Old Constitutions and New Issues: National Lessons from Vermont’s State Constitutional Case on Marriage of Same-Sex Couples

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Abstract: The Vermont Supreme Court's 1999 ruling in Baker v. State was a watershed decision, holding that same-sex couples in Vermont were entitled to the same benefits and protections as opposite-sex married couples. While Baker is extremely important as a matter of substantive law, and as a contribution to the national discussion of the issues surrounding marriage of same sex-couples, it also provides an excellent lens through which to consider principles of state constitutional law and the New Judicial Federalism. This Article demonstrates how Baker is illustrative of major themes in state constitutional law, including the use of state constitutional history and textual analysis, distinctions between federal equal protection approaches and independent state constitutional equality doctrines, and plaintiffs' choice of state forum and state constitutional claims. The Article also shows how Baker highlights the application of a new, developing state constitutional rights jurisprudence.

INTRODUCTION

In December 1999, the Supreme Court of Vermont decided Baker v. State, a decision that one of the Vermont justices referred to as "the most closely-watched opinion in this Court's history." All five justices

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1 744 A.2d 864 (Vt. 1999).

2 Id. at 889 (Dooley, J., concurring). One of the other Vermont justices noted that "This case is undoubtedly one of the most controversial ever to come before this Court." Id. at 912 (Johnson, J., concurring in part and dissenting in part). For a full treatment of the events leading up to Baker, and its aftermath, see Michael Mello, For Today I'm Gay: The Unfinished Battle for Same-Sex Marriage in Vermont, 25 Vt. L. Rev. 149 (2000). For additional commentary on the Baker decision, see Melanie D. Price, The Privacy Paradox: The Divergent Paths of the United States Supreme Court and State Courts on Issues of Sexuality, 33 Ind. L. Rev.
agreed that denying same-sex couples the benefits and protections accorded to opposite-sex married couples violated the Vermont state constitution. Chief Justice Jeffrey Amestoy, writing for the majority, found a violation of the Common Benefits Clause of the Vermont Constitution, which states:

That government is, or ought to be, instituted for the common benefit, protection, and security of the people, nation, or community, and not for the particular emolument or advantage of any single person, family, or set of persons, who are a part only of that community . . . .

The majority opinion did not require marriage licenses to be issued to same-sex couples, but rather left the question to the Vermont legislature whether to remedy the constitutional violation by expanding the marriage laws to include same-sex couples, or, as an alternative, creating a new law that mirrored all of the legal benefits and protections accorded to married opposite-sex couples. Within a matter of months the Vermont legislature passed, and the governor approved, a "Civil Union statute reaffirming the limitation of marriage to opposite-sex couples, but granting all of the benefits of marriage to same-sex couples."
Baker is extremely important as a matter of substantive law, and as a contribution to the national discussion of the issues surrounding marriage of same-sex couples. The decision was a major, national news story in much the same way as landmark decisions of the United States Supreme Court. Baker was only the second state constitutional law decision in the country to mandate a remedy for same-sex couples who are not seen to be included within the marriage statutes. The case also attracted the attention of interest groups, and a wide variety of amici curiae, both nationally and within Vermont, filed briefs in the case.

Perhaps more significantly, Baker provides a lens through which to review a wide range of important lessons about the ‘battleground’ of state constitutional law and the New Judicial Federalism. In the


In November 1998, the voters of Hawaii approved an amendment to Article I of the state constitution, proposed by the Legislature, providing: ‘The Legislature shall have the power to reserve marriage to opposite-sex couples.’ See Douglas S. Reed, Popular Constitutionalism: Toward a Theory of State Constitutional Meanings, 30 RUTGERS U. L.J. 871, 918–31 (1999) (analyzing the Hawaii constitutional amendment campaign as an example of ‘popular constitutionalism’); infra notes 187–189, 292–297 and accompanying text.

9 See Baker, 744 A.2d at 866-67.

10 See James A. Gardner, Introduction to 1 STATE EXPANSION or FEDERAL CONSTITUTIONAL CIVIL LIBERTIES ix, xxxviii (James A. Gardner ed., 1999) (‘[S]tate constitutional law has become something of a battleground, not only politically, but jurisprudentially.’); Mary Cornelia Porter & G. Alan Tarr, The New Judicial Federalism and the Ohio Supreme Court: Anatomy of a Failure, 45 OHIO ST. L.J. 143, 143 (1984) (noting that ‘[d]uring the past decade, law journals and other sources have devoted considerable attention to the emergence of the ‘new judicial federalism,’ the renewed reliance by state courts on state constitutions as independent sources of constitutional rights, often with the aim of extending greater protection to individual liberties than is available under current interpretations of the federal constitution’) (internal citations omitted).

last generation or so, state courts have, with some regularity, interpreted their state constitutions to provide more protection than the federal Constitution as interpreted by the United States Supreme Court. Justice William J. Brennan, Jr. called this movement "[t]he most important development in constitutional jurisprudence of our times." The *Baker* decision is illustrative of every important theme in the New Judicial Federalism and state constitutional rights protection. Lessons drawn from *Baker* include the use of state constitutional history and textual analysis, distinctions between federal equal protection approaches and independent state constitutional equality doctrines, and plaintiffs’ choice of state forum and state constitutional claims. Additionally, *Baker* highlights the application of the new, developing state constitutional rights jurisprudence. It is to these topics that this article will now turn.

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11 See generally Robert F. Williams, *Foreword: Looking Back at the New Judicial Federalism’s First Generation*, 30 *V.U. L. REV.* xiii (1996); Dr. G. Alan Tarr has argued that prior to the beginning of the 1970s, the conditions were not right for the development of an expansive state constitutional rights jurisprudence. He noted:

What was missing was a model of how state judges could develop a civil liberties jurisprudence. Because Americans had not come to rely on courts to vindicate civil liberties, state courts throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries gained little experience in interpreting civil liberties guarantees. Nor could they look to federal courts for guidance in interpreting their constitutional protections. . . . Only when circumstances brought a combination of state constitutional arguments, plus an example of how a court might develop constitutional guarantees, could a state civil liberties jurisprudence emerge. Put differently, when the Burger Court’s anticipated—and to some extent actual—retreat from the Warren Court activism encouraged civil liberties litigants to look elsewhere for redress, the experience of the preceding decade had laid the foundation for the development of state civil liberties law.

Paradoxically, then, the activism of the Warren Court, which has been often portrayed as detrimental to federalism, was a necessary condition for the emergence of vigorous state involvement in protecting civil liberties.


13 See infra text accompanying notes 16, 23.
I. THEMES OF VERMONT'S STATE CONSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE NEW JUDICIAL FEDERALISM

In 1985, the Vermont Supreme Court rendered State v. Jewett,\(^\text{14}\) which is probably the most explicit "teaching opinion" about state constitutional law.\(^\text{15}\) Written by the late Justice Thomas L. Hayes, Jewett outlined the approaches to state constitutional interpretation (historical, textual, comparison to sibling jurisdictions, and analysis of economic and social materials),\(^\text{16}\) cautioning that "[i]t would be a serious mistake for this Court to use its state constitution chiefly to evade the impact of the decisions of the United States Supreme Court. Our decisions must be principled, not result-oriented."\(^\text{17}\) Justice Hayes explained the reasoning behind writing an opinion aimed at the bar in connection with the court's order that counsel file supplemental briefs on the state constitutional issues in Jewett:

There was some discussion on the court about publishing a law review article advising lawyers to look to the state constitution, but I had the feeling that if we took that course the article would be read by nine students, nine law professors, and the janitor who was cleaning up at night at the law school. I believed an article would not get our message across. Ultimately the court agreed that if we were to tell our lawyers: "Look to your Vermont constitution and, when you

\(^{14}\) 500 A.2d 233 (Vt. 1985).

\(^{15}\) Robert F. Williams, In the Glare of the Supreme Court: Continuing Methodology and Legitimacy Problems in Independent State Constitutional Rights Adjudication, 72 NOTRE DAME L. REV. 1015, 1020 (1997). A teaching opinion serves the function of "alerting the bar and bench to the possibilities of independent state constitutional analysis, and educating them in the techniques of making state constitutional arguments." \textit{Id.} at 1019.

\(^{16}\) \textit{See Jewett}, 500 A.2d at 235.

\(^{17}\) \textit{Id.} Justice Hayes continued: "This generation of Vermont lawyers has an unparalleled opportunity to aid in the formulation of a state constitutional jurisprudence that will protect the rights and liberties of our people, however the philosophy of the United States Supreme Court may ebb and flow." \textit{Id.}

The Vermont court reiterated this approach in subsequent cases. \textit{See State v. DeLaBruere, 577 A.2d 254, 268 (Vt. 1990); see also State v. Zumbo, 601 A.2d 986, 988 (Vt. 1991)} ("Defendant fails to provide a substantive analysis as to why the Vermont Constitution should provide a different answer for his argument than the federal constitution."); \textit{State v. Jenne, 591 A.2d 85, 89 (Vt. 1991)} ("Vermont's constitutional guarantee to a fair cross-section . . . does not, in this case, provide any greater protection than that afforded by the federal constitution.").
do, brief it adequately," we could do so only in a judicial opinion.\textsuperscript{18}

Justice Hayes also thought that if Vermont developed an independent state constitutional jurisprudence, it might "give courage" to other states to follow the Vermont lead.\textsuperscript{19} Jewett set forth a road map or glossary for what Professor James A. Gardner has referred to as a "discourse of distinctness . . . a language and set of conventions enabling participants in the legal system to argue that provisions in the state constitution mean something different from their federal counterparts."\textsuperscript{20}

A review of Chief Justice Amestoy's majority opinion in \textit{Baker v. State} reflects the unmistakable influence of the teachings of Justice Hayes and his Jewett opinion.\textsuperscript{21} During the formative years of the New Judicial Federalism in Vermont, Chief Justice Amestoy had served as the state's attorney general and was deeply involved in these developments.\textsuperscript{22} He introduced his state constitutional analysis in \textit{Baker} by noting: "We typically look to a variety of sources in construing our Constitution, including the language of the provision in question, historical context, case-law development, the construction of similar provisions in other state constitutions, and sociological materials."\textsuperscript{23} His majority opinion reflects each of these elements.


\textsuperscript{19} Hayes, \textit{supra} note 18, at 153.


\textsuperscript{21} See, e.g., \textit{Baker}, 744 A.2d at 870 (quoting \textit{Jewett}, 500 A.2d at 235).


The increasing reliance on state constitutions presents interesting and at times exasperating problems for attorneys general. For if—as more than one writer has put it—"a state constitution can be used as a sword," one's enthusiasm for it depends on whether one is swinging the sword or catching the blade.

Amestoy & Brill, \textit{supra}, at 230.

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Baker}, 744 A.2d at 873; see also \textit{Jewett}, 500 A.2d at 235.
A. State Constitutional History

In Baker, after analyzing the historical context of the Common Benefits Clause, Chief Justice Amestoy concluded: "In the faith that a case beyond the imagining of the framers of our Constitution may, nevertheless, be safely anchored in the values that infused it, we find a constitutional obligation to extend to plaintiffs the common benefits, protection, and security that Vermont law provides opposite-sex couples." As suggested by the Jewett decision, the state constitutional analysis in Baker included a searching analysis of the state constitutional history of the Common Benefits Clause. This analysis covered both state-specific Vermont constitutional history and a wider review of constitution-making during the Revolution.

As legal historian Stephen Gottlieb has observed, analysis of state constitutional history "is valuable whether or not one subscribes to a jurisprudence of original intent." He continued:

For those who reject a jurisprudence of original intent, constitutional history nevertheless helps us to preserve the lessons embodied in the drafting of the provisions at issue and to explore the consequences of the language chosen. State constitutional history has become more important as the United States Supreme Court has become less protective of individual rights.

Chief Justice Amestoy's use of state constitutional history in Baker seems clearly to be of the latter sort—not an attempt to discover original intent in its strict sense. He admitted as much by his acknowledgment that the issues were "beyond the imagining of the framers of our Constitution." Chief Justice Amestoy's historical

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24 Baker, 744 A.2d at 886 (emphasis added).
25 See id. at 875-77; cf. Jewett, 500 A.2d at 236.
26 See Baker, 744 A.2d at 875-77.
28 Gottlieb, supra note 27, at 258.
29 Cf. id.
30 Baker, 744 A.2d at 886. Chief Justice Amestoy stated that "[a]lthough historical research yields little direct evidence of the framers' intentions, an examination of the ideological origins of the Common Benefits Clause casts a useful light upon the inclusionary principle at its textual core." Id. at 875 (emphasis added).
analysis was, rather, a wide-ranging survey of the egalitarian impulses of the Revolution.\textsuperscript{31} Chief Justice Amestoy described the use of state constitutional history in interpretation as follows:

\begin{quote}
[T]he responsibility of the Court . . . is distinct from that of the historian, whose interpretation of past thought and actions necessarily informs our analysis of current issues but cannot alone resolve them. . . . Out of the shifting and complicated kaleidoscope of events, social forces, and ideas that culminated in the Vermont Constitution of 1777, our task is to distill the essence, the motivating ideal of the framers. The challenge is to remain faithful to that historical ideal, while addressing contemporary issues that the framers undoubtedly could never have imagined.\textsuperscript{32}
\end{quote}

In \textit{Baker}, Chief Justice Amestoy traced the origins and context of the Common Benefits Clause.\textsuperscript{33} As he noted, the Revolution occurred not only against Great Britain, but also against the elite and aristocratic social, economic, and political structure in the Colonies.\textsuperscript{34} Historians support his conclusion. Carl Becker wrote that the decade between 1765 and 1776 witnessed the internal political struggle over "who should rule at home" as well as the Revolutionary War struggle for "home rule."\textsuperscript{35} Even the idea of written constitutions itself was an egalitarian, inclusive development.\textsuperscript{36} In the decade following inde-

\textsuperscript{31} See id. at 875–77.
\textsuperscript{32} Id. at 874.
\textsuperscript{33} See id. at 877.
\textsuperscript{34} Id. at 875–76.
\textsuperscript{35} CARL LOTUS BECKER, THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE PROVINCE OF NEW YORK, 1760–1776, at 22 (1909). Becker wrote:

\begin{quote}
From 1765 to 1776, therefore, two questions, about equally prominent, determined party history. The first was whether essential colonial rights should be maintained; the second was by whom and by what methods they should be maintained. The first was the question of home rule; the second was the question, if we may so put it, of who should rule at home.
\end{quote}

\textit{Id.} In \textit{Baker}, Chief Justice Amestoy stated: "Although aimed at Great Britain, the American Revolution—as numerous historians have noted—also tapped deep-seated domestic antagonisms. The planter elite in Virginia, the proprietors of Eastern Pennsylvania, and New Yorkers claiming Vermont lands were each the object of long-standing grievances." \textit{Baker}, 744 A.2d at 875; see also GORDON S. WOOD, THE CREATION OF THE AMERICAN REPUBLIC 1776–1787, at 83 (1969).

\textsuperscript{36} See Patrick H. Hutton, \textit{The Print Revolution of the Eighteenth Century and the Drafting of Written Constitutions}, 56 VT. HIST. 154, 158 (1988). Hutton wrote:
pendence, the states, in the words of Jackson Turner Main, "became the laboratories for testing theories, trying the institutions in the various forms that presently appeared in constitutions of the United States and other countries." Historian Elisha Douglass has noted:

Large numbers of those unable to vote or hold political office felt that the primary purpose of the struggle was to abolish the political institutions by which privilege had been maintained in the colonial governments. Thus when the question of home rule was succeeded by the question of who would rule at home, these groups of humbler rebels attempted to obtain equal consideration for themselves by demanding that democratic reforms be written into the new state constitutions.

As Chief Justice Amestoy pointed out, Vermont's first constitution from 1777 was modeled directly on Pennsylvania's. Historians agree that Pennsylvania's constitution of 1776 was the most radical of the Revolutionary state constitutions. In Pennsylvania, a number of former political outsiders, including Dr. Thomas Young, James Cannon, and George Bryan, drafted the state's "ultrademocratic" 1776 constit-

The growing importance attached to written constitutions reveals the change in mentality that had been worked by the spread of print culture between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries. By the eighteenth century, the middle class, then on the verge of acquiring political power, had learned to read. Reading was of fundamental importance because it promoted a transformation in the way humans learn. Reading involved a move from learning through hearing to learning through seeing, a change that had far-reaching implications for political culture.

Id.


Baker; 744 A.2d at 875. This phenomenon of state constitutional borrowing is discussed infra notes 153-154 and accompanying text.

Thomas Paine referred to the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776 as "a generous Constitution . . . which considers mankind as they came from their maker’s hands—a mere man, before it can be known what shall be his fortune or his state . . . ." It contained a separate Declaration of Rights and Frame of Government. The Declaration of Rights, patterned after Virginia’s, contained a Common Benefits Clause. The Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776 mirrored the extreme shift in the political structure of the state and was a reflection of an "urban variant of republicanism that fostered egalitarianism as well as economic enterprise." Pennsylvania, in making a virtually complete change of its government, thus was the only colony to experience a true revolution. According to Richard Ryerson, "By late 1776 the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania was perhaps the most vital participatory democracy in the world."

The Pennsylvania Constitution proved influential beyond the state, particularly in Vermont. The drafters of the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776 sent copies to representatives of Vermont, who came to Philadelphia to lobby the Continental Congress to recognize their statehood. Dr. Thomas Young, a key Pennsylvania radical constitutionalist and long-time friend of Vermont’s Ethan Allen, pub-
lished a letter, addressed to Vermonters, on April 11 and 12, 1777. Young offered the Pennsylvania Constitution “as a model, which, with very little alteration, will, in my opinion, come as near perfection as anything yet concocted by mankind.” He even claimed that Congress was disposed to grant Vermont statehood. After concluding that the recent, more conservative New York Constitution of 1777 was a “horrible example,” Vermonters proposed a constitution modeled closely after Pennsylvania’s.

Vermont’s origins as a state arose from the “authority of squatter sovereignty.” In rebelling against the authority of New York and New Hampshire, the state engaged in what Chief Justice Amestoy referred to as a “double revolution—a rebellion within a rebellion.” Vermonters’ attempts at convincing the Continental Congress to grant statehood, based on many of the same self-determination arguments supporting the Revolution against England, failed because Congress was more preoccupied in preserving peace with and between New York and New Hampshire than it was in admitting a new state over their objections and potentially shifting the balance of power in New England. As one historian put it, “When Vermont became independent, it became independent of all the world, and remained so until 1791

53 See Jones, supra note 52, at 380; Gillies, supra note 50, at 107. But see Aichele, supra note 52, at 175-76 (contending that the 1777 Vermont Constitution did not adhere as closely to Pennsylvania’s as is commonly thought). Appended to Young’s letter was a copy of the Continental Congress Resolutions of May 10 and 15, 1776. Jones, supra note 52, at 380. Young’s letter had been the first to suggest the name “Vermont.” See id. at 383-84.
54 See Hill, supra note 4, at 4; Aichele, supra note 52, at 179; Gillies, supra note 50, at 107.
55 Brewster, supra note 51, at 29; see also Jones, supra note 52, at 382 (“The straw that broke the opposition to an independent state and overcame the loyalty to New York . . . was the adoption by New York in April of a conservative state constitution.”).
57 Brewster, supra note 51, at xi.
when it was finally admitted to the union." Therefore, he concluded, "Vermont was the only true American republic, for it alone had truly created itself."

The historical events leading to the constitutions of both Pennsylvania and Vermont reflected fundamental Revolutionary debates about equality, the social contract, and the structure and purposes of government. In this light, the Common Benefits Clause in Vermont, and provisions like it in other states, can be seen as foundational recognitions of the nature of people themselves, and the basic reasons for forming governments. Therefore, equality was viewed, in Ronald Dworkin's modern term, as a "sovereign virtue" of government. Moreover, provisions such as Vermont's Common Benefits Clause reflect important community-based concerns as well as individual rights concerns.

The Baker court's use of constitutional history is, however, not without controversy. One criticism of the Baker court's reliance on the Revolutionary "inclusionary principle," which arose from "deep-seated domestic antagonisms," might be that these egalitarian impulses were highly contested by elites who had been used to deference and who possessed what they considered a natural right to control

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60 See ONUF, supra note 59, at 127.
61 Id. at 145.
62 One well-known scholar has noted that New England state constitutions such as Vermont's, in contrast to patterns in other regions, are basically philosophic documents designed first and foremost to set a direction for civil society and to express and institutionalize a theory of republican government... These constitutions, as brief or briefer than the federal document, concentrate on setting forth the philosophic basis for popular government, guaranteeing the fundamental rights of the individual, and delineating the elements of the state's government in a few broad strokes.

Daniel J. Elazar, The Principles and Traditions Underlying State Constitutions, 12 PUBLIUS: THE J. OF FEDERALISM 11, 18 (1982). On the centrality of the equality component of republican political discourse, see Wood, supra note 35, at 70-75 (describing the tension between notions of equality of opportunity (accepting social differences and distinctions) and equality of condition (a social leveling, denying social differences and distinctions)). On social contract thinking during the Revolution, see id. at 282-91, 607-08.


65 See infra notes 272-276 and accompanying text.
government. Much of the equality rhetoric was aimed at the British. It is true that the elites compromised their objections to a wider role for the former outsiders, leading to a variety of constitutional accommodations for participation in government through office holding and voting as well as equality provisions such as the Common Benefits Clause. Still, one must be careful not to view a constitutional history as providing a single truth. As H. Jefferson Powell cautioned:

We cannot assume, as a matter of a priori truth, that there is a unitary tradition of constitutional law across the several states or even within a single one. The existence of a meaningful tradition is an assertion to be proven rather than a premise to be assumed. This is a point of more than "mere" methodological significance. One of the most common sources of misunderstanding and anachronism in constitutional history stems from the desire to identify a common set of ideas and arguments shared by groups labeled "the founders," "framers," "traditional' constitutional lawyers," or similar appellations. This desire easily leads one to find more agreement and intelligibility in the past than was in fact there.

Another criticism of Baker's use of history might be that the constitutional history of the Common Benefits Clause reflects majoritarian concerns about special privileges for an elite minority. In the modern context, lesbians and gay men are not in the majority; in fact, the reverse is true. Can such a provision be invoked to protect against

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68 See supra text accompanying note 38.


70 Chief Justice Amestoy himself recognized this point. Baker, 744 A.2d at 876-77; see also infra notes 106, 110 and accompanying text.
discrimination aimed at minority rights? It does seem that the common benefit thrust of both the constitutional text and the judicial approach developed by Chief Justice Amestoy is broad enough to protect minority rights.71

Analysis of, and reliance on, state constitutional history has been an integral part of the New Judicial Federalism.72 This is partially because, in contrast to federal constitutional history, more details are available at the state level.73 Additionally, as Dr. G. Alan Tarr has pointed out, a careful look at state constitutional history (in addition to textual differences) could be used to justify an interpretation of the state constitution that was more protective, or recognized greater rights, than those available at the federal level.74 The Baker court’s reliance on the egalitarian anti-aristocracy flavor of the first state constitutions stands in sharp contrast to the constitutional history of the federal Equal Protection Clause.75

B. Textual Analysis in Baker

The landmark Jewett decision specified textual analysis as an important way to analyze the potential differences in state and federal constitutional law.76 Dr. Tarr also has pointed out the appeal of textualism, in addition to historical analysis, as a method to support a state constitutional decision going beyond federal constitutional minimum standards.77 Further, Chief Justice Amestoy employed a textual analy-

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71 See generally Baker, 744 A.2d at 877-78.
72 See, e.g., Jewett, 500 A.2d at 236.
74 Id. at 848 (“[I]f a divergent interpretation may be justified by reference to the distinctive origins or purpose of a provision, then state jurists must pay particular attention to the intent of the framers and to the historical circumstances out of which the constitutional provisions arose.”).
75 See G. ALAN TARR, UNDERSTANDING STATE CONSTITUTIONS 191-93 (1998); see also Baker, 744 A.2d at 870.
76 See Jewett, 500 A.2d at 235.
77 Tarr, supra note 73, at 847-48 (“[E]ven when state and federal constitutions contained analogous provisions, the language of the provisions often differed; and where these textual differences were substantial, they seemed to call for independent interpretation. This was especially true when it could be shown that the textual differences reflected a distinctive historical experience or were designed to incorporate a particular perspective.”); see also Joseph R. Grodin, Commentary: Some Reflections on State Constitutions, 15 Hastings Const. L.Q. 391, 400 (1988) (“The presence of distinctive language or history obviously presents the most comfortable context for relying upon independent state grounds.”); Peter Linzer, Why Bother with State Bills of Rights?, 68 Tex. L. Rev. 1573, 1584-85, 1607-08, 1610 (1990).
sis when interpreting the text of the Common Benefits Clause in Baker.78

Obviously, the Common Benefits Clause of the Vermont state constitution reads very differently from the federal Equal Protection Clause and has very different origins.79 This should not be surprising because the state and federal governments constitute very different polities with very different governmental functions. The federal government exercises limited, delegated powers in contrast to the states’ plenary, residual authority. No one would have expected the federal Constitution to provide any sort of guarantee about the “benefit, protection, and security of the people.”80 Historically, that was a function of state government.81

Chief Justice Amestoy pointed out in Baker that the “first point to be observed about the text is the affirmative and unequivocal mandate of the first section, providing that government is established for the common benefit of the people and community as a whole.”82 This notion of affirmative rights is a very important way to distinguish state constitutional rights from the more familiar, negatively-phrased federal constitutional rights.83 Chief Justice Amestoy was able to discern from the text of the clause “broad principles which usefully inform” the decision on the constitutionality of a statute. As he stated, “Chief among these is the principle of inclusion.”84

Next, Chief Justice Amestoy responded to the possible textual argument that the introductory phrase in the Common Benefits Clause—"that government is, or ought to be, instituted for the common benefit"—rendered the provision judicially unenforceable,88 Scholars have pointed out the admonitory quality of the early state rights pro-

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78 See generally Baker, 744 A.2d 864.
79 See Farr, supra note 75, at 191-93; see also Baker, 744 A.2d at 870.
80 See Vt. Const. ch. 1, art. 7.
82 Baker, 744 A.2d at 874; see also id. at 875 (noting the “affirmative right to the ‘common benefits and protections’ of government”).
84 Baker, 744 A.2d at 875.
85 Id. at 874 n.7; accord Vt. Const. ch. 1, art. 7.
visions as "defects," and the Vermont Supreme Court had ruled in 1994 that another provision of the declaration of rights was not judicially enforceable. Chief Justice Amestoy, however, noted that the Common Benefits Clause is obligatory, and that "the State does not argue that it is merely hortatory or aspirational in effect, an argument that would not be persuasive in any event."

Chief Justice Amestoy deftly utilized the actual words of the Common Benefits Clause repeatedly throughout his opinion in describing the factual situation and the plaintiffs' claims based on denial

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"The Virginia Declaration of Rights has the defect of being written in terms of admonition, not legal command. Most of its provisions state the different rights protected and then go on to provide that they "ought not" to be abridged. Not once is there a "shall not"—which, in legal terms, imposes an unmistakable mandatory restriction that the courts can then enforce."

The [Virginia] precedent was followed in the Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, North Carolina, and Vermont Declarations of Rights.

Id.; see also Kenyon, supra note 40, at 96-99.

87 See Benning v. State, 641 A.2d 757, 761 (Vt. 1994). In Benning, the Vermont Supreme Court rejected plaintiffs' argument that the Vermont motorcycle crash helmet law violated the Vermont Constitution. See id. at 758. The court focused on Chapter 1, Article 1, which states: "That all men are born equally free and independent, and have certain natural, inherent, and unalienable rights, amongst which are the enjoying and defending life and liberty, acquiring, possessing and protecting property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety ...." VT. CONST, ch. I, art. 1; see Benning, 641 A.2d at 759. According to the Benning court:

"We find sparse help for the plaintiffs in the text of Article 1 and in our decisions construing this text. The constitutions of New England states have been described as basically philosophic documents designed first and foremost to set a direction for civil society and to express and institutionalize a theory of republican government. ... [Article 1 reflects] the fundamental principles, not of our state only, but of Anglo-Saxon government itself, enlarging upon the axiom that when the facts are the same the law is the same, and inspired by the ideal of justice, that the law is no respecter of persons. Given the nature of Article 1, it is not surprising that we can discover no instance where this Court has struck down an act of the Vermont Legislature solely because of a violation of Article 1."

Id. at 759 (internal citations omitted). The court concluded: "[W]e are not convinced that Article 1 offers plaintiffs any special protections that are applicable to this case. ... As a result, we reject the notion that this case can be resolved on the basis of a broad right to be let alone without government interference." Id. at 761.


88 Baker, 744 A.2d at 874-75 n.7.
of the "benefits," "protection," and "security" offered by Vermont marriage law to same-sex couples.89 He even introduced his opinion with the following question: "May the State of Vermont exclude same-sex couples from the benefits and protections that its laws provide to opposite-sex married couples?" This is a powerful and convincing use of state constitutional text.

C. Equality Without Equal Protection

The Vermont Constitution does not contain an equal protection clause.91 Like many states with similar constitutions, the Vermont judicial interpretations of its equality provision, the Common Benefits Clause, nevertheless have been deeply influenced by, and sometimes seemingly dependent upon, federal equal protection analysis.92 Consequently, in the Baker decision, both Chief Justice Amestoy and Justice Dooley expended significant effort attempting to unravel Vermont's equality doctrine and determining whether to treat it as independent from the federal Equal Protection Clause.93

Justice Dooley, in fact, asserted in his concurrence that Vermont was bound by precedent to apply the federal equal protection ap-

89 Id. at 867, 870, 871, 878, 879, 880, 881, 882, 883, 884, 886.
90 Id. at 867.
92 Williams, supra note 67, at 1197. Part of this is attributable to lawyers, the lay understanding of constitutional law, and the dominance of federal constitutional analysis. As Justice Hans A. Linde has noted:

People do not claim rights against self-incrimination; they "take the fifth" and expect "Miranda" warnings. Unlawful searches are equated with fourth amendment violations. Journalists do not invoke freedom of the press; they demand their first amendment rights. All claims of unequal treatment are phrased as denials of equal protection of the laws.

93 See Baker, 744 A.2d at 870, 898.
The question of whether a state court's earlier decisions adopting one methodology or another are actually precedent-setting, and therefore binding, is a very important matter. As Justice Robert Utter of the Washington Supreme Court pointed out, state courts should carefully scrutinize older cases using federal analysis "to determine whether [their pronouncements] constitute actual holdings, and if not, whether they were based on assumptions that are no longer valid." This is particularly important with respect to equality provisions, where there has been so much misplaced reliance on federal analysis. In many states including Vermont, whose courts have said on occasion that state equality provisions are no different from the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, there is at least a conflict of authority.

Justice Dooley therefore advocated resolving the case by applying the familiar, "rigid" three-tiered suspect class/fundamental rights approach used in federal courts, but with a result different from the likely federal outcome because of the different and smaller "legal climate" in Vermont. For his assessment of the Vermont legal climate, Justice Dooley relied on Vermont statutes that decriminalized homosexual conduct and prohibited discrimination based on sexual orientation. Justice Dooley concluded that lesbians and gay men were a suspect class and applied strict scrutiny. He therefore maintained the distinction between "civil rights" and "economic discrimination" cases, imposing in the former a more searching judicial inquiry and a much greater burden on the government to justify the

94 Id. at 893. See Williams, supra note 67, at 1219 (describing situations where "the state court adopts the federal frame of analysis but applies those constructs independently"). For an assessment of Baker's equality analysis, see Friedman & Baron, supra note 2, at 129-49; Mark Strasser, Equal Protection at the Crossroads: On Baker, Common Benefits, and Facial Neutrality, 42 Ariz. L. Rev. 935 (2000).
95 See Tarr, supra note 75, at 197.
97 Williams, supra note 67, at 1219.
98 Id.
99 Baker, 744 A.2d at 896-97.
100 See id. at 891 ("My point here is simply that the rationale in federal decisions for withholding a more searching scrutiny does not apply in Vermont.").
101 Id.
102 Id. at 890-91.
103 Id. at 890.
classification. Justice Dooley's analysis followed the Oregon approach, based on that state's similar constitutional provision. The Oregon Supreme Court described its equality clause as follows:

Article I, section 20, of the Oregon Constitution has been said to be the "antithesis" of the equal protection clause of the fourteenth amendment. While the fourteenth amendment forbids curtailment of rights belonging to a particular group or individual, article I, section 20, prevents the enlargement of rights. There is an historical basis for this distinction. The Reconstruction Congress, which adopted the fourteenth amendment in 1868, was concerned with discrimination against disfavored groups or individuals, specifically, former slaves. When article I, section 20 was adopted as a part of the Oregon Constitution nine years earlier, in 1859, the concern of its drafters was with favoritism and the granting of special privileges for a select few.

Chief Justice Amestoy, by contrast, distinguished the Vermont Common Benefits Clause from the federal Equal Protection Clause, articulating and applying a standard different from the federal approach. He concluded that although the "federal amendment may

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104 Baker, 744 A.2d at 893-94.
105 Id. at 892-93.
106 Matter of Compensation of Williams, 653 P.2d 970, 975 (Or. 1982) (citations omitted). On Oregon's provision, see generally David Schuman, The Right to "Equal Privileges and Immunities": A State's Version of "Equal Protection," 13 VT. L. REV. 221 (1988). Schuman asserted that fifteen states have provisions like Oregon's. Id. at 223. He noted the differences between these types of provisions and an equal protection clause:

An "equal protection" guarantee typically emanates from the privileged as a self-limiting gesture of largess toward the burdened: "we hereby grant equal treatment to you." It is a promise to adhere to the equality principle.... Conversely, state "equal privileges and immunities" provisions typically emanate from the non-privileged as a gesture of warning to those who have or seek special benefits; they are an implied threat to adhere to the equality principle.

Id. at 224-25; see also David Schuman, Advocacy of State Constitutional Law Cases: A Report from the Provinces, 2 EMERGING ISSUES IN ST. CONST. L. 275, 281-82 (1989) (discussing the Oregon provision). Schuman concluded: "If a state's equality guarantee requires all citizens to have equal privileges and immunities, then an approach that extends equality with respect only to rights the court decides are 'fundamental' is analytically bankrupt, because the text itself precludes ranking or prioritizing rights." Id. at 285.

107 Baker, 744 A.2d at 870-79. Another state court that recently confronted the problem of untangling its seemingly interdependent federal and state constitutional equality doctrines is the Indiana Supreme Court. See Collins v. Day, 644 N.E.2d 72 (Ind. 1994).
supplement" the Vermont Constitution, it could not “supplant” it.\textsuperscript{108} As noted earlier, he relied on the egalitarian impulses of the social and political revolution within the Revolution generally, as well as the principle of inclusion at the core of the text of the Common Benefits Clause.\textsuperscript{109} He cautioned that the framers, “although enlightened for their day, were not principally concerned with civil rights for African-Americans and other minorities, but with equal access to public benefits and protections for the community as a whole.”\textsuperscript{110} He did note that the Vermont Constitution of 1777 was the only Revolutionary constitution to abolish slavery,\textsuperscript{111} which certainly reflected some concern for African-Americans. The Vermont anti-slavery clause was an important symbolic statement, but as one historian noted, the provision “may have freed a few score persons.”\textsuperscript{112}

Chief Justice Amestoy’s assessment of Vermont equality jurisprudence, stripped of reliance on federal equal protection constructs, was a standard that he said exhibited deference to “the legislative prerogative to define and advance governmental ends, while vigorously ensuring that the means chosen bear a just and reasonable relation to the governmental objective.”\textsuperscript{113} This is, of course, an independent state constitutional doctrine and the point on which Justice Dooley disagreed.\textsuperscript{114} Chief Justice Amestoy continued, rejecting the “rigid, multi-tiered” federal equal protection analysis and stating that the first issue was to define which “part of the community” was disadvantaged by the statute.\textsuperscript{115} Then the inquiry moved to the “statutory basis,” distinguishing those protected from those excluded.\textsuperscript{116} He cautioned that the court’s “concern here is with delineating, not with labeling the excluded class” for purposes of tiers of scrutiny.\textsuperscript{117} The next focus of the court’s equality analysis was on the “government’s purpose in drawing a classification,” including some within the statute’s protections and excluding others.\textsuperscript{118} Then, the court determined whether

\textsuperscript{108} Baker, 744 A.2d at 870.
\textsuperscript{109} See supra notes 34–38 and 82–84 and accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{110} Baker, 744 A.2d at 870, 876.
\textsuperscript{111} Id.; see Adams, supra note 56, at 6, 158; Brewster, supra note 51, at 29.
\textsuperscript{112} Main, supra note 56, at 337.
\textsuperscript{113} Baker, 744 A.2d at 871.
\textsuperscript{114} See supra notes 99–100 and accompanying text; see also Friedman & Baron, supra note 2, at 136–37.
\textsuperscript{115} Baker, 744 A.2d at 878.
\textsuperscript{116} Id.
\textsuperscript{117} Id.
\textsuperscript{118} Id.
the omission bore a "reasonable and just relation to the governmental purpose." Chief Justice Amestoy concluded that this approach would necessitate some weighing of interests, but that this could remain "grounded and objective, and not based upon the private sensitivities or values of individual judges" by looking to the history and traditions of the state. He conceded, however, that judges' "reasoned judgments" would have to be applied.

The key to application of Chief Justice Amestoy's analysis is, of course, to identify the governmental purpose for the exclusion and then to evaluate whether it is just and reasonable. The state of Vermont advanced the main purpose for excluding same-sex couples from the benefits and protections of the marriage laws as "furthering the link between procreation and child rearing." While acknowledging that this was a valid governmental purpose, Chief Justice Amestoy was able to show that, based on the fact that many married opposite-sex couples do not procreate, and that advances in assisted-reproductive techniques and liberalized adoption policies seemed inconsistent with the government's stated purpose, the exclusion was not reasonably related to the purpose. Characterizing the benefits of marriage as "vital personal rights," he concluded that the state purposes did not meet the heavy burden to justify the exclusion.

Interestingly, much of the evidence Chief Justice Amestoy used to demonstrate the "extreme logical disjunction between the classification and the stated purpose of the law" consisted of statutes enacted by the State of Vermont itself to ease restrictions on homosexual conduct, to ban discrimination and hate crimes against gays and lesbians, and to permit same-sex couples to adopt children. This is similar to the reasoning of the Florida Supreme Court in its landmark abortion ruling in 1989, striking down a parental consent statute. That court cited statutes permitting pregnant minors to

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119 Id. at 879.
120 Baker, 744 A.2d at 879 (quoting Poe v. Ullman, 367 U.S. 497, 542 (1961) (Harlan, J., dissenting)).
121 Id.
122 Id. at 881.
123 Id. at 881-82.
124 Id. at 883.
125 Baker, 744 A.2d at 884.
126 Id.
127 Id. at 882, 885-86.
128 In re T.W., 551 So. 2d 1186, 1195 ( Fla. 1989); see also Planned Parenthood of Cent. N.J. v. Farmer, 762 A.2d 620, 636 (N.J. 2000).
consent to all forms of medical treatment, except abortion, associated with pregnancy to counter the state’s asserted interest in protecting young women. 129 In Vermont, the state additionally relied on other purposes for the exclusion, such as promoting child rearing in a male-female model, discouraging marriages solely for tax and other benefits, maintaining uniformity with marriage laws in other states, and historical intolerance for same-sex relationships. 130 These also did not pass muster under the court’s analysis. 131

The disagreement between Chief Justice Amestoy and Justice Dooley is one that has arisen in many states. 132 Critics of the federal equal protection approach point to a number of reasons for developing an independent approach to interpreting equality provisions. For example, Professor Lawrence Sager has pointed out that the federal Equal Protection Clause is among the most “underenforced” of federal constitutional provisions. 133 This underenforcement pattern is due to the deference to states because of concerns for federalism, the rigid application of the state-action requirement, and the tiered “suspect class/levels of scrutiny” constructs imposed by the United States Supreme Court. 134 Thus, federal equal protection decisions should hardly be viewed as limiting the interpretation of state constitutional equality provisions.

In addition, several years after Professor Sager offered his underenforcement thesis, he described another important reason why state courts should not blindly follow federal constitutional interpretations. 135 Describing the substantial role of “strategic” considerations in

129 See In re T.W., 551 So. 2d at 1195.
130 Baker, 744 A.2d at 884–85.
131 See id. at 885.
133 Lawrence G. Sager, Fair Measure: The Legal Status of Underenforced Constitutional Norms, 91 HARV. L. REV. 1212, 1218–20 (1978); see Williams, supra note 67, at 1222.
134 Professor Sager stated:

While there is no litmus test for distinguishing these norms, there are indicia of underenforcement. These include a disparity between the scope of a federal judicial construct and that of plausible understandings of the constitutional concept from which it derives, the presence in court opinions of frankly institutional explanations for setting particular limits to a federal judicial construct, and other anomalies . . . .

Sager, supra note 133, at 1218–19.

135 Professor Sager asked, “[T]o what extent, if any, should state judges faced with claims under provisions of their state constitutions feel themselves bound to defer to Supreme Court interpretations of equivalent federal constitutional provisions?” Lawrence G.
judicial enforcement of constitutional norms, Professor Sager identified the possibility of state and federal courts employing different strategies in constitutional interpretation: "Like other legal rules, constitutional rules bear a pragmatic, strategic relationship to the concerns that animate them. Norms of political morality comprise the targets of constitutional law, but not the necessary or exclusive content of its rules."136 He noted that strategic concerns account, in part, for the Supreme Court's limiting equal protection doctrines.137 State courts, interpreting their own constitutions, may see the need to employ different strategies, even though they are applying a similar "norm of political morality"—equality.138 Sager concluded:

State judges confront institutional environments and histories that vary dramatically from state to state, and that differ, in any one state, from the homogenized, abstracted, national vision from which the Supreme Court is forced to operate. It is natural and appropriate that in fashioning constitutional rules the state judges' instrumental impulses and judgments differ.

In light of the substantial strategic element in the composition of constitutional rules, the sensitivity of strategic concerns to variations in the political and social climate, the differences in the regulatory scope of the federal and state judiciaries, the diversity of state institutions, and the special familiarity of state judges with the actual working of those institutions, variations among state and federal constitutional rules ought to be both expected and welcomed.139

Chief Justice Amestoy implicitly recognized this potential underenforcement of the federal Equal Protection Clause when he discussed the Vermont Supreme Court's well-known 1982 decision, State v. Ludlow Supermarkets, Inc.,140 in Baker. Describing Ludlow, he noted:

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Sager, Foreword: State Courts and the Strategic Space Between the Norms and Rules of Constitutional Law, 63 Tex. L. Rev. 959, 959 (1985); see also Linzer, supra note 77, at 1580 ("The gut issue, though, is how closely the state courts should follow federal precedents in applying their states' provisions.").

136 Sager, supra note 135, at 962.
137 Id. at 974.
138 Id. at 967.
139 Id. at 975–76; see also Lawrence G. Sager, Some Observations About Race, Sex, and Equal Protection, 59 Tul. L. Rev. 928, 936–37 (1985).
140 448 A.2d 791 (Vt. 1982) (invalidating Sunday closing law on equality grounds).
After noting that this Court, unlike its federal counterpart, was not constrained by considerations of federalism and the impact of its decision on fifty varying jurisdictions, the Court declared that Article 7 "only allows the statutory classifications ... if a case of necessity can be established overriding the prohibition of Article 7 by reference to the 'common benefit, protection, and security of the people.'"\(^{141}\)

It remains to be seen whether *Baker* will resolve the confused state of Vermont equality jurisprudence.\(^{142}\) The court should treat the matter as resolved by the majority opinion because the Common Benefits Clause cannot be both an independent, vital clause and a disguised federal Equal Protection Clause at the same time. Chief Justice Amestoy's majority opinion demonstrates clearly that it is independent in text and history, and therefore should be independent in judicial interpretation.

### D. Plaintiffs' Choice of State Forum and State Constitutional Cause of Action

Choosing the state forum, and relying on state constitutional claims rather than federal constitutional claims, reflects an important strategic choice in current civil liberties litigation.\(^{143}\) Professor Jennifer Friesen observed, earlier in the development of the New Judicial Federalism:

> Without question, the rebirth of reliance on state bills of rights is one of the most fascinating developments in civil rights law of the last two decades. . . .

> It is no accident that the best-publicized uses of state constitutions have been as defenses to criminal or civil liability or as grounds for injunctive relief, rather than as grounds for recovering damages. . . . Injunctive relief under state constitutions is most often sought by plaintiffs bringing class action

\(^{141}\) *Baker*, 744 A.2d at 871 (quoting *Ludlow*, 448 A.2d at 795).

\(^{142}\) Professors Friedman and Baron provide extensive treatment of this question. *See* Friedman & Baron, *supra* note 2, at 151-53.

or public interest litigation, for which privately or publicly funded counsel may be available.144

Because *Baker* was a civil case, the plaintiffs were able to exercise their choice of a cause of action and forum.145 Chief Justice Amestoy's majority opinion concluded that having resolved the matter under the Common Benefits Clause, it was unnecessary to address the other state constitutional claims.146 The Common Benefits Clause therefore provided an "adequate and independent state ground" that the United States Supreme Court could not review.147 The insulation of state constitutional interpretations from the United States Supreme Court review is a central feature of the New Judicial Federalism.148

The unlikely chances of prevailing on a federal claim undoubtedly influenced the plaintiffs' choice of forum and state constitutional claims in *Baker*. The plaintiffs' decision to employ the state forum, however, can also be attributed to Vermont's responsiveness to state

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144 Jennifer Friesen, *Recovering Damages for State Bills of Rights Claims*, 63 Tex. L. Rev. 1269, 1269-70 (1985); see also J. Friesen, *supra* note 91, at 7-1 to 7-42. *Baker* was filed by three same-sex couples, not as a class action, and sought only the declaratory and injunctive remedy of an order requiring marriage licenses to be issued. *See Baker*, 744 A.2d at 867-68, 886; Brief for Appellant at 2, Baker v. State, 744 A.2d 864 (Vt. 1999) (No. 98-032).

145 *See Baker*, 744 A.2d at 870 n.2.

146 *Id.* The plaintiffs, had also wisely, although unsuccessfully, added a state statutory claim under the Vermont marriage statute. *Id.* at 868-69. Brief for Appellants at 6-16, Baker v. State, 744 A.2d 864 (Vt. 1999) (No. 98-032); Brief for Appellees, at 5-28, Baker v. State, 744 A.2d 804 (Vt. 1999) (No. 98-032); *see also* Mac Knykenhall, *Resistance to Same-Sex Marriage as a Story About Language: Linguistic Failure and the Priority of a Living Language*, 34 Harv. C.R.-C.L. L. Rev. 385, 400-01 (1999) (discussing statutory interpretation arguments). Plaintiffs in *Baker* therefore avoided the mistake often made by constitutional litigators—ignoring subconstitutional statutory or common-law claims. As Justice Hans A. Linde has noted:

Eager legal aid lawyers once came to our court trying to fit a woman's right to operate a day care center within the due process analysis of *Goldberg v. Kelly*. Only after the argument did our own examination show that she was entitled to prevail under the state administrative procedure act, which counsel apparently had not read.


148 *See Jewett*, 500 A.2d at 235; *see also supra* notes 14-23 and accompanying text.
constitutional claims. For example, in 1982 the Vermont Supreme Court boldly declared:

[O]ur constitution is not a mere reflection of the federal charter. Historically and textually, it differs from the United States Constitution. It predates the federal counterpart, as it extends back to Vermont's days as an independent republic. It is an independent authority, and Vermont's fundamental law.

The state of Vermont has been a leader in the development of the New Judicial Federalism, with a state bar that is more conscious of state constitutional law than many other states. By the time the Baker litigation was filed, the State of Vermont possessed a legal culture amenable to, if not actually encouraging of, such claims being asserted in state court under the state constitution.

E. State Constitutional Borrowing and Horizontal Federalism

As noted earlier, Chief Justice Amestoy placed substantial reliance on the fact that Vermont's Common Benefits Clause "was borrowed verbatim from the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776, which was based, in turn, upon a similar provision in the Virginia Declara-

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149 See generally supra notes 14-23 and accompanying text; see also infra note 152.
151 See text accompanying supra notes 15-20.
152 The Vermont Supreme Court adopted a dual analysis approach in Badger. The Badger court first analyzed the federal Constitution's treatment of evidence seized and a confession made after interrogation but prior to a Miranda warning. Badger, 450 A.2d at 341. The court went on to consider the same issues under the Vermont Constitution, observing that:

Our first concern is comity between this Court and the United States Supreme Court. We stand on a different footing when we evaluate federal constitutional claims. On federal issues, we are no more than an intermediate court, attempting to apply the "supreme law of the land," as pronounced by the United States Supreme Court. Yet, if our ruling is based upon an adequate and independent state ground, federal review is limited to a determination of whether Vermont law violates some provision of federal law.

Id. at 346 (internal citations omitted).

A survey of over 500 decisions, from all 50 states, between the time of the Michigan v. Long decision and the beginning of 1988, concluded that "few states have adopted a consistent, concise way of communicating the bases for their constitutional decisions." Felicia A. Rosenfield, Fulfilling the Goals of Michigan v. Long: The State Court Reaction, 56 Fordham L. Rev. 1041, 1068 (1988).
tion of Rights of 1776. This process of state constitutional borrowing, which began with the first state constitutions, continues today.

Alternatively, state courts look for guidance from other state courts interpreting similar or identical state constitutional provisions, rather than looking vertically to United States Supreme Court decisions interpreting federal constitutional provisions. Labeled “horizontal federalism” by G. Alan Tarr and M.C. Porter, this was one of the techniques suggested by Justice Hayes in the State v. Jewett opinion. In Baker, Chief Justice Amestoy surveyed other states’ interpretations of common benefits clauses and similar provisions in a long footnote. He concluded, however, that such decisions were “scarce” and not very instructive.

F. Remedy

Chief Justice Amestoy's majority opinion crafted a remedy that deferred to the legislature the question whether to authorize formal marriage for same-sex couples or, rather, to enact “a parallel ‘domestic partnership’ system or some equivalent statutory alternative.” He noted that the court did not “purport to infringe upon the prerogatives of the Legislature to craft an appropriate means of addressing this constitutional mandate.” In effect, the court “remanded” the case to the legislative branch, with instructions to act. Chief Justice Amestoy acknowledged that it was possible that some future case might allege that denial of a marriage license based on the domestic partnership alternative was a per se violation of the Common Benefits Clause, but that was not the claim addressed in Baker. Finally, the court suspended its judgment to give the legislature a reasonable pe-

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155 Baker, 744 A.2d at 875; see also supra notes 40–56 and accompanying text.
154 Tarr, supra note 75, at 50–51, 98.
156 Id.
157 See Jewett, 500 A.2d at 237; see also Benning, 641 A.2d at 759.
158 See Baker, 744 A.2d at 877 n.9.
159 See id.
160 Id. at 867; see also id. at 886. Professor Robert Schapiro has examined judicial deference in an exhaustive study in Robert A. Schapiro, Judicial Deference and Interpretative Coordination in State and Federal Constitutional Law, 85 Cornell L. Rev. 656 (2000).
161 Baker, 744 A.2d at 886.
162 See id.
period of time in which to act, inviting plaintiffs to return if it refused to act.164

Almost immediately after the court’s decision, the Vermont Legislature took up the Civil Union act. In April 2000, the bill was adopted and approved by the governor.165 The Civil Union act reaffirmed the limitation of civil marriage itself to “a union between a man and a woman,”166 a victory for opponents of same-sex marriage. The bill, however, contained extensive legislative findings (and specific references to the Baker decision) concerning the unfairness of denying the benefits and protections of marriage to same-sex couples.167 The Civil Union act also provided an exhaustive statutory equalization of the position of opposite-sex couples in the marriage relationship and same-sex couples in the civil-union relationship, beginning with the following provision: “Parties to a civil union shall have all the same benefits, protections and responsibilities under law, whether they derive from statute, administrative or court rule, policy, common law or any other source of civil law, as are granted to spouses in a marriage.”168

Justice Denise Johnson dissented from the remedy portion of the Baker decision, concluding that it “abdicates this Court’s constitutional duty to redress violations of constitutional rights.”169 She would have preferred an injunctive remedy forbidding the denial of marriage licenses.170 Chief Justice Amestoy had devoted a significant portion of his opinion to refuting this claim, asserting that it was “predicated upon a fundamental misinterpretation of our opinion.”171

The remedial approach taken by the court flowed rather naturally from the legal theory applied by both Chief Justice Amestoy and Justice Dooley. Both opinions addressed the claim as seeking, in Chief Justice Amestoy’s words, “the secular benefits and protections of a singularly human relationship,” rather than, specifically, marriage li-

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164 See Baker, 744 A.2d at 887.
167 See id. at (4)–(11).
168 See id. at § 1204(a)–(f).
169 Baker, 744 A.2d at 898 (Johnson, J., concurring in part and dissenting in part).
170 Id. For support of her position, see generally Cox, supra note 163; William N. Eskridge, Jr., Equality Practice: Liberal Reflections on the Jurisprudence of Civil Unions, 64 ALB. L. REV. 853 (2001); Mae Kuykendall, Gay Marriages and Civil Unions: Democracy, The Judiciary and Discursive Space in the Liberal Society, 52 MERCER L. REV. 1003 (2001); Strasser, supra note 163.
171 Baker, 744 A.2d at 887.
Chief Justice Amestoy acknowledged that the plaintiffs’ complaint was “designed to secure a marriage license,” but noted that their “arguments here have focused primarily upon the consequences of official exclusion from the statutory benefits, protections and security incident to marriage under Vermont law.” Characterizing the claim in this way supported the alternative “legislative remand” remedy crafted in Baker. These calculations in framing a remedy for a constitutional violation seem to reflect, in Professor Sager’s terms, significant “strategic elements” at work in the court’s decisionmaking process.

The Vermont court’s remedial approach to the marriage of same-sex couples/legislative remand issue differed in a very important way from that adopted earlier by the Hawaii Supreme Court. That court, in Baehr v. Lewin, rejected a state constitutional privacy claim to the right to marriage of same-sex couples, but held that under state equal protection analysis the state would have to show a compelling interest to justify denying them marriage licenses. It is not clear whether the court considered a civil union remedy. Before the case could make it back to the Hawaii Supreme Court after remand and an extensive trial on the compelling state interest question, the people of Hawaii approved a 1998 amendment to the state constitution providing: “The legislature shall have the power to reserve marriage to opposite-sex couples.” In December 1999, about a week before the Vermont Baker decision, the Hawaii Supreme Court recognized that any state constitutional basis for ordering access to marriage for same-sex couples had been eliminated.

Chief Justice Amestoy acknowledged the “instructive” events in Hawaii, including the state constitutional amendment overruling the Hawaii Supreme Court’s decision, as well as a similar amendment in Alaska. It seems likely that this information played a significant role

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172 Id. at 889.
173 Id. at 886.
174 See id. at 888.
175 See supra notes 135–139 and accompanying text.
177 See id. at 55–57.
178 See id. at 59–68.
179 Haw. Const. art. 1, § 23.
180 See Baehr v. Mīkē, 994 P.2d 566, 566 (Haw. 1999) (mem.).
181 See Baker, 744 A.2d at 888. Alaska Constitution, article 1, section 25 reversed an Alaskan trial court decision that held, on state constitutional privacy and equal protection
in the decision to provide an alternative remedy, deferring to the legislature. Justice Johnson had stated that her preferred remedy—mandating issuance of marriage licenses to same-sex couples—would avoid the "political caldron" of a remand to the legislature. Chief Justice Amestoy, referring explicitly to the Hawaii and Alaska amendments, described Justice Johnson's view as "significantly insulated from reality." In fact, an unsuccessful move to amend the Vermont constitution did follow the Baker decision.

Chief Justice Amestoy acknowledged the fact that state constitutions present somewhat of a paradox when guaranteeing rights, because judicial rights interpretation can be overturned by a mere majority vote through state constitutional amendment. Dr. Douglas Reed has called this element of state constitutional law (which he distinguishes from federal constitutional law) "popular constitutionalism," concluding that "[t]he interpreter of state constitutions, under popular constitutionalism, is less likely to be a judge and more likely to be a mobilized and politically active citizenry." In fact, the events in Vermont seem to bear out his description of effective "legal mobilization":

A key test of popular constitutionalism's capacity to resolve the claims of gays and lesbians lies in the political majority's ability to reconstruct the language of a constitutional right to equal marriage as a negotiable interest that can be traded.

grounds, that unless the state could demonstrate a compelling interest, same-sex couples were entitled to obtain marriage licenses. See ALASKA. CONST. art. I, § 25 (stating "a marriage may exist only between one man and one woman"); Brouse v. Bureau of Vital Statistics, No. 3AN-95-6562 CI, slip op. at 1 (Alaska Super. Ct., 3d Dist., Feb. 27, 1998).

See Reed, supra note 8, at 871 ("[I]t is clear that the Vermont Supreme Court learned from Hawaii's example, noting that a decision which mandated same-sex marriage outright might face intense opposition."). The State of Vermont had pointed out the Hawaii amendment in its brief. Brief for Appellee at 92, Baker v. State, 744 A.2d 864 (Vt. 1999) (No. 99-032).

Baker, 744 A.2d at 898.

Id.


Reed, supra note 8, at 875.
within a framework of majoritarian policy-making. The political trajectory of the struggle indicates that this has already happened.188

The compromise Civil Union act passed by the Vermont Legislature represents the translation of judicially-determined rights into an "interest" subject to negotiation and compromise.189 The court's decision clearly facilitated this outcome.190

Of course, some critics would not characterize the court's ruling as deferential in any way toward the legislature.191 After all, the Vermont legislature had not, prior to the court's decision, chosen to provide for either marriage of same-sex couples or for civil union status. Professor Bill Eskridge characterized the Baker court as a "norm entrepreneur,"192 which, by the use of a "savy ... aggressive trial balloon" forced the issue of marriage of same-sex couples onto the legislative agenda.193 The legislature responded with its Civil Union statute, referred to by Professor Eskridge as a "face-saving pseudonym."194

The Baker decision can also be seen as an example of "agenda setting policymaking" judicial decisionmaking, where the court acts by "identifying problems for political resolution rather than prescribing detailed policies of its own."195 It can also be seen as a form of judicial "affirmative activism."196 This kind of judicial intervention in social policy questions, at the invitation of the plaintiffs to be sure, always raises separation of powers concerns and criticism based on a more passive model of judicial power. In Baker, Chief Justice Amestoy answered these predictable criticisms. Acknowledging the controversial nature of the case but asserting that it raised a question that the court

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188 Id. at 919.
189 See id.
192 Eskridge, supra note 191, at 1405.
193 See id. at 1404; see also Kuykendall, supra note 170, at 1031-32.
196 Cf. id. at 516.
well knew arouses deeply-felt religious, moral, and political beliefs, he
noted: "Our constitutional responsibility to consider the legal merits
of issues properly before us provides no exception for the controver-
sial case." 197

It has been argued that state courts are perhaps less subject to
criticism for "affirmative activism" than federal courts. As one com-
mentator noted: "[t]hese institutional differences between the federal
and state courts suggest that active judicial review of public law issues
at the state level is not as troublesome theoretically as it is at the fed-
eral level." 198 Still, cases like Baker certainly stimulate criticisms of the
court's "activism" and raise questions about the legitimacy of such
forms of state constitutional decisionmaking. 199

II. BAKER AND STATE CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS JURISPRUDENCE

Not until about ten years ago, well into the development of the
New Judicial Federalism, 200 could one describe the topic of state con-
stitutional rights jurisprudence. For example, in 1988, two commenta-
tors pointed out that "most of the literature, like many of the state
cases themselves, offers more in terms of approval and encourage-
ment than of analytical insight and innovation.... More attention
must be devoted to new conceptualizations in constitutional doc-
trine." 201 Several years later, Dr. G. Alan Tarr noted that "one might
have expected a lively dialogue between constitutional theorists and
state constitutional scholars. However, no such dialogue has devel-
oped. Indeed, what is striking is how little attention scholars and ju-
rists have paid to the relationship between constitutional theory and
state constitutional law." 202

197 Baker, 744 A.2d at 867.
198 Robert B. Keiter, An Essay on Wyoming Constitutional Interpretation, 21 LAND & WATER
L. REV. 527, 535 (1986); see also Tarr & Harrison, supra note 195, at 539-40.
200 See supra notes 10-12 and accompanying text.
tions to state constitutional theory. See, e.g., A.E. Dick Howard, State Courts and Constitu-
tional Rights in the Day of the Burger Court, 62 Va. L. Rev. 873 (1976); Keiter, supra note 198,
at 527; David R. Keyser, State Constitutions and Theories of Judicial Review: Some Variations on a
Theme, 63 Tex. L. Rev. 1051 (1985); Linde, supra note 92; Hans A. Linde, Without "Due
Process": Unconstitutional Law in Oregon, 49 Or. L. Rev. 125 (1970); Symposium, Developments
in the Law—The Interpretation of State Constitutional Rights, 95 Harv. L. Rev. 1324 (1982).
202 Tarr, supra note 73, at 842. But see Daniel B. Rodriguez, State Constitutionalism and the
Domain of Normative Theory, 37 San Diego L. Rev. 523, 531 (2000) (questioning whether
In the 1990s this situation began to change. Matters of constitutional theory began to be brought to bear on state constitutional rights questions. Much of the state constitutional jurisprudence of the 1990s can actually be attributed to a 1992 critique of the New Judicial Federalism.203 Professor James A. Gardner argued that "state constitutional law today is a vast wasteland of confusing, conflicting, and essentially unintelligible pronouncements"204 and that "state constitutional discourse is impoverished and inadequate to the tasks that any constitutional discourse is designed to accomplish."205 He criticized state constitutional decisions for not utilizing a "'discourse of distinctness' . . . a language and set of conventions enabling participants in the legal system to argue that provisions in the state constitution mean something different from their federal counterparts."206

After having concluded that state constitutional discourse was impoverished, Professor Gardner asserted that this is caused by the failure of state constitutionalism generally.207 He pointed to the inclusion of mere statutory detail in state constitutions (which reflect political compromise), and the frequency with which constitutions are amended or revised to conclude that state constitutionalism was a failed enterprise.208 According to Professor Gardner, the "poverty of state constitutional discourse merely reflects the limited narrative possibilities that state constitutions offer to erstwhile interpreters."209 A truly diverse set of independent constitutional values, at least in rights cases, was even said to be dangerous to the national community.210 Ultimately, Professor Gardner contended that "the communities in theory defined by state constitutions simply do not exist, and debating the meaning of a state constitution does not involve defining an identity that any group would recognize as its own."211 A true constitution, according to his view, would do much more: "The content of a consti-

the focus on the "high lawcraft" in constitutional adjudication is as important in state constitutional law as in federal constitutional law).

203 See generally Gardner, supra note 20.
204 Id. at 763.
205 Id. at 766.
206 Id. at 778 (emphasis added); see also id. at 804 ("[A] discourse of distinctiveness [is] . . . a way of explaining differences between the state and federal constitutions.").
207 See id. at 812 (noting "the failure of state constitutionalism itself to provide a workable model for the contemporary practice of constitutional law and discourse on the state level").
208 See Gardner, supra note 20, at 818–22.
209 Id. at 822.
210 Id. at 827.
211 Id. at 837.
stitution can thus reflect some of the most essential and intimate aspects of the character of the people who adopted it, a feature that courts occasionally can exploit in order to assist them in construing the constitution in difficult cases.212

Professor Gardner’s strong and provocative conclusions have stimulated useful discussions of what state constitutional law is about.213 Much of that discussion continues to analyze state constitutional law as it relates to federal constitutional law, in comparative or relational terms, or, in Professor Gardner’s terms, debating the merits of a “discourse of distinctness.”214 The Baker v. State decision provides an excellent vehicle for analyzing Gardner’s critique as well as competing jurisprudential views of state constitutional law.215

A. Critiques of the “Discourse of Distinctiveness”

One critic of Professor Gardner, Professor Paul Kahn, argued that state constitutional rights cases should not necessarily “rely on unique state sources of law. Those sources include the text of the state constitution, the history of its adoption and application, and the unique, historically identifiable qualities of the state community.”216 Kahn described constitutionalism, including state constitutional law, as not a “single set of truths” but rather as an ongoing national discourse about “ideas of liberty, equality, and due process.”217 Professor Kahn illustrated his point using the doctrine of equality:

212 Id. at 815-16; see also James A. Gardner, Southern Character; Confederate Nationalism, and the Interpretation of State Constitutions: A Case Study in Constitutional Argument, 76 Tex. L. Rev. 1219, 1221-22 (1998).
214 See Gardner, supra note 20, at 778.
215 744 A.2d 8114 (Vt. 1999).
217 See id. at 1147-48.
The object of interpretation might, for example, be the meaning of the constitutional value of equality. Equality does not have a single, definite meaning in any community prior to the process of interpretation. It is not a thing waiting to be discovered by a judge. It only has an identifiable shape after the judge articulates the conclusion of an interpretive inquiry. Even that conclusion is only a momentary stopping point in an ongoing debate.218

Thus, Professor Kahn argued that state courts and federal courts should work together, using both state constitutions and the federal Constitution to pursue the "common enterprise" of providing interpretive answers to great constitutional questions.219 He seemed to reject the necessity of Professor Gardner's "discourse of distinctness."220

Professor Kahn used a landmark state constitutional decision to support his thesis.221 He referred to Kentucky v. Wasson,222 a case in which the Kentucky Supreme Court rejected the United States Supreme Court's decision in Bowers v. Hardwick223 and struck down Kentucky's sodomy laws. The Baker decision seems equally illustrative of a state court's contribution, interpreting its own state constitution, to

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218 Id. at 1161.
219 Id. at 1168.
220 See Gardner, infra note 20, at 778.
221 See Kahn, supra note 216, at 1153.

the national constitutional dialogue about the meaning of equality in the context of marriage of same-sex couples. Chief Justice Amestoy concluded his majority opinion in *Baker* with the following observation:

The past provides many instances where the law refused to see a human being when it should have. ... The challenge for future generations will be to define what is most essentially human. The extension of the Common Benefits Clause to acknowledge plaintiffs as Vermonters who seek nothing more, nor less, than legal protection and security for their avowed commitment to an intimate and lasting human relationship is simply, when all is said and done, a recognition of our common humanity. 224

Despite his state-specific reference to "Vermonters," it seems clear that Chief Justice Amestoy was referring to the "common enterprise" of a universal, generalizable, human-rights *question* that transcends the State of Vermont, and even the United States, to encompass the entire world. It was to state-specific Vermont legal sources, however, both textual and historical, that he turned to formulate an *answer* to the universal question. 225

Chief Justice Amestoy's references to Vermonters and to the Common Benefits Clause of the Vermont state constitution do suggest a state-specific inquiry, based on unique state sources or a "discourse of distinctness." 226 This textual focus is an important way to distinguish the interpretation of a state constitution from the United States Supreme Court's interpretations of the federal Constitution. 227 This point was emphasized by Justice Hans Linde of Oregon, one of the most influential scholars and judges in the rise of New Judicial Federalism, when he cautioned that state constitutions are not "common law." 228 He noted that:

[S]tate courts find themselves pulled between fidelity to the state's own charter and the sense that constitutional law is a

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224 *Baker*, 744 A.2d at 889.
225 See id., at 886–87.
shared enterprise. Fidelity to a constitution need not mean narrow literalism. Most state bills of rights leave adequate room for modern applications, as well as for comparing similar guarantees elsewhere. But fidelity to a constitution means at least to identify what clause is said to invalidate the challenged law, to read what one interprets, and to explain it in terms that will apply beyond the case at issue, not to substitute phrases that have no analogue in the state’s charter. . . . A demand that each state’s court reach whatever desired result courts in other states have reached, in the common law manner of generic judge-made formulas, denies significance to the lawmaking act of choosing and adopting the constitutional provisions on which claims of unconstitutionality rest.229

Chief Justice Amestoy’s focus on the Common Benefits Clause itself, together with its historic origins, judicial interpretation, and differences from the federal Equal Protection Clause, illustrates Professor Gardner’s and Justice Linde’s theories just as it reflects Professor Kahn’s.259 In other words, the majority decision in Baker both contributes to the national dialogue about equality and is anchored in state-specific, relatively unique Vermont constitutional law sources.231

229 Linde, Common Law?, supra note 228, at 228–29. Some years earlier Justice Linde had made a similar point:

Courts, of course, are quite accustomed to seeing differences in state laws without attributing these to different values or beliefs of the state’s inhabitants. The values or beliefs that count are those that have been translated into law, often by people with different views from the present generation’s. This is true of important differences in people’s rights under state statutes and common law; it also is true of state constitutions. . . . The presence or absence of a clause in a constitution—an equal rights amendment, for instance, or a right of privacy—may or may not be evidence of social values, but it is unmistakable evidence of societal action, of the choice whether to enact an idea into law. To bury such choices under a theory of noninterpretive adjudication deprives political action of its constitutional significance.

Linde, supra note 92, at 195.


231 Put differently, using Professor Gardner’s terms, the opinion has both positivist and universalist characteristics. See generally James A. Gardner, The Positivist Revolution That Wasn’t: Constitutional Universalism in the States, 4 ROGER WILLIAMS U. L. REV. 109 (1998). Professor Gardner distinguished constitutional universalism: “the belief that all American constitutions are drawn from the same set of universal principles of justice and good government,” from the positivist approach: “looking to the state constitution’s text, history and structure and the underlying values of the state polity that the constitution reflects—in other words, the kinds of sources that would be relevant under a positivist approach to
Professor Lawrence Friedman, building on the work of Professor Kahn and others, has elaborated carefully on the elements and benefits of a true constitutional dialogue between state courts and the United States Supreme Court on shared constitutional issues. Professor Friedman argued that “insofar as the new judicial federalism reflects attempts by state courts independently to interpret the meaning of cognate textual provisions, its legitimacy is buoyed by the federal constitutional value of dialogue—that is, the value that attaches to discourse about law and governance that occurs between and among the different organs of the federal and state governments.”

State constitutional decisions on provisions similar to federal constitutional rights guarantees would provide “an interpretative counterpoint to the U.S. Supreme Court.” Professor Friedman took issue with Professor Gardner:

Recall Gardner’s skepticism about the depth of state constitutionalism as a reflection of state, as opposed to national, values, and his contention that this lack of depth militates against independent interpretation. Because the value of dialogue reflects a federal constitutional concern, its vindication vis-à-vis state constitutionalism does not necessarily depend upon differences in the fundamental character and values of the people of the states. In other words, assuming Gardner is correct that state constitutions may reflect variations of a national identity, a state court still would not be disabled or precluded from contributing to the larger project of interpreting shared constitutional text, for the dialogic

Professor Lawrence Friedman concludes that the national contribution will be blunted by reliance on unique state sources. See Lawrence Friedman, The Constitutional Value of Dialogue and the New Judicial Federalism, 28 HAST. CONST. L. Q. 93, 143-44 (2000).

The exchange encourages the evolutionary development of constitutional interpretation on the part of each of the participants, to a greater extent in the state court. But this need not be the case: no jurisprudential rule requires the U.S. Supreme Court to ignore state court interpretations of cognate provisions as respectable authority, and the Supreme Court has on occasion relied upon state constitutional decisions for guidance in characterizing federal constitutional obligations.

Id. at 127-28.
approach (to paraphrase Jennifer Friesen) encourages state courts to make good constitutional law, using accepted constitutional argument; it does not mandate that state courts make unique constitutional law.\textsuperscript{235}

Thus, Professor Friedman agreed with Professor Kahn and took issue with Professor Gardner, over the need for unique state constitutional sources as an underpinning for independent, legitimate state constitutional law.\textsuperscript{236} Like Professor Gardner, though, he called for dialogue, but not a dialogue of "distinctiveness."\textsuperscript{237} Although the Vermont \textit{Baker} decision does not necessarily fit Professor Friedman's model,\textsuperscript{238} because it was based on the Common Benefits Clause, which has no federal cognate,\textsuperscript{239} it seems clear that \textit{Baker} contributes to Professor Friedman's national dialogue model.

The concurrent state and federal responsibility for constitutional decisionmaking, albeit under different constitutions, is a manifestation of American constitutional federalism's "jurisdictional redundancy."\textsuperscript{240}—a term coined by the late Professor Robert Cover by analogy to the use of redundant systems to protect against technological malfunction and ensure reliability.\textsuperscript{241} Redundancy in constitutional interpretation can be, in Professor Cover's terms, either confirmatory, where all authorities are in agreement, or nonconfirmatory, where authorities are in conflict.\textsuperscript{242} Put into state constitutional terms, state courts can either adopt (agree with) or reject (disagree with) earlier federal constitutional analysis.\textsuperscript{243}

Professor Cover identified this redundancy in federal and state jurisdiction as providing a variety of positive influences.\textsuperscript{244} Given the dual goals of courts both to resolve disputes and articulate norms, federal courts may balance these goals differently in interpreting the federal Constitution from the way some state courts balance them in

\textsuperscript{235} \textit{Id.} at 137 (internal citation omitted).

\textsuperscript{236} \textit{See id.} at 138.

\textsuperscript{237} \textit{See} Friedman, supra note 231, at 138; \textit{see also} Gardner, supra note 20, at 778.

\textsuperscript{238} \textit{See Friedman, supra note 231, at 137-43.}

\textsuperscript{239} \textit{But see infra note 255 and accompanying text.}


\textsuperscript{241} \textit{See id.}

\textsuperscript{242} \textit{See id.} at 674-75.

\textsuperscript{243} \textit{See id.} at 679-80; \textit{see also} supra notes 155-159.

\textsuperscript{244} \textit{See Cover, supra note 240, at 642. But see generally Earl M. Maltz, The Dark Side of State Court Activism, 63 TEX. L. REV. 995 (1985).}
interpreting state constitutions. Professor Cover noted that “the jurisdictional structure frequently permits recourse to the courts of another system after one system has adjudicated and reached a result. This diachronic or sequential redundancy is comparatively common.” He identified three areas in which this federal-state jurisdictional redundancy would provide a beneficial influence: interest, ideology, and innovation.

Clearly, state judges such as those on the Vermont Supreme Court might, and seemingly did in Baker, have a world-view (interest), construction of reality (ideology), and view of the issue of marriage of same-sex couples (innovation) that differed substantially from the predicted views of members of the United States Supreme Court. Although there has not yet been a definitive decision by that Court on marriage of same-sex couples, the Baker case illustrates nicely Cover’s concept of jurisdictional redundancy with the Vermont Supreme Court’s norm articulation most likely representing a different, “non-confirmatory” result from that expected from the United States Supreme Court.

Professor Louis Bilionis pointed out another difference between state and federal constitutional interpretation: “[T]he constitutionally significant facts may be different at the state and federal levels. . . . Indeed, whenever a constitutional methodology admits a need to accommodate institutional considerations, the possibility for different yet equally correct state and federal results exists.” A state court’s view of “constitutionally significant facts” in equality analysis could certainly differ from the United States Supreme Court’s view, thus yielding a different outcome. This seems clearly to have been the case

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245 Cover, supra note 240, at 643–44.
246 Id. at 648.
247 Id. at 657, 660–61 (applying to “the judge . . . who simply shares a world-view with the dominant elite”).
248 Id. at 657, 664 (influencing the “decisionmaker’s construction of reality was distorted by the social determinants of his mental world”).
249 Id. at 657, 673 (interpreting Justice Holmes to argue that “innovation in norm articulation is healthier in a federal system”).
250 Cf. Cover, supra note 240, at 657.
251 Cf. id. at 674–75.
in *Baker*, and relates to Professor Sager's point about strategic concerns.\(^{253}\)

Professor Thomas Morawetz has analyzed state constitutional rights decisions and concluded that they either represent an exercise of state deviation from federal constitutional principles, or rather, represent a state judicial exercise of autonomy, without specific reference to related federal constitutional norms.\(^{254}\) He explained:

In understanding the role of judges who must interpret provisions of state constitutions that are identical or very similar to provisions of the federal Constitution, one must distinguish questions of power and authority from questions of interpretive responsibility. Questions of power and authority are answered by the doctrines of federal supremacy and federalism. Accordingly, federal law establishes a minimal national standard for the exercise of individual rights and state judges, under state constitutions, may recognize higher levels of protection for such rights.

But the logic of interpretive responsibility commits judges to offering the best justification they can devise for the rights at issue. That justification may not simply describe a *higher level* of protection but may involve a different way of conceiving the right, using factors that may or may not be idiosyncratic to the state context. The logical implications of that way of conceiving the right may create conceptual tension with the way in which federal courts have conceived the right. Of course, if the scope of the former conception is narrower than the scope of the latter, its practical implications are nil.

Thus, from the standpoint of power and authority, it is appropriate to see state courts as needing to justify *deviation* from the federal norm, to justify expanding a right. But from the standpoint of interpretive responsibility, state courts are necessarily autonomous, committed by the very nature of the judicial task to offering a compelling account of the rights in

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\(^{253}\) See supra text accompanying notes 135–139.

\(^{254}\) See Thomas Morawetz, *Deviation and Autonomy: The Jurisprudence of Interpretation in State Constitutional Law*, 26 CONN. L. REV. 635, 657 (1994). This is related to, but with less emphasis on, the *relation* between federal and state constitutional decision, Cover's "confirmatory and nonconfirmatory" categories. See Cover, supra note 240, at 674–75.
question, an account that may or may not dovetail with the federal understanding. 255

Professor Morawetz’s view seems to contrast with Professor Gardner’s, whose “discourse of distinctness” thesis was based on justifications for deviation involving issues of power and authority, 256 rather than on autonomy based on “interpretive responsibility.” 257 Professor Morawetz’s emphasis on interpretative responsibility is more consistent with Justice Linde’s view, 258 albeit with less emphasis on specific text, as well as with Professor Kahn’s view. 259

Although Professor Morawetz indicated that sometimes it is difficult to distinguish an opinion relying on the deviation approach from an opinion relying on the autonomy approach, 260 the Baker decision presents a clear example of an autonomy opinion. Baker sets out specifically to interpret the Common Benefits Clause of the Vermont constitution and does not labor excessively to justify deviation from the likely federal constitutional answer to the claim. 261 It does, however, justify a different equality doctrine, and judicial approach, from that contained in federal Equal Protection Clause doctrine. 262 This is true as well for Justice Dooley’s concurring opinion. 263 The Vermont Supreme Court approached the Baker case as a matter of “interpretive responsibility” rather than a matter of “power and authority.” 264

Professor Robert Schapiro has challenged the existing legal theories about state constitutional rights protection, particularly Professor Gardner’s idea that for truly independent interpretation of a state constitution there must be “an identifiable state community, an entity whose inhabitants share distinctive ideals, customs, and traditions.” 265 Professor Schapiro argued that it is not the identity of the people of the state, but rather the ideals defined by the constitution itself that form the underpinning for a vibrant, independent state constitutional

255 See Morawetz, supra note 254, at 656-57 (internal citation omitted).
256 See supra text accompanying notes 207-212.
257 See supra text accompanying notes 228-229.
258 See supra text accompanying notes 216-220.
259 See supra text accompanying notes 228-229.
260 See supra note 254, at 656.
261 See supra note 254, at 639.
262 See id. at 877-79.
263 See id. at 890-91.
264 See supra note 254, at 656-57.
discourse.\textsuperscript{266} He contended that what is at issue is really a debate over judicial review itself, and that Professor Gardner's requirement of a demonstrated state community served as a condition precedent to the exercise of independent state constitutional judicial review.\textsuperscript{267} He proposed, as an alternative, the form of "ethical" argument proposed by Philip Bobbitt.\textsuperscript{268} Professor Schapiro concluded:

The text and structure of the Constitution provide the materials for deriving ethical arguments. The ethical modality does not understand constitutional interpretation as an exercise in deriving fundamental values directly from an examination of a community. Rather, by studying the text and structure of the Constitution, one comes to understand the deeply held beliefs that the polity has enshrined in its fundamental charter. For our purposes, Bobbitt's key insight is that fundamental values may be derived from the structure and relationships embodied in the Constitution. The people speak and their underlying commitments give meaning to their brief and suggestive words; however, judges do not seek to divine these commitments directly, but through the medium of the Constitution. By identifying an ethos through an examination of the values placed in a constitution, courts may avoid various supposed obstacles to independent interpretation.\textsuperscript{269}

To illustrate the ethical approach, Professor Schapiro, like Professor Kahn, examined equality doctrine.\textsuperscript{270} The Vermont Baker decision reflects a judicial inquiry into the "ethos" of the Common Benefits Clause of the Vermont state constitution rather than any attempt to access the values of the current Vermont community.\textsuperscript{271} Chief Justice

\textsuperscript{266} See id. at 393.
\textsuperscript{267} Id. at 393-94.
\textsuperscript{268} Id. at 441-42 (citing \textsc{Philip Bobbitt}. \textsc{Constitutional Fate: Theory of the Constitution} 94-95, 137-56 (1992); \textsc{Philip Bobbitt}. \textsc{Constitutional Interpretation} 20-21, 137 (1991)). Interestingly, the landmark Vermont \textit{State v. Jewett} opinion cited Bobbitt's approach with approval. See 500 A.2d 233, 237 (Vt. 1985). For discussion of \textit{Jewett}, see supra notes 14-20 and accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{269} See Schapiro, supra note 265, at 442-43.
\textsuperscript{270} See id. at 444 ("Reading the particular constitution and understanding the values that it expresses might well provide additional information relevant to answering the interpretive inquiry. Equality may have different meanings and its particular expression may be informed by other values of constitutional magnitude.").
\textsuperscript{271} See generally \textit{Baker}, 744 A.2d at 864 (basing the holding on the Common Benefits Clause's historical and textual meaning).
Amestoy examined the "ideological origins" of the clause, which he found to provide a "useful light upon the inclusionary principle at its textual core." He provided a searching and deep analysis of the revolutionary "deep-seated domestic antagonisms," concluding that "[t]he powerful movement for 'social equivalence' unleashed by the Revolution ultimately found its most complete expression in the first state constitutions adopted in the early years of the rebellion." Chief Justice Amestoy did not attempt to analyze the "inclusionary" instincts of the current population or community of Vermont, but rather relied on the general, American, 220-year-old egalitarian philosophy which, in Professor Schapiro's terms, demonstrates that "by studying the text and structure of the Constitution, one comes to understand the deeply held beliefs that the polity has enshrined in its fundamental charter." From this point of view, Chief Justice Amestoy's majority decision in Baker reflects Justice Linde's and Professor Schapiro's argument that the state constitutional text and its animating political origins must be the touchstones of state constitutional interpretation.

Dean Daniel Rodriguez has pointed out that now, as a result of the "devolution revolution," many important questions of public policy are no longer being decided at the federal level, but are left to the states. He asked whether there is "anything theoretically special about state constitutionalism beyond the availability of state constitutions as a source of rights and liberties?" He answered:

While it follows that each state is to be left to its own devices in shaping its own constitutional discourse, it does not follow that each state ought to fashion its independent, separate theory of state constitutionalism. On the contrary, there are sound reasons for developing a comprehensive—let us call it "trans-state"—constitutional theory which can help orient constitutional discourse throughout the United States. What is called for in the end is a balance: States can

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272 Id. at 875.
273 Id.
274 Id. at 876.
275 Schapiro, supra note 265, at 442.
276 Cf. supra text accompanying notes 228–229, 266–269.
278 Id. at 273. Dean Rodriguez reminds us that "[m]odern constitutional theory is, in the main, national constitutional theory." Id.
develop independent discourse to account for their own, distinct constitutional traditions; at the same time, states can build upon a more general, trans-state constitutional discourse. After all, states share in common a set of constitutional objectives.279

Dean Rodriguez was primarily discussing the institutional structure set forth in state constitutions.280 Nonetheless, at least in states that have common benefits or similar clauses, the Vermont Baker decision does provide the basis for a “trans-state” constitutional theory, particularly if one remembers that family and personal relationships are, generally, uniquely within the competence of states to regulate.281

One of the criticisms of state constitutions, including Professor Gardner's,282 has been that they contain a wealth of non-fundamental policy matters that would be better relegated to statutory law. Professor James Pope made this point in the following way:

At bottom, the problem with state constitutionalism is—as James Gardner has thoroughly, ruthlessly, and humorously shown—that state constitutions just aren't all that constitutional. How can anyone expect judges to develop independent constitutional jurisprudence on a textual foundation that changes with every legislative or popular whim, obsesses in excruciating detail over pecuniary matters, and declares the law on such fundamentals as golf course tax exemptions and bingo regulation?283

Professor Pope, though, went on to contend that there have been, in fact, a number of very important “vital provisions” that are “of sufficient constitutional weight to alter the field of state constitutional interpretation.”284 Professor Pope differentiated the constitutional provisions of state constitutions from those that are merely constitutional

279 Id. at 290-91.
280 See generally id. at 288-91.
281 See id. at 300 (“Each state in our union ought to be seriously responsible for addressing systematically and efficiently the needs and demands of its citizens.”). The late Dr. Daniel J. Elazar has indicated that the structure of American constitutionalism has almost always left such matters to the states and to state constitutions, rather than to the federal Constitution. See Elazar, Foreword, supra note 81, at 859; see also ELAZAR, TRADITION, supra note 81, at 170.
282 See Gardner, supra note 20, at 761; see also Kahn, supra note 216, at 1159 n.52.
284 Id. at 1007.
because they have been included in the state constitution.\textsuperscript{285} He derived this distinction from the 1977 New Jersey case, \textit{Vreeland v. Byrne}.\textsuperscript{286} The \textit{Vreeland} court observed:

Not all constitutional provisions are of equal majesty. Justice Holmes once referred to the "great ordinances of the Constitution." Within this category would be included the due process clause, the equal protection clause, the free speech clause, all or most of the other sections of the Bill of Rights, as well as certain other provisions. The task of interpreting most if not all of these "great ordinances" is an evolving and on-going process. . . .

But there are other articles in the Constitution of a different and less exalted quality. Such provisions generally set forth—rather simply—those details of governmental administration as are deemed worthy of a place in the organic document. . . .

Such constitutional provisions as these, and others like them, important as they doubtless may be, are entirely set apart from the "great ordinances" mentioned above, and as a matter of constitutional interpretation should receive entirely different treatment. Where in the one case the underlying spirit, intent and purpose of the Article must be sought and applied as it may have relevance to the problems of the day, in the other a literal adherence to the words of the clause is the only way that the expressed will of the people can be assured fulfillment.\textsuperscript{287}

Professor Pope proposed a similar distinction, with "vital" state constitutional provisions receiving the Holmesian "great ordinance" approach.\textsuperscript{288}

\textsuperscript{285} See at 988.
\textsuperscript{286} See id.; see also \textit{Vreeland v. Byrne}, 370 A.2d 825 (N.J. 1977).
\textsuperscript{287} \textit{Vreeland}, 370 A.2d at 831–32 (internal citation omitted).
\textsuperscript{288} See Pope, supra note 283, at 1002–04. Professor Gardner, although conceding that Professor Pope's analysis had "undeniable appeal," disagreed; concluding, "What makes something a constitution is not its content or its pedigree, but the current attitude of the people toward it." Gardner, \textit{What Is?}, supra note 213, at 1031, 1032; see also Tarr, supra note 75, at 190 ("For one thing, dispensing with 'lesser' provisions in building a state constitutional jurisprudence is highly questionable, because what a state chooses to include in its constitution is important evidence of the vision underlying the document. In addition, the sharp bifurcation of constitutional provisions reintroduces in another context Gardner's dubious distinction between what is truly constitutional and what is not.")
As examples of truly constitutional provisions, Professor Pope cited Jacksonian democracy, the populist-progressive movement for direct democracy, and the guarantees of free public schools.\(^{289}\) The Vermont Baker decision focuses on another category of truly constitutional provisions: equality provisions such as the Common Benefits Clause. These kinds of provisions in state constitutions reflect vital constitutional moments. The Vermont Common Benefits Clause certainly appears to be a rather majestic, vital "great ordinance" of the state constitution. The Vermont Supreme Court treated it in a manner befitting such a constitutional clause, as one of the "flexible pronouncements constantly evolving responsively to the felt needs of the times."\(^{290}\) In other words, the provision was considered to be constitutional and was interpreted accordingly.\(^{291}\)

Dr. Douglas Reed has described a new theory of state constitutional meaning that emanates not exclusively from courts, but rather from an "exchange between popular mobilization and judicial interpretation."\(^{292}\) One form of this he refers to as "legal mobilization through public interest litigation."\(^{293}\) Dr. Reed has reviewed the so-called "down and out" scholarship by those who seek to "de-center" the courts as the exclusive source of constitutional meanings, and applied those theories to the movement for recognition of marriage of same-sex couples or civil union.\(^{294}\) As he stated:

Legal mobilization is a political and strategic practice that seeks to redefine legal rights and to transform the interests that are claimed or perceived as legal rights. The transformation occurs both at the level of individual consciousness and institutional recognition. Thus, legal mobilization is a regularized political practice that strives to reallocate power within a regime or political order. It does so by asking rank and file members to reconceive their grievances as rights

\(^{289}\) See Pope, supra note 283, at 1004.

\(^{290}\) See id. at 987; see also Baker, 744 A.2d at 875-76.

\(^{291}\) See Pope, supra note 283, at 987; see also Baker, 744 A.2d at 874-76.

\(^{292}\) Reed, supra note 8, at 875; see also Rodriguez, supra note 202, at 530 ("[I]f the centrality—or, at least the exclusivity—of constitutional adjudication as a method for framing constitutional discourse is replaced by legislative, administrative, and citizen/grass-roots action, then the pressure groups who regularly participate in state constitutional politics will organize their strategies accordingly.").

\(^{293}\) Reed, supra note 8, at 875.

\(^{294}\) Id. at 881; see also Michael Paris, Legal Mobilization and the Politics of Reform: Lessons from School Finance Litigation in Kentucky, 1984-1993, 26 LAW & SOC. INQUIRY 531 (2001) (using a similar approach).
and then by seeking legal legitimation of that reconceptualization. From the perspective of down and out legal scholarship, the practice and struggle over the allocation of rights is effectively a process of constitutional definition. The value of down and out scholarship is that it enables us to see these episodes not merely as recurring legal contests, but as fundamental fights over the meaning and content of state constitutional provisions. 295

Under this view, even the federal and state cases that failed to authorize marriage of same-sex couples or civil union rights worked to fuel the legal mobilization through transforming people's consciousness about their entitlement to rights. 296 This seems to be an accurate account of what happened in Hawaii (although it was met with another form of popular constitutionalism) 297 and can certainly account for the litigation in Vermont.

B. Other Perspectives

Dr. G. Alan Tarr has noted that in contrast to the great question in federal constitutional law about the legitimacy of judicial review itself, the central question in state constitutional law has concerned the legitimacy of state constitutional rulings that diverge from, or "go beyond," federal constitutional minimum standards. 298 This was also the focus of Professor Gardner's concern, as well as a central element of Professor Morawetz's analysis. 299 Dr. Tarr had indicated that constitutional theory had not been brought to bear on state constitutionalism and that textualism and originalism had represented the most

295 Reed, supra note 8, at 893-94. Elsewhere Dr. Reed notes that:

The meanings of state constitutions are frequently forged outside judicial confines because state constitutions give great credence and power to democratic majorities, which invites political contestation and dispute. This political responsiveness of state constitutions, in conjunction with the expansion of the state judicial agenda under the "new judicial federalism," has made state constitutional politics an increasingly dynamic and energetic form of political contestation in recent times.

Id. at 885.


297 See supra notes 176-180, and accompanying text.

298 See TARR, supra note 75, at 174-75; see also Rodriguez, supra note 202, at 581.

299 See supra notes 202, 251 and accompanying text.
appealing first steps toward an independent state constitutional approach. Recently, he has grown more optimistic, concluding:

Doubts about the viability of state constitutional jurisprudence have not prevented its development. . . .

This is not to deny the difficulty of the enterprise of state constitutional interpretation. State constitutions are distinctive documents, and the approach to their interpretation must take account of that distinctiveness. Contemporary constitutional theory can assist in the development of a state constitutional jurisprudence, but state interpreters nevertheless confront a host of problems for which constitutional theorists supply no solutions. Yet these problems are not insuperable. Through attention to the text of state provisions, to their generating history, to their place in the state's overall constitutional design, and to their relation to earlier state provisions as well as provisions in other states, state interpreters can develop a body of law that reflects the distinctive traditions of state constitutionalism.

Dr. Tarr has identified an important perspective on state constitutional interpretation and jurisprudence: No single theory will explain, justify or account for the developments of the New Judicial Federalism. Outcomes will depend on the clarity as well as the distinctness of the state constitutional text (both in contrast to the federal and other state texts), its character as an open-textured or "great ordinance," the presence of either general or specific state constitutional history, precedents and judicial doctrines that have been developed within the state in interpreting the state constitutional provision at issue, precedents and judicial doctrines from other states (particularly those from which the provision was copied) with similar or identical provisions, judges' assessments of "strategic concerns," as well as, of course, judges' attitudes and "reasoned

500 See supra notes 77, 202.
501 T Harr, supra note 75, at 208-09.
502 See id.
503 See id. at 185.
504 See id. at 187.
505 See id. at 192.
506 See Tarr, supra note 75, at 197.
507 See id. at 199.
508 Sager, supra note 135, at 974.
judgment." Each of these factors must be assessed and weighed separately, and in relation to each other, leading to different approaches in different kinds of cases. This is at least a partial answer for those scholars who search for a single constitutional theory to explain the New Judicial Federalism, or who call on courts to follow a single methodology.

Whether one agrees with the outcome of Baker or not, it must be conceded that the decision engages in a serious state constitutional "discourse of distinctness," albeit without resort to the values of the current Vermont community. Interestingly the opinion reflects many of the other state constitutional theories set forth by scholars and discussed here: Professor Kahn’s "common enterprise," Justice Linde’s "fidelity to a constitution," Professor Friedman’s "dialogue," Professor Cover’s "jurisdictional redundancy," Professor Sager’s "strategic concerns," Professor Morawetz’s "autonomy rather than deviation," Professor Schapiro’s "ideals defined by the constitution itself," Dean Rodriguez’s "trans-state constitutional theory," and Professor Pope’s "great ordinances." As Dr. Tarr suggests, it appears that no single theory can account for the complexities of state constitutional interpretation within the New Judicial Federalism.

**CONCLUSION**

Oregon Justice Hans A. Linde said that in order "to make an independent argument under the state clause [it] takes homework—in texts, in history, in alternative approaches to analysis." The Vermont Baker decision is one of the better examples of working with the advice given by Justice Linde a generation ago. Baker demonstrates the application of virtually all of the lessons of the New Judicial Federal-

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309 Baker, 744 A.2d at 879.
310 See TARR, supra note 75, at 209.
311 See, e.g., Landau, supra note 96. See generally Williams, supra note 15.
312 Gardiner, supra note 20, at 788.
313 Kahn, supra note 216, at 1168.
314 Linde, Common Law?, supra note 228, at 228.
315 Friedman, supra note 231, at 137.
316 Cover, supra note 240, at 649.
317 Sager, supra note 135, at 974.
318 Morawetz, supra note 254, at 656.
319 Schapiro, supra note 265, at 393.
320 Rodriguez, supra note 277, at 291.
321 Pope, supra note 283, at 831.
322 TARR, supra note 75, at 209.
323 Linde, supra note 146, at 392.
ism. The case provides a methodological primer with application far beyond the merits of its substantive outcome. It is not merely a provincial, state-specific decision. Baker possibly will live up to the late Justice Thomas Hayes' hope that "decisions taken under Vermont's constitution may give courage to another state to come to the same or similar resolution under its constitution." Baker may prove to be not only a source of courage, but also of some of the political and legal tools necessary to accomplish legal change.

Eugene Rostow made a famous observation about the United States Supreme Court in 1952: "The Supreme Court is, among other things, an educational body, and the Justices are inevitably teachers in a vital national seminar." Toward the end of the twentieth century, and at the beginning of the twenty-first, state justices are taking their seats at the head of the seminar table.

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324 Hayes, supra note 18, at 153.