suspect that this reasoning arose from the “peculiarities of the situation” approach, the German Court observed, rather, that if the legislature had based the differential treatment on the principle of need, it would have seriously questioned the validity of the statutory provision. The Court found that the legislature did not adopt the principle of need with respect to this statutory provision and upheld the statute because it complied with the two principles described above.

The implied legislative power to establish criteria of justice can be turned against the legislature itself. One may argue that legislation must comply with the established system of principles within a specific area of the law. This principle of systematic consistency, termed Systemgerechtigkeit, played a prominent role in the Court’s ju-

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147 See, e.g., BVerfGE 26, 72 (74); see also, Rübner, supra note 86, at 25 (RZ 29); Dürrig, supra note 41, at 146 (RZ 310). For a striking example, according to which progressive taxation is required by the German Constitution, see BVerfGE 29, 402 (412); BVerfGE 32, 333 (339); BVerfGE 36, 66 (72).

148 For example, the Court gave the legislature leeway to determine the amount of alimony paid to public officials, reasoning that no pre-established relationship would help to translate differences of position and status into monetary terms. In short, there seem to have been no “peculiarities of the subject matter” that would amount to a criterion of justice. See BVerfGE 26, 72 (78).

149 See BVerfGE 48, 346 (356).

150 See id., at 358-59.

151 On the different treatment of retirement benefits of public officials and other employees within the system of taxation on the grounds that the respective entitlements are different in nature, see BVerfGE 55, 11 (26, 31).

152 See BVerfGE 48 346 (356).

153 See id., at 356.

154 See, e.g., Gubelt, supra note 16, at 240-41; Gusy, supra note 32, at 2508; Dürrig, supra note 41, at 87-100 (RZ 194-232); Rübner, supra note 86, at 29-32 (RZ 39-40).
risprudence for many years.\textsuperscript{155} Apparently yielding to wide criticism,\textsuperscript{156} the Court subsequently employed the arbitrariness standard to curtail arguments based on systematic consistency\textsuperscript{157} by holding that the legislature may deviate from the established system, so long as it does not do so arbitrarily.\textsuperscript{158} The reintroduction\textsuperscript{159} of the arbitrariness standard by this departure, however, is to some extent dependent on the sphere of the government action in question.\textsuperscript{160}

Before the second purported Americanization of German equal protection review occurred, there were "suspect" classifications, the use of which as a basis for a legislative distinction\textsuperscript{161} was explicitly proscribed by Article 3 § 3. In addition, within the domain of general equal protection furnished by Article 3 § 1, concealed balancing and the use of equal treatment criteria existed as two ways of intensifying review.\textsuperscript{162} What was still absent, however, was a general, as opposed to particular, classification-based approach to strict scrutiny. This general classification-based approach is exactly what the New Formula pretended to introduce.

\textbf{X. THE NEW FORMULA: CAROLENE PRODUCTS ABROAD?}

In Germany, the special provisions of equal protection have always been understood to be integral parts of an overarching principle.\textsuperscript{163} Thus, according to the German Court, the special provisions of equality are simply detailed manifestations of the general Equal Pro-

\textsuperscript{155} See, e.g., BVerfGE 9, 339 (349); BVerfGE 17, 122 (132).
\textsuperscript{156} See, e.g., \textsc{Christoph Degenhart}, \textsc{Systemgerechtigkeit und Selbstbindung des Gesetzgebers als Verfassungspostulat} 22-23, 27-28 (Munich: C.H. Beck 1976).
\textsuperscript{157} See, e.g., BVerfGE 22, 371 (402-403); BVerfGE 59, 36 (39).
\textsuperscript{158} See, e.g., BVerfGE 34, 103 (115); BVerfGE 61, 138 (148); BVerfGE 66, 217 (224). For further examples, see \textsc{Huster, Rechte und Ziele}, supra note 33, at 389; \textsc{Franz-Joseph Peine}, \textsc{Systemgerechtigkeit} 55-56 (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft 1985); \textsc{Kirchhof}, supra note 32, at 942 (RZ 232-33); \textsc{Heun}, supra note 12, at 249-50 (RZ 34).
\textsuperscript{159} On the significance of re-entries for the avoidance of paradoxes, see \textsc{Niklas Luhmann}, \textsc{Die Wissenschaft der Gesellschaft} 93-94 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1990).
\textsuperscript{160} For example, for purposes of reducing spending, the legislature has relatively broad discretion to rearrange welfare-benefits. See BVerfGE 60, 16 (43). For counter-examples, however, see \textsc{Currie}, \textsc{Lochner Abroad}, supra note 17, at 369 ("Among other things, the Constitutional Court has found fault with the exclusion of employment benefits for students and for persons formerly employed by their parents, limitations on aid of the blind or disabled, and the denial of retirement benefits to persons living abroad.") (citations omitted).
\textsuperscript{161} See \textsc{Heun}, supra note 12, at 287 (RZ 110).
\textsuperscript{162} One might add that judicial scrutiny has been higher where an unequal treatment has burdened the exercise of a basic liberty. This holds true, for example, with respect to the equal opportunity to education. As \textsc{Currie} notes, in this respect, German equal protection doctrine closely resembles the fundamental right strand of equal protection in the United States. See \textsc{Currie}, \textsc{The Constitution}, supra note 7, at 333. A further elaboration of the fairly complex body of precedents is beyond the scope of this essay. For a useful overview of the subject matter, see \textsc{Winfried Rohloff}, \textit{Zusammenwirken von allgemeinem Gleichheitssatz und Freiheitsgewährleistungen. Eine Untersuchung der Rechtsprechung des Bundesverfassungsgerichts} (1992) (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Augsburg).
\textsuperscript{163} See \textsc{Heun}, supra note 12, at 293 (RZ 129).
tection Clause.' It comes as no surprise, therefore, that, at least in particular cases, one might assimilate the arbitrariness standard into the stricter test of Article 3, § 3.

The step toward assimilating the arbitrariness standard into the Article 3, § 3 test was apparently taken in 1980 with the promulgation of a New Formula165 by the First Senate of the German Court. Although the Court's own characterization of the New Formula sounded far more moderate,167 some commentators, insofar as the New Formula introduced a general classification-based higher scrutiny test, posited that it represented a decisive break with the traditional standard.168

The allegedly revolutionary New Formula169 appears in an opinion of the German Court170 in the format of an explanation of some circumstances under which a statute should be invalidated on Article 3, § 1 equal protection grounds. With a bold emphasis on group disadvantage reminiscent of the most famous footnote of American constitutional law,171 the German Court first held that this Clause is violated: In particular if a group of norm-addressees is treated differently from another group, although the differences between those groups are not of such a kind nor of such a weight as to justify the unequal treatment.172

Second, the Court declared that this “regulatory import” of Article 3, § 1 had been repeatedly emphasized in decisions dealing with statutes that deviate from a pre-established system.173 The Court did not indicate, however, whether the range of this “explication” of the

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164 See, e.g., BVerfGE 25, 167 (173); BVerfGE 44, 1 (18); BVerfGE 48, 346 (365). See also, e.g., BVerfGE 85, 191 (206) (holding that Art. 3 § 3 is to be understood as underscoring the general Equal Protection Clause of § 1).
165 On the significance of “formulae” in the context of judicial review, see generally Robert F. Nagel, The Formulative Constitution, 84 MICH. L. REV. 165, 182 (1985) (asserting that formulae stem from the effort to combine formalism and realism and to preserve the authority of the text).
166 See BVerfGE 55, 72 (88).
167 See id. (insinuating that it wishes to clarify aspects of its former jurisprudence).
168 See Gubelt, supra note 16, at (RZ 14); MAAB, supra note 16, at 14.
169 Herzog raises the question of whether these decisions turned out differently then they would have under the old arbitrariness standard. See Roman Herzog, Art. 3 Anhang: Der allgemeine Gleichheitsgrundsatz (Art. 3 Abs. 1) in der Rechtsprechung des Bundesverfassungsgerichts, in 1 GRUNDEGEBETZ 357 (RZ 7) (Theodore Maunz et. al. eds., Munich: C.H. Beck, 7th ed. 1994).
170 See BVerfGE 55, 72 (88).
171 See United States v. Carolene Prods. Co., 304 U.S. 144, 144 n.4 (1938) (“[P]rejudice against discrete and insular minorities may be a special condition ... curtailing the operation of those political processes ordinarily to be relied upon to protect minorities.”). In contrast to footnote four of Carolene Products, however, the German Court did not establish any link between group disadvantage and the failure of the political process. This link, however, rests on questionable grounds. See generally, Bruce A. Ackerman, Beyond Carolene Products, 98 HARV. L. REV. 713 (1985) (arguing that the Carolene Products approach to minority rights “yields systematically misleading cues within the new participatory paradigm”).
172 See BVerfGE 55, 72 (88).
173 See id.
meaning of general equal protection should be restricted to the context in which it was discovered.\textsuperscript{174}

The development of the New Formula was disjointed and quite confusing. For a considerable period of time, it was unclear whether this formula was meant to replace the old arbitrariness standard.\textsuperscript{175} Although the First Senate announced that the New Formula represented the regular standard of review,\textsuperscript{176} several subsequent decisions still seem to rely on the traditional inventory.\textsuperscript{177} As this article will suggest, the integration of old and new formulae into something that one might call the "Most Recent Formula" has attenuated this problem. Yet, even before the Court created its Most Recent Formula, the Second Senate expressed reluctance to follow the course taken by the First Senate. The result caused substantial uncertainty in the application of formulae. Although the Second Senate and the German Court employed the New Formula in some instances, opinions of each body exhibited a steadfast preference for the arbitrariness standard.\textsuperscript{178} In addition, the Second Senate opted for an approach to the arbitrariness standard even more robust than that employed by the German Court. Under the Second Senate’s arbitrariness standard, heightened scrutiny was made conditional on the peculiarities of the social situation subject to legislation, regardless of whether the unequal treatment affected distinct groups.\textsuperscript{179}

Despite the differences in the old and new formulae variously applied, there is widespread agreement among scholars that both approaches have to some extent incorporated the principle of proportionality into the German Court’s equal protection review.\textsuperscript{180} This interpretation, "the official account," suggests that the complex principle of proportionality did not emerge until the German Court created the New Formula and the Second Senate synthesized its idiosyncratic method of analysis from a myriad of diverse precedents. The official account also implies that the Court’s formulaic discourse about the weighing of differences undertaken in the implementation of the proportionality principle can be taken at face value and, hence, that judicial practice actually involves a strict test of the proportionality of the quasi-suspect differential treatment of groups.\textsuperscript{181}

\textsuperscript{174} See id., at 90.
\textsuperscript{175} See Hesse, Der Gleichheitssatz, supra note 10, at 90-91.
\textsuperscript{176} See, e.g., BVerfGE 72, 84 (89); BVerfGE 74, 129 (149).
\textsuperscript{177} Accordingly, despite the New Formula, the legislature still has wide discretion in matters of social security and the installment of public officials. See, e.g., BVerfGE 68, 287 (301); BVerfGE 67, 107, (113). See also, Maß, supra note 16, at 18.
\textsuperscript{178} See, e.g., BVerfGE 67, 70 (85-86); BVerfGE 78, 249 (287); BVerfGE 79, 293 (236). For an overview, see Hesse, Der allgemeine Gleichheitssatz, supra note 16, at 125-26.
\textsuperscript{179} See, e.g., BVerfGE 75, 108 (158).
\textsuperscript{180} See, e.g., Hesse, Der allgemeine Gleichheitssatz, supra note 16, at 123, 126. For a critique of Hesse’s view see Huster, Rechte und Ziele. Zur, supra note 35, at 193-194 and Heun, supra note 12, at 246 (RZ 27-28).
\textsuperscript{181} Justice Katzenstein expressed the latter idea in a dissenting opinion. See BVerfGE 74, 9.
Before returning to this question, this article will briefly address why the New Formula might just as well have evolved, almost harmoniously, from the arbitrariness standard.\textsuperscript{182}

\textbf{XLA NON-OFFICIAL ACCOUNT OF THE NEW FORMULA'S PEDIGREE}

Over the years, the arbitrariness standard has developed something akin to a scheme of equal protection review. This scheme consists of a sequence of propositions giving effect to the idea that equal protection review must assemble a stable synthesis of considerations of substance and institutional competence. Against this backdrop, the New Formula can be read to specify certain elements of the sequence of considerations for an effective equal protection review.\textsuperscript{183}

Under the New Formula, the scheme begins with the blunt assertion that the legislature must not treat differently what is essentially alike. This substantive overture is followed by considering institutional competence, which amounts to the understanding that, in principle, the legislature is free to specify those components of social situations that constitute a similarity or dissimilarity between such situations. Accordingly, such elements may supply a rational basis for equal or unequal treatment. As already noted, the Court has held that the legislature may legitimately bring about the operation of a criterion of justice in a particular domain.\textsuperscript{184}

The final step in the sequence reintroduces substance. This step is representative of the core of the arbitrariness standard. As under the arbitrariness standard, legislative discretion comes to an end\textsuperscript{185} where the differences (or “peculiarities”)—existing independently of the legislative appraisal of the situation—are of such significance that they must be taken into account from the standpoint of justice. Composed of the two elements of “significance” and “the assumption

\textsuperscript{(30). In contrast to the arbitrariness standard, the new type of review embodied a “strict” proportionality test and in effect extended the range of judicial control of legislation. See id. Nonetheless, it is doubtful whether resorting to proportionality would indeed entail a more searching inquiry. In the context of rights jurisprudence some constitutional scholars have argued repeatedly that the very same principle operates as a softener of constitutional provisions, which opens the door for almost any form of interference with basic rights. See, e.g., Friedrich E. Schapp, \textit{Die Verhältnismäßigkeit des Grundrechtseingriffs}, in \textit{Juristische Schullung} 850, 850 (1980); Ernst Forsthoff, \textit{Der Staat der Industrie-Gesellschaft} 139-40 (1971). For an overview of the debate, see Detlef Marten, \textit{Zur verfassungsrechtlichen Herleitung des Verhältnismäßigkeitprinzips}, in \textit{Für Staat und Recht} (= Festschrift Heribert Schambeck) 349-79 (J. Hengstschläger & H.F. Köck, eds., Humblot 1994).

\textsuperscript{184}My formulation suggests that the question of whether the latter has been overruled by the former is entirely one of interpretation. \textit{See generally} Stanley Fish, \textit{Still Wrong after All These Years}, 6 LAW AND PHILOSOPHY 401-18 (1987).

\textsuperscript{185}This sequence can be gleaned from BVerfGE decisions prior to the New Formula. \textit{See, e.g.}, BVerfGE 12, 326 (337); BVerfGE 17, 319 (330); BVerfGE 50, 177 (186-87); BVerfGE 54, 11 (36).

\textsuperscript{186}See, e.g., \textit{supra} text accompanying notes 144-145.

\textsuperscript{186}See BVerfGE 1, 264 (276) (an early formulation).
of the standpoint of justice,” this final step in the sequence reintroduces substance in a way that also stresses institutional competence. It is only in instances in which both elements are satisfied that legislative discretion must yield to judicial opinion. In this respect, the core of the arbitrariness standard promises to reconcile the substantive and institutional components of judicial review.185

Contrary to both the comparative and the official account,186 one can plausibly maintain that, upon closer inspection, the New Formula and its progeny may have resulted from the judicial attempt to clarify the conditions under which the significance and standpoint of justice elements serve to vindicate the judicial control of legislation.187 On the other hand, as indicated above, the German Court may have thought that a reference to quasi-suspect differential treatment of groups—a reference which has a strong American connotation in the German context—is necessary in order to extend the proportionality principle to the field of equal protection.

As always in the context of a historical reconstruction, an examination of cases decided immediately before the appearance of the New Formula is instructive. For example, prior to the promulgation of the New Formula, the German Court held that the legislature must recognize those similarities between groups that are of such significance that they must be taken into account from the standpoint of justice.188 The significance of group difference—a factor which is important enough to engender heightened judicial scrutiny under the New Formula—was already foreshadowed. One can speculate, therefore, that the New Formula initially amounted to nothing more than a judicial specification of the two elements: “significance” and “assuming the standpoint of justice.” With the New Formula, the Court established that, other things aside, the former element, “significance,” designates a “differential treatment of groups” and the latter, “assuming the standpoint of justice,” designates the finding of the absence or presence of “reasons of such a kind and weight as to warrant the differential treatment.”189 Viewed in this light, one should be wary of the official account that takes for granted that the replacement of old phrases such as “taking the perspective of justice” and “a sound reason” with the new slogan “reasons having a certain weight” amounts to an incorporation of the proportionality principle.

Confusion concerning the application of equal protection formulae was compounded by the strategy adopted by the Second Senate to condense both the “significance” and the “the viewpoint of justice” elements into one simple standard that ties judicial scrutiny to the

186 See Heun, supra note 12, at 254 (RZ 43).
187 See supra sections III and X.
188 Heun argues for a similar position. See Heun, supra note 12, at 242 (RZ 20).
189 See, e.g., BVerfGE 50, 177 (189); BVerfGE 54, 11 (25-26).
190 Compare BVerfGE 55, 72 (88) with BVerfGE 22, 387 (415) and 52, 277 (280).
“peculiarities of the social situation.” In fact, the Second Senate also understood that the scope of legislative freedom varies according to the subject matter of the regulation. Moreover, it held that the guidance provided by the nature of things, although of different intensity, emerges from the internal arrangement of social relationships as they tacitly and continuously evolve over time. Of course, this fairly Burkean string of precedents is merely the product of a very robust reading of the arbitrariness standard. This article posits, therefore, that the official account is wrong on both counts. Neither the First nor the Second Senate’s practice of equal protection review reveals that the principle of proportionality is of any genuine importance.

Before introducing the most recent developments, I would like to draw attention to a decision that sought to have it both ways. The decision discussed both the New Formula and the “peculiarities of historically given social relationships.” A look at this example demonstrates that the New Formula could have been integrated into the old arbitrariness standard, although this did not occur. In addition, against the backdrop of a criterion of justice, the example may also shed some light on the distinction between the mere means-ends test and the control of the means of classification test.

XII. AN INTERMEDIATE STEP

In an instructive case, the German Court dealt with a statute which treated full-time and part-time public officials differently with respect to an additional payment that, owing to their marital status, they were eligible to receive. Two part-time judges who were also spouses together received less than half of the additional payment, while every full-time public official was entitled to the full amount. The Court began its analysis with an invocation of the second proposition of the New Formula—assuming the standpoint of justice—stating that the legislature has broad discretion in matters relating to the installment of public officials. The German Court then identified the statute’s twin purposes of taking marital status into account only once and of disproportionately reducing the relative benefit for pub-

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191 See, e.g., BVerfGE 75, 108 (156).
192 See id. at 158-59.
193 See Hesse, Der allgemeine Gleichheitssatz, supra note 16, at 127-28, 130. See supra section I for a discussion of the rationale of this principle. In the context of the judicial invocation of a criterion of justice, the normative productivity of balancing seems to be out of place. The criterion is simply alleged to exist and then applied to a piece of legislation. However, this proves to be a bit more complicated. The difference between formulation and application is systematically indeterminate in the context of equal protection review.
194 See BVerfGE 71, 39 (52).
195 See Heun, supra note 12, at 244-45 (RZ 25).
196 See BVerfGE 71, 39 (52) and the prior decision BVerfGE 49, 260 (272).
197 See supra section XI.
lic officials who only worked part-time. In its reconstruction of legislative intent, the German Court imputed both a purpose and an effect to the statute, inferring that the legislature "evidently" did not establish the criterion of distributing benefits according to the amount of work performed for the employer. The absence of a genuinely meritocratic principle, the Court found, was manifest in the statute.

The traditional rational basis test would have terminated here. The Court, however, applied both the preferred robust reading of the arbitrariness standard and the New Formula in order to determine whether it was legitimate to disregard the internal reciprocity between workload and payment. Explicitly, the Court stated that it had already identified a purpose behind the statute's differential treatment. The disproportionate reduction of the benefit, as well as an underlying normative criterion, was warranted on the basis part-time status. Yet, the Court found that the differential treatment could not be deemed constitutional simply because the legislature had taken this difference into account. The opinion further provides a robust reading of the core of the arbitrariness standard by an incantation of "pre-established differences," the "nature of things," and the "internal composition of the social situation," as well as by a citation to the New Formula. This dictum brings an entirely different perspective to bear on the meaning of "significance" and "standpoint of justice.

Nonetheless, from such compounded premises as these, the Court reached the conclusion that the unequal treatment of different groups of public officials was firmly rooted in the nature of public employment. This reasoning echoes a familiar Prussian esprit de corps. First, working as a public official demands full-time employment, since public officials devote their entire lives to the state. Accordingly, public officials working on a half-time basis are an irregu-

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198 See BVerfGE 71, 39 (54).
199 See BVerfGE 71, 39 (55).
200 See id.
201 See id. Evidently, the question of whether the means comply with a standard and whether the purpose is a legitimate one are the same.
202 See BVerfGE 71, 39 (57-58).
203 See id. at 58-59.
204 See id. See also supra section XI.
205 See BVerfGE 71, 39 (60-63).
larity, a disagreeable exception. Second, since the whole-hearted dedication of one's life to the state corresponds to the duty on the part of the state to pay "alimony" — and not a salary — to the public official, the principle of reciprocity between labor and payment would be out of place. Thus, the Court upheld the statute by finding an acceptable rationale for treating part-time workers differently from full-time workers.

XIII. THE MOST RECENT FORMULA

In the past few years the evolution of the equal protection standard has not been as transparent as the public official example discussed above seems to suggest. On the contrary, attempts to arrive at a unified standard have persisted, and have mirrored the ordinary circumstances of judicial review. Yet, one can observe some trends. The judiciary, for example, subjects legislation to a more searching inquiry if the legislation "affects" other basic rights, or if it burdens particular groups. At the other end of the continuum, a much more relaxed standard exists for legislation involving the detailed construction of a system of positive entitlements or, as has always been the case, in the field of economic regulation. Some commentators, therefore, have posited the evolution of a two-tiered scheme of general equal protection review which incorporates the proportionality principle on its higher level, triggered by treatments that are suspect because they affect single groups or burden other constitutional rights.

In 1993, the First Senate, most likely motivated by both the aforementioned developments and the related scholarly commentary, attempted to develop another new formula. For the sake of the distinction, this article shall refer to it as the "Most Recent Formula." Beyond providing another schematic matrix, however, the opinion of the First Senate developed what amounted to a nutshell theory of equal protection review.

Surprisingly, the First Senate's reflections did not, as its pedigree and its progeny might have suggested, integrate the original — and now more dated — New Formula into the arbitrariness standard. On

207 See Hesse, Der allgemeine Gleichheitssatz, supra note 16, at 123.
208 See supra note 162; BVerfGE 67, 348 (365); BVerfGE 71, 364 (384). For a first express statement of that principle, see BVerfGE 77, 9 (24). See also Currie, Lochner Abroad, supra note 17, at 278.
209 See e.g., BVerfGE 87, 1 (36-39).
210 See Hesse, Der allgemeine Gleichheitssatz, supra note 16, at 127; Maß, supra note 16, at 18; Hesse, GRUNDZÜGE DES VERFASSUNGSRECHTS, supra note 104, at 190 (RZ 439). For a more constructive account, see HUSTER, RECHTE UND ZIELE, supra note 33.
211 See BVerfGE 88, 87 (96). Almost the same wording can be found in a decision from June 8th, 1993, in 1 NEUE JURISTISCHE WOCHENSCHRIFT 122 (1994).
212 See Herzog, supra note 169, at 381-382.
the contrary, the First Senate drew a sharp line on the grounds that each theory set a distinct limit for legislative discretion.²¹³ It is apparent from the First Senate's opinion that the introduction of a split between the ordinary (lower) and the new (higher) tier of review resulted from a "creative misreading"²¹⁴ of the scattered body of precedents, to put the matter mildly. It may well be that the "best" interpretation of the relevant legal materials has not yet been crafted.²¹⁵

XIV. THE COURT'S OFFICIAL ACCOUNT

The Most Recent Formula redefines the core of equal protection. As we have seen, its ancestor resulted from an interpretation that explained the core of the arbitrariness standard with reference to differences between groups that have a certain "weight." The Most Recent Formula begins with the same frame of reference as the New Formula, declaring that the legislature's zone of discretion can be more or less circumscribed depending upon the subject matter of regulation and the classifying criteria employed.²¹⁶ In practical terms, these limits on legislative action under the Most Recent Formula, therefore, may range from the "mere arbitrariness standard" to the principle of "strict adherence to requirements of proportionality."²¹⁷

More theoretically, the opinion explains that the Most Recent Formula approach to equal protection can be derived from two sources: First, textually, from the words and the meaning of Article 3, § 1; and, second, structurally, from Article 3, § 1's relationship to other constitutional provisions.²¹⁸ With respect to the former textual argument, the Court cites the premise in Article 3, § 1 that everyone shall be equal before the law.²¹⁹ As such, it follows that if the legislature treats certain groups of people differently, the statute is subject to a more searching mode of inquiry.²²⁰

With respect to the latter structural argument, which alleges Arti-

²¹³ With respect to the upper limit, the Most Recent Formula actually removes the traditional core of equal protection, which was characterized by the traditional components of "significance" and "standpoint of justice."
²¹⁴ See HAROLD BLOOM, A MAP OF MISREADING 2 (1975) (describing the process of revisionist reading, where a reader imputes his own meaning into the words of the text).
²¹⁵ See RONALD DWORKIN, LAW'S EMPIRE 51, 226, 235 (1986) (noting that constructive interpretation requires judges to arrive at the best possible interpretation of an existing body of precedents).
²¹⁶ See BVerfGE 88, 87 (96).
²¹⁷ Id.
²¹⁸ See id.
²¹⁹ See THE BASIC LAW, supra note 34, at 14 ("All persons shall be equal before the law.").
²²⁰ See Heun, supra note 12, at 26; Magadlena Pöschl, Über Gleichheit und Verhältnismäßigkeit, 119 JURISTISCHE BÄTTER 413, 416 (1997) (critiquing this approach by arguing that since every differential treatment eventually affects persons, one cannot plausibly distinguish between the treatment of persons and the treatment of states of affairs).
Article 3, § 1's relationship to other constitutional provisions, the Court refers to both the special Equal Protection Clause of Article 3, § 3 and to the Bill of Basic Rights.\textsuperscript{211} Thus, the Court declares that the rigidity of the standard of review increases as the characteristics of the relevant group begin to resemble the qualities mentioned in Article 3, § 3.\textsuperscript{222} Surprisingly, the Court seems to be proposing a sliding-scale approach to equal protection. Thus, the shared vision of Justices Stevens\textsuperscript{222} and Marshall\textsuperscript{224} may eventually come true in Karlsruhe.

Relative to that of the German Court, the equal protection jurisprudence of the United States Supreme Court reflects a more thorough familiarity with comparative constitutional law. Illustratively, under the United States Supreme Court's reasoning, the increasing rigidity of the arbitrariness standard in the face of "suspect" or "quasi-suspect" classifications is indispensable to the protection of minorities against hostile discrimination.\textsuperscript{225} The United States Supreme Court also holds that heightened scrutiny should not be restricted to the direct classification of persons, but that it is also appropriate where the treatment of a state of affairs indirectly results in the differential treatment of groups.\textsuperscript{226} Of course, it is difficult to predict if this dictum will be read to imply that strict scrutiny should be extended to instances of disproportionate impact without an inquiry into discriminatory purpose.\textsuperscript{227} The United States Supreme Court also makes reference to another principle of heightened scrutiny which is not unfamiliar to students of American constitutional law: Regulation of human action should be submitted to a stricter test if the people affected are not in a position to escape the reach of the classifying criteria through their own conduct because the criteria embodies immutable or almost immutable characteristics of persons.\textsuperscript{228} Finally,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{211} See BVerfGE 88, 87 (96-97).
  \item \textsuperscript{22} See id.
  \item \textsuperscript{222} See Craig v. Boren, 429 U.S. 190, 212 (1976) (Stevens, J., concurring) (disagreeing with the Supreme Court's system of levels of scrutiny under the Equal Protection Clause):
  \begin{quote}
    I am inclined to believe that what has become known as the two-tiered analysis of Equal Protection claims does not describe a completely logical method of deciding cases, but rather is a method the Court has employed to explain decisions that actually apply a single standard in a reasonably consistent fashion.
  \end{quote}
  \item \textsuperscript{225} See United States v. Carolene Products, 304 U.S. 144 (1938)
  \item \textsuperscript{226} See id.
  \item \textsuperscript{227} See the following cases for examples regarding possible dilution of the minority vote in legislative redistricting claims: Voinovich v. Quilter, 113 S.Ct. 1149 (1993); Rogers v. Lodge, 458 U.S. 613 (1982); and Mobile v. Bolden, 446 U.S. 55 (1980).
  \item \textsuperscript{228} See Frontiero v. Richardson, 411 U.S. 677 (1973) (holding that a statute which affords dependency benefits to the spouses of male Air Force officers, but not the spouses of female offi-
the United States Supreme Court refers to the effect such regulation might have on the exercise of other basic rights. Again, legislative discretion is narrower if the unequal treatment of persons or a state of affairs is likely to burden the exercise of such rights.229

Returning to the German context, after a remarkably detailed explanation of the instances in which legislative freedom is more circumscribed, the Court continued its explication of the Most Recent Formula by explaining that the range of legislative action exacts different standards of equal protection review.230 In cases where legislative discretion is relatively wide, “merely the arbitrariness standard” applies.231 In essence, legislation must be struck down only if the alleged unreasonableness is “evident.”232 According to the Court, in instances where groups are treated unequally and in instances where one can expect a negative impact on the exercise of other basic rights, a more searching inquiry is necessary into whether reasons of such a kind and weight that could justify the imposition of unequal legal consequences exist.

The narrative on the development of equal protection formulae ends here. Evidently, the Most Recent Formula represents the provisional result of the German Court’s ongoing attempt to come to grips with its own practice of review. It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that the theory of the Most Recent Formula has acquired canonical status. Some decisions of the First Senate seem to comply with its program.233 The Second Senate, however, still clings in its rulings to a markedly robust reading of the arbitrariness standard,234 and considers the elements introduced by the New Formula as representing one of the arbitrariness standard’s constituent parts.235

XV. IN DEFENSE OF THE DIE-HARD ACCOUNT

Employing its Most Recent Formula, the German Court explicitly asserts that a strict test of proportionality should be applied to specified cases.236 One of these cases was one in which the Court reviewed a federal statute that prohibited transsexuals from altering their first name prior to obtaining the age of twenty-five. This is the so-called “small solution.”237 Transsexuals younger than twenty-five were al-

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229 See Currie, Lochner Abroad, supra note 17, at 368 (noting earlier precedents).
230 See BVerfGE 88, 87 (96-97).
231 Id.
232 Id.
233 See BVerfGE 90, 145 (195-196).
234 See BVerfGE 93, 386 (397).
235 See BVerfGE 88, 87 (96-97).
236 See id.
allowed to have their sex changed through surgery, in which case the
individual's birth records would be modified to reflect the sex
change. This is the so-called "big solution."228 The Court left no
doubt that the classification was based on personal characteristcs and
that it affected the exercise of basic liberties, such as human dignity,
guaranteed by Article 1, § 1, and general freedom of action, guaran-
teed by Article 2, § 1.229 Thus, the Court raised the question of
whether one could imagine reasons, the "kind and weight" of which
would justify the unequal treatment of transsexuals below the age of
twenty-five in the simple process of name-changing.230

In contrast to its own formulaic manifesto, however, the German
Court did not engage in outright balancing. The only component of
the proportionality principle that actually appeared in the Court's
opinion was focused on the appropriateness of the legislative means.
This component, however, constitutes a rather trivial element of
equal protection review. Notwithstanding grandiose rhetorical ges-
tures, the Court simply presupposed that the purpose of the "small
solution" was to permit experiments with one's sexual identity before
any action that would have manifestly irreversible effects was taken.231
The prohibition of a name-change for transsexuals below the age of
twenty-five, the Court found, did not truly advance the purpose of
protecting young adults from the risks of an imprudent sex-change.
The only remedy available to this group, rather, was surgery which
carries irreversible consequences.232 The Court, therefore, actually
engaged in a rational basis test "with a bite," which resulted in finding
that the means chosen did not further the goal of legislation.233

It should be noted that in the transsexuals case the Court's state-
ment of the legislature's professed statutory goal tacitly stemmed
from the Court's own reconstruction of legislative purpose, rather
than from the government's professed end. The government ex-
plained that the age-based restriction of the "small solution" had
been enacted to prevent adolescents from prematurely devoting
themselves to a transsexual life-style. Had the Court dealt with the
government's stated purpose of the statute, perhaps something like a
test of proportionality could have been applied. Contemplating this
illiberal purpose, the Court could have argued that the classificatory

228 See id.
229 See id. at 97.
230 See id.
231 See id. at 100-01. In this respect, the "small solution" erects a safeguard against an error in
prognosis.
232 See id. at 100.
233 A later case, also employing the New Formula, was decided on exactly the same grounds.
See 1 NEUE JURISTISCHE WOCHENSCHRIFT 122 (1994). In another, more recent instance, the
Court simply applied the robust rationality test, referred to as the "systematic consistency vari-
ant," by examining whether the legislature had some reason to refrain from applying a prior
established criterion to a specific group, without even approaching the threshold of the propor-
tionality test. See BVerfGE 92, 53, 69 (71-72).
means were moderately appropriate and perhaps even necessary — although it is dubious why the legislature did not choose the general age of maturity, namely eighteen years of age. Nevertheless, at the third stage of the proportionality review, the Court would have been committed to comparing this stated goal with the consequence that young transsexuals who contemplated a sex change would not be able to express this desire by changing their name, but instead would have to undergo surgery, a far more drastic and permanent result. If the Court had compared this consequence with the option available to transsexuals above the age of twenty-five, the Court then could have decided that the less burdensome alternative of a name change should have been made available to younger transsexuals as well.

Indeed, several of the cases recently decided by the German Court still exhibit the pattern of intensified rationality review—a robust application of the arbitrariness standard—which this article has previously reconstructed. The German Court continues to employ the old subterfuges of identifying legislative purpose with substantive cri-

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245 The difference in these lines of judicial reasoning, however, does not actually matter in the equal protection practice in Germany.
teria\textsuperscript{246} and of juxtaposing the means against the "peculiarities of the situation."\textsuperscript{247} While the German Court's descriptions have changed, its practice has not. Formulae do not matter much. If anything, they are a means of drawing attention away from what is actually going on in equal protection review.\textsuperscript{248}

XVI. ANALYTICAL CODA

By appealing to a New Formula of equal protection review, the German Court began to emphasize that a differential treatment of groups, as opposed to a mere differential treatment of a state of affairs,\textsuperscript{249} ought to trigger heightened judicial scrutiny. In the eyes of proponents of a comparative account, this seems to liken the new standard to some Carolene Products-footnote-four-type focus on the infliction of group disadvantage.\textsuperscript{250} This conceptualization would lead to the following type of analysis:

(Part 1) If person A who belongs to group X is treated differently from person B who belongs to group Y, the Court has to inquire whether there is, first, some important interest pursued by the government, and, second, a narrowly tailored relationship between the unequal treatment and the pursuit of that goal.

This kind of inquiry is aimed at extinguishing abuses of government power that are motivated by animosity or hostility toward certain groups.\textsuperscript{251}

Upon closer inspection, therefore, the perceived Americanization of German standards can plausibly be understood as a mere extension of one of the most prominent principles of the German Court's home-made jurisprudence. According to the official account, it seems as if, with respect to the differential treatment of groups, the German Court is ready to apply the third component of the proportionality principle to equal protection review. This clearly amounts to a balancing of the benefits and burdens of state action. For example:

(Part 2a) If person A, who belongs to group X, is (as a result of government action) worse off than person C, who belongs to group Y, the Court has to in-

\textsuperscript{246} See 1 NEUE JURISTISCHE WOCHENSCHRIFT 122 (1994).

\textsuperscript{247} See BVerfGE 90, 145 (1995-96).

\textsuperscript{248} See Herzog, supra note 169, at 367 (RZ 7).

\textsuperscript{249} Under the auspices of a Carolene Products standard this difference makes sense. Consider San Antonio School District v. Rodriguez, 411 U.S. 1, n. 28 (1973), in which the disadvantage conferred by a statute may have had an affect on poor school districts (which could be comprised of rich and poor people), but was not directly aimed at poor people.

\textsuperscript{250} See United States v. Carolene Prods. Co., 304 U.S. 144, 152 (1938) (stating that laws directed at "discrete and insular" minorities may prevent the political process from working and, thus, these laws may require a heightened standard of review).

\textsuperscript{251} See, e.g., Korematsu v. United States, 323 U.S. 214, 216 (noting that "all legal restrictions which curtail the civil rights of a single racial group are immediately suspect").
quire whether the public interest pursued by the government is important enough to outweigh the relative disadvantage suffered by members of group X.

The meaning of "relative disadvantage" in this type of case is unsettled. For example, it is unclear whether it means a disadvantage understood in deontological terms, following from the moral harm inflicted by the differential treatment, or instead whether it means a disadvantage understood in consequentialist terms, following from the resulting inferior level of well-being. In adopting the proportionality principle, the judicial inquiry would not be primarily concerned with identifying uses of government power which are motivated by animosity or hostility toward certain groups, but rather, whether it is reasonable that members of group X suffer relative deprivation for the benefit of all. Such a reading of the New Formula's standard would conform with a transformation of the proportionality principle into equal protection review. The third component of proportionality is usually understood to demand that the public benefit obtained by a regulation ought not be out of proportion to the burden imposed.

At the same time, the German Court has occasionally given an interesting twist to this proportionality requirement in the area of equal protection. Apparently, consistent with the first formulation of the New Formula, the Court asserts that differences between groups, and not the public benefit, could have sufficient weight in order to warrant unequal treatment. Accordingly, the judicial standard suggests:

(Part 2b) If person A, who belongs to group X, is treated differently from person B, who belongs to group Y, then the Court has to inquire whether the differences between group X and Y are significant enough to support the differential treatment.

One may well wonder whether such a standard can really be understood to be an extension of the proportionality principle, because, as this article attempts to explain with respect to the formula's pedigree, the emphasis is not on the relative weight of the public interest or the infringement of the right, but on the significance of the differences between groups. Whereas Part 2a (the first reading of proportionality in the field of equal protection) focuses on the importance, or "compelling" quality of the government interest, Part 2b (the second reading) highlights the relationship between the attainment of any public objective and the different situations faced by groups. The second reading of Part 2b would have us ask whether the perceived difference between groups is either sufficiently plausible or too tenuous to render government action rational. What purports to be a proportionality standard, therefore, turns out to be nothing other than a concealed replica of the rational basis test.

This confusing transformation of domestic doctrine is mainly car-
ried out on the level of the formulae of judicial review. Still, an equally plausible case can be made for the fact that there remains a shrouded disparity between what the Court claims to do on the level of formulaic representations and what it does when deciding a particular case. In particular cases, the reasoning seems to amount to the following:

(Part 3) If A, who belongs to group X, is treated differently from B, who belongs to group Y, then the unequal treatment must not violate a criterion of justice, such as the principle that like cases be treated alike or that each case be considered according to its own merits.

This article has argued that the latter type of reasoning is the hallmark of a more robust understanding of the good old arbitrariness standard.252

XVII. CONCLUSION: WHITHER HIGHER LAW?

The emerging picture of a difference between the formulaic explanations of general judicial standards and the ways in which cases are actually resolved by the German Court speaks to the fact that the pursuit of formulaic expositions can become detached from the actual resolution of the issue before the Court. It seems as if there are two more or less independent spheres of constitutional law: the sphere of judicial action and the sphere of judicial representation of action.

Should one be concerned about these separate spheres? Is this a disquieting result, or should it be? Misapplication of formulae occasionally happens. One would not want to blame the judicial contemplation of formulae for any misapplication that may occur, however. After all, formulae not only explain the meaning of a constitution, but also serve as a restraint on judicial decision making.253

Formulae conspicuously lack a statute-like quality in that they do not have a textual basis that is beyond the reach of judicial reasoning. On the contrary, formulae are precedents of a second-order; they are open to revision and improvement on a case-by-case basis. It is not surprising that the effort to arrive at precise articulation of formulae may tend to obscure the constitutional issue before the Court.254 The elaboration of formulae, therefore, involves a paradox. As Nagel correctly points out, the quest for the proper construction of formulae "reflects intellectual embarrassment about the existence of judicial

252 See supra section VII.
253 See NAGEL, supra note 14, at 136, 142-44 (explaining that rules must be sufficiently detailed and schematic to bind judges who otherwise might seem beyond the law).
254 See id. at 137 ("If in part the Constitution means what judges want it to mean, the Court is obliged to attempt to convince others that its choices are desirable.").
discretion, but is designed to assure plentiful opportunities for its exercise. At the same time, formulae do have a somewhat statute-like quality in that they allow for the assessment and re-evaluation of precedents as well as for the immediate exercise of flexible balancing tests. In this respect, they are higher lawmaker devices. Tinkering with formulae ostensibly reflects our unwritten constitutional rule of judicial self-authorization. Elaborating the formula, in particular with reference to a foreign example, reflects indifference to the underlying substantive issue. In fact, as idols of constitutional law, formulae are precise representations of this indifference, given that they are often at once too specific and too simple for the range of cases that they are designed to solve.

Formulae constitute a second order of constitutional law. They both assume and do not assume the role of a constitutional statute. Formulae are supreme legal rules and are not supreme legal rules at the same time. It is not surprising that the German Court's failure to acknowledge what is actually occurring in its own application of formulae does not necessarily affect their exposition. Moreover, formulae are not only designed to govern adjudication; they are also defined by it. The matter of settling an emerging divergence between the formula and the rationale governing adjudication may be left to an observer who is in the same position as the Court observing its practice. Such an observer may be forced to admit that the proportionality principle was specified by the Court in the moment it was transformed to the field of equal protection. Accordingly, one could argue that the proportionality principle has acquired a different meaning through a transaction relying on borrowing to provide the suitable vector. It is only the Court which is at liberty to either make judicial reasoning conform to the formula or to adjust the formula to what is really at issue in adjudication, or to leave existing divergences as they are.

Endorsing such a liberty on the part of the Court presupposes a commitment that the account offered here is evidently unwilling to make. One would have to subscribe to the unwritten rule of judicial self-authorization. It may well be that we have reason to welcome the

255 Id. at 147 (arguing that formulae allow the Court to analyze issues in different ways and thus emphasize the “range of choices available to the Court”).
256 See id. at 148 (stating that using formulae gives the Court a sort of regulatory role as well because formulae are used in deciding how problems in society should be handled).
257 For a related critique, see RONALD DWORKIN, FREEDOM’S LAW: THE MORAL READING OF THE AMERICAN CONSTITUTION 35-36 (1996) (arguing that abstract legal principles defy the structures that formulae impose).
258 See NAGEL, supra note 14, at 151 (“As cases continue to arise, however, the variety of possible fact configurations gradually becomes more and more difficult to ignore.”).
259 See generally JACQUES DERRIDA, LIMITED INC. 53 (1988) (explaining that iteration of language “implies both identity and difference,” and, thus this repeated examination of formulae both idealizes and weakens the meaning of formulae).
disappearance of the final traces of constraint resulting from the analytical sweep of our received legal vocabulary; yet, the author is ready to admit that he does not think that there is any such reason.