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Langdell Upside-Down: James Coolidge Carter and the Anticlassical Jurisprudence of Anticodification

Lewis A. Grossman

I. INTRODUCTION

In the decades following the Civil War, the American legal profession engaged in a heated debate about the wisdom of replacing the substantive common law with a written civil code. During the dispute's most intense period, in the 1880s, discussions of the benefits and shortcomings of codification appeared regularly in legal publications, as well as in general-interest newspapers and magazines. Professional organizations and state legislatures devoted countless hours to the question. Ultimately, the post-bellum codification movement achieved little. By the 1890s, it was apparent that the American defenders of the common law had won the battle. The codification impulse lasted into the twentieth century, as reflected in the Uniform Code and Restatement projects. But there were no further major campaigns to abandon the common law wholesale in favor of a code.¹

The late nineteenth-century codification debate generated a profusion of jurisprudential literature. Although modern scholars have not totally ignored this rich body of writing,² they have devoted surprisingly little att-

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¹ See infra Section II.A. (discussing the history of the codification movement).
ention to it. Strikingly, only a few articles have analyzed the portrait of the common law painted by Gilded Age jurists who fought codification. This neglect is surprising, for the common law jurisprudence of that period has engaged the attention of legal scholars for more than a century. The writings of those who resisted the common law’s elimination are an obvious source of insight into the era’s conception of the common law.

Importantly, much anticodification literature described the common law in a manner greatly different from what standard twentieth-century depictions of Gilded Age private law jurisprudence would lead one to expect. Legal scholars have long viewed Christopher Columbus Langdell, the Dean of Harvard Law School from 1870 to 1895, as the prototypical American jurist of the late nineteenth century. He portrayed the common law as a conceptually-ordered scientific system in which rigorous logical reasoning trumped concerns about the just resolution of particular cases. In *Langdell’s Orthodoxy*, probably the most influential modern article on Langdell, Thomas Grey dubbed this system of legal thought “classical orthodoxy.” Others have labeled it “mechanical jurisprudence,” “classical legal thought,” “liberal legal science,” or “Langdellian formalism.” Whatever term they have preferred, scholars have long agreed that Gilded Age legal thinkers viewed the common law as a rigidly logical, amoral system.

In recent years, some have begun to challenge the notion that soulless formalism typified Gilded Age common law jurisprudence. Stephen

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4. See, e.g., GRANT GILMORE, *THE AGES OF AMERICAN LAW* 42 (1977) (“Langdell... has long been taken as a symbol of the new age [from the Civil War to World War II].”).


9. At least 94 law review articles have used this phrase. (LEXIS search conducted May 3, 2007).

Siegel, for example, has successfully demonstrated that Langdell’s supposed amorality was not characteristic of late nineteenth-century legal thought. He has closely analyzed the work of other leading jurists of the era, both religious scholars such as Joel Bishop and Francis Wharton and secular scholars such as John Chipman Gray, and has shown that they believed the common law had a moral basis. Nevertheless, Siegel retains the label “classical” in describing these men because, like Langdell, they firmly embraced the common law’s formal conceptual order. Indeed, Siegel’s central thesis is that moral classicism was the standard jurisprudential approach of the late nineteenth century. Strikingly, one scholar has recently contended that even Langdell himself was not “Langdellian,” as that term has long been understood. Bruce Kimball challenges the familiar portrait of Langdell as an amoral logician. Instead, he depicts Langdell as a flexible thinker concerned with justice and policy. Kimball does not, however, deny that Langdell was a classicist, but only that he was an amoral one.

The anticodification literature explored in this Article powerfully supports the rising consensus among revisionist legal historians that Gilded Age jurists generally viewed morality as an essential component of the common law. Indeed, the anticodifiers argued that the common law’s ethical content was one of its main advantages over a code system. This Article goes further than the current revisionist scholarship, however, by suggesting that at least some late-nineteenth century jurists so devalued formal conceptual order, at least when it came into conflict with case-specific justice, that they can hardly be characterized as “classical” at all. The anticodifiers, most notably James Coolidge Carter, their leading intellectual voice, explicitly minimized the role of formality and conceptual order in common law decision making. This Article will explore how the battle against codification drove Carter and others to formulate a common law method that largely rejected the formal and conceptual aspects of legal reasoning that dominated Langdell’s system. Indeed, in trumpeting the advantages of the common law, Carter, an almost exact contemporary of

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11. Siegel, Francis Wharton’s Orthodoxy, supra note 10; Siegel, Joel Bishop’s Orthodoxy, supra note 10; Siegel, John Chipman Gray, supra note 10.
14. See infra text accompanying notes 80-85.
15. Andrew Morriss, interestingly, reads Carter and reaches the opposite conclusion. Morriss, supra note 2, at 389 (describing the anticodifiers as having “a shared sense of the common law as a system of rules that, at least, is striving toward internal consistency . . . ”).
Langdell,\textsuperscript{16} manifested a rule skepticism that foreshadowed that of the legal realists a half century later.

Can a legal system be both classical and moral? Siegel argues not only that such a combination is possible, but that it epitomized Gilded Age jurisprudence.\textsuperscript{17} He fails, however, to acknowledge that there is, at bottom, an unavoidable tension between classicism and justice, between formal conceptual order and equity. Morality undoubtedly shaped the classical legal system’s general principles, and it may have helped guide the reasoning process by which legal scientists derived lower-level rules from these general principles. Nevertheless, a jurist applying lower-level rules to actual affairs simply has to choose occasionally between the deductive application of a rule and the equitable resolution of a particular case. Carter and Langdell both recognized this phenomenon, but they diverged on the appropriate solution. When forced to choose between formal deductive reasoning and a fair outcome, Langdell favored the former whereas Carter opted for the latter.

II. THE BATTLE OVER THE CIVIL CODE: FIELD VERSUS CARTER

A. The Codification Movement

Attorney David Dudley Field made his first major foray into the world of codification in 1847, when he assumed membership on a New York State commission created, pursuant to the state’s 1846 constitution, “to revise, reform, simplify, and abridge the rules and practice, pleadings, forms and proceedings of the courts of record of this State.”\textsuperscript{18} This three-man commission produced a Code of Civil Procedure, which New York enacted in 1848.\textsuperscript{19} Field so dominated the drafting of this instrument that it became commonly known as “the Field Code.”\textsuperscript{20} It abolished the complex scheme of common law writ pleading, as well as the independent system of equity procedure, and replaced both with a simplified, uniform procedural system.\textsuperscript{21} The procedural code was Field’s most successful codifica-

\textsuperscript{16} Langdell lived from 1826 to 1906. Carter lived from 1827 to 1905.

\textsuperscript{17} Siegel, \textit{Francis Wharton’s Orthodoxy}, supra note 10, at 442.

\textsuperscript{18} N.Y. CONST. OF 1846, art. VI, § 24, \textit{quoted in Friedman}, supra note 2, at 391 (describing the formation of the commission and Field’s participation on it).

\textsuperscript{19} In 1849, this commission also completed a Code of Criminal Procedure, which New York finally enacted in 1881.


\textsuperscript{21} At least on the surface, code procedure, with its single form of action, fact pleading, joinder, and discovery, borrowed more from equity than from the common law. \textit{Id} at 337. Subrin, however, contends that despite the indisputable commonalities between the Field Code and equity practice, “Field ... leaned as much, or more, toward the view of common law procedure, as to equity.” Stephen N. Subrin, \textit{How Equity Conquered the Common Law: The Federal Rules of Civil Procedure in Historical Perspective}, 135 U. PA. L. REV. 909, 939 (1987). According to Subrin, Field rejected the
tion effort; the majority of states ultimately embraced the Field Code or some revised version of it. Moreover, the code eventually served, in some important ways, as a model for the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, enacted in 1938.

Even after 1848, however, the substantive private law of New York—its law of torts, contracts, property, domestic relations, wills, and agency, for example—remained mostly uncodified. Lawyers and judges had to extract these rules from countless reported judicial decisions and some poorly organized statutes. New York was hardly alone in this respect; despite the efforts of many fervent and eloquent codification proponents in antebellum America, substantive private law development was still court-centered throughout the country at the time of the Civil War. In other words, the United States remained, from a substantive rather than a procedural perspective, almost uniformly a common law country.

In addition to mandating procedural reform, New York’s 1846 constitution had also required the establishment of a commission “to reduce into a written and systematic code the whole body of the law of this state, or so much and such parts thereof as to the said commissioners shall seem practicable and expedient.” The first such commission failed to produce a code, but in 1857 the legislature established a new code commission and named David Dudley Field one of its three members. Field was primarily responsible for writing the resulting substantive Civil Code.

The commission presented the final draft of the Civil Code to the legislature in 1865. In the introduction to the code, Field described it as a “complete digest of our existing law, common and statute, dissected and analyzed, avoiding repetitions and rejecting contradictions, moulded into distinct propositions, and arranged in scientific order, with proper amendments, and in this form sanctioned by the Legislature . . . .” Field also explained what benefits codification offered:

flexibility and judicial discretion of equity because he wanted the legal system to be efficient and predictable. He thus designed a procedure that was, despite its surface similarities to equity procedure, more confining and formalistic. \[\text{Id. at 934-36; Subrin, supra note 20, at 327-34.}\]


23. \textit{See id. at 64 (“[T]here can be no question but that [the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure] represent a present-day interpretation and execution of what are at bottom the Field principles.”).}

24. \textit{See generally Cook, supra note 2.}

25. Louisiana was the major exception. Essentially a civil law state, it enacted, in 1825, a general, substantive Civil Code, drafted by Edward Livingston. \textit{Friedman, supra note 2, at 173-74, 403.} In 1860, Georgia became the first common law state to enact a civil code. \textit{Id. at 405-06; Gunther A. Weiss, The Enchantment of Codification in the Common Law World, 25 YALE J. INT’L L. 435, 511-12 (2000).}

26. \textit{N.Y. Const. of 1846, art. I, § 17, quoted in Morriss, supra note 2, at 389.}


In the first place, it will enable the lawyer to dispense with a great number of books which now incumber [sic] the shelves of his library. In the next place, it will thus save a vast amount of labor, now forced upon lawyers and judges, in searching through the reports, examining and collecting cases, and drawing inferences from decisions . . . . In the third place, it will afford an opportunity for settling, by legislative enactment, many disputed questions, which the courts have never been able to settle. In the fourth place, it will enable the Legislature to effect reforms in different branches of the law, which can only be effected by simultaneous and comprehensive legislation . . . . In the fifth place, a publication of a Code will diffuse among the people a more general and accurate knowledge of their rights and duties, than can be obtained in any other manner. 29

Despite Field's references to the Civil Code's substantive reforms and its resolution of disputed questions, his primary goal in drafting the code was not to revolutionize the content of New York's law, but rather to embody existing law in an organized statutory form. 30 In his view, the only reforms in the code specifically worth mentioning concerned the rights of married women, the adoption of children, and the assimilation of the law of real property and personal property. 31 By Field's own count, there were only about 120 other changes, all "of less importance," in the code's 1,998 sections. 32

Field spent many years doggedly urging the adoption of his Civil Code. Both the Assembly and the Senate of New York voted to enact the Civil Code in 1879 and 1882, but each time the governor vetoed it. Undaunted, Field lobbied for the passage of the Civil Code annually throughout the 1880s. 33 Nonetheless, it never became part of New York law. Field's successes in the area of substantive codification were confined to a few western states. 34 His greatest triumph occurred in 1872, when California adopted a modified version of his Civil Code. 35 As will be discussed be-

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29. Id. at xxix-xxx.
30. See COMMISSIONERS OF THE CODE, FINAL REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE OF NEW YORK, at vi (1865) ("In all this immense range of subjects, . . . it has been the general purpose of the Commissioners to give the law as it now exists . . . .").
31. Id. at xxx.
32. Id.
33. Alison Reppy, The Field Codification Concept, in DAVID DUDLEY FIELD: CENTENARY ESSAYS CELEBRATING ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF LEGAL REFORM 36-42 (Alison Reppy ed., 1949); van Ee, supra note 27, at 331-32. The code commission established in 1857 drafted not only the substantive Civil Code, but also a Political Code (1860) and a Penal Code (1865). The New York legislature never enacted the former, but it enacted the latter in 1881.
34. The Dakota Territory enacted Field's Civil Code with almost no changes in 1865, and both North and South Dakota continued to use it when they became states in 1889. Weiss, supra note 25, at 512. Montana enacted a revised version of the code in 1895. Id. at 513. California's adoption of Field's Civil Code is discussed infra.
35. See generally Grossman, California Mentality, supra note 2. In California, the Civil Code as first enacted was identical to Field's New York draft, except for some revisions to accommodate earlier California legislation. In 1874, however, the California code was extensively amended to resolve
low, however, the state’s judiciary soon minimized the significance of this event by embracing a method of code interpretation that rendered California’s approach to legal decision making little different from that of the traditional common law states.36

B. The Anticodification Response

Field’s codification campaign failed in New York State largely because of the energy, passion, and talent of the opponents of codification there. The leader of this opposition was James Coolidge Carter, an extremely prominent legal figure in the late nineteenth-century—perhaps the most famous lawyer of his era.37 As I have discussed elsewhere, Carter was one of the nation’s leading appellate advocates, and he argued some of the most important Supreme Court cases of the Gilded Age.38 President Grover Cleveland likely would have appointed him Chief Justice of the United States if not for concerns about his health.39 Carter was also an influential figure in New York City politics and one of the country’s foremost municipal reformers.40 In addition, he served as president of the American Bar Association and the Association of the Bar of the City of New York (ABCNY).

From within the latter of these organizations, Carter led the successful fight against Field’s efforts to replace New York State’s decisional private law with a civil code. Under Carter’s direction, ABCNY attorneys issued a series of pamphlets excoriating the code for failing to reflect the actual state of the common law in particular substantive areas, even when it was intended to do so. In some instances, these pamphlets suggested that Field

the many additional conflicts between the code and prior statutes and decisions that had become apparent during the code’s first two years of operation. Maurice E. Harrison, The First Half-Century of the California Civil Code, 10 CAL. L. REV. 185, 187-88 (1922). California and Montana, in addition to adopting Field’s Civil Code, also enacted versions of three other codes Field drafted for New York: the Code of Civil Procedure, the Political Code, and the Penal code. See Grossman, California Mentality, supra note 2, at 617; Weiss, supra note 25, at 512-13.

36. Infra Section V.B.3.


38. Among the prominent cases Carter argued were The Chinese Exclusion Case, 130 U.S. 581 (1889), Smyth v. Ames, 169 U.S. 466 (1898), United States v. Joint Traffic Ass’n, 171 U.S. 505 (1897), United States v. Trans-Missouri Freight Ass’n, 166 U.S. 290 (1896), and Hyde v. Continental Trust Co., 157 U.S. 654 (1895) (companion case to Pollock v. Farmer’s Loan & Trust Co., 157 U.S. 429 (1895)).

39. See MARTIN, supra note 37, at 173; THERON G. STRONG, LANDMARKS OF A LAWYER’S LIFETIME 281 (1914); Unattributed speech: “James Coolidge Carter” (n.d.) (transcript available in the Irving Club Collection, Special Collections, Hoskins Library, Univ. of Tenn. Knoxville); see also The Man for Chief Justice, N.Y. TIMES, Apr. 10, 1888, at 4.

had manipulated the law to favor his plutocratic clients. Carter assigned himself (and Albert Mathews, whose work is also discussed below) the task of framing the broader jurisprudential and practical arguments against codification and in favor of the common law. He did so in two major pamphlets, titled The Proposed Codification of Our Common Law and The Provinces of the Written and the Unwritten Law, and in testimony before the New York Senate. During the 1880s, Carter’s name became almost synonymous with the anticodification position.

III. CARTER’S CUSTOM-BASED JURISPRUDENCE

Carter set forth a detailed portrait of the common law in his anticode pamphlets, as well as in a renowned 1890 presidential address to the American Bar Association called The Ideal and the Actual in the Law and a posthumously published book titled Law: Its Origin, Growth, and Function. Through these writings, he became the most prominent representative of the American school of historical jurisprudence. Like Friedrich Karl von Savigny, the leader of the German historical school, Carter equated the unwritten law with the evolving customs of the people. He argued that common law judges, instead of making law, found the basis for their decisions in “the social standard of justice, or from the habits and customs from which that standard itself has been derived.” Statutory enactments, by contrast, often conflicted with custom, or came to do so as custom changed while the written law remained static. In Carter’s view, legislation contrary to custom was not only futile, but promoted grave mischief as the people strove to evade its enforcement. He thus contended that the regulation of private affairs should remain primarily the province of the unwritten law.

By equating the common law with custom, Carter acknowledged that the law would change along with the habits and manners of the people. Nonetheless, Carter clung to a form of moral objectivism even while recognizing social flux. His simultaneous embrace of natural law notions and
historical evolutionism represented a coherent, if not always clearly expressed, melding of the two approaches. Carter believed that the evolution of custom was characterized by the gradual unfolding of eternal moral principles. Therefore, the common law, by reflecting customary standards of justice, embodied elements of natural law. As Carter explained, "[The law] possesses as an essential feature a moral character; ... it springs from and reposes upon that everlasting and infinite Justice which is one of the attributes of Divinity; and ... it is so much of that attribute as each particular society is able to comprehend and willing to apply to human affairs." Because Anglo-American civilization was highly advanced, its customs, and hence its law, were approaching the ideal. Carter asserted, "I have sought to discover those rules only which actually regulate conduct, not those which ought to regulate it." Tellingly, however, he then remarked, "I imagine that the rule which will be found in fact to exist, is the best."

Carter's reference to "finding" a legal rule points to another essential aspect of his jurisprudence. He steadfastly denied that judges "made" law. Rather, they "declared" already existing law, which they "found" among the "habits, customs, business and manners of the people, and those previously declared rules which have sprung out of previous similar inquiries into habits, customs, business and manners." This assertion was a critical feature of Carter's defense of the common law against the codifiers' attacks. Advocates of codification often protested that judges did not "find" the unwritten law, but rather "made" it themselves. Field, for example, argued: "[T]he legislative and judicial departments should be kept distinct. ... [W]e violate [this maxim] every hour that we allow judges to participate in the making of the laws." In response, Carter maintained that custom was an objective, nondiscretionary basis for judicial decisions.

Proponents of codification also frequently condemned the common law's ex post facto quality. Because the common law was inaccessible to nonlawyers, they argued, citizens were not aware of their legal obligations until a judge issued his decision. A code, by contrast, would allow any person to determine his duties and responsibilities before taking action.

48. Id. at 606-09.
50. Stephen Siegel has identified a parallel impulse among other legal thinkers of the time. Stephen A. Siegel, Historism in Late Nineteenth-Century Constitutional Thought, 1990 WIs. L. REV. 1431, 1438.
51. CARTER, ORIGIN, GROWTH & FUNCTION, supra note 44, at 145.
52. Id.
53. Carter, Ideal and Actual, supra note 44, at 224. He often asserted that judges were society's "experts" at ascertaining these customs, although he never offered any real support for this assertion. See, e.g., CARTER, ORIGIN, GROWTH & FUNCTION, supra note 44, at 327; CARTER, PROPOSED CODIFICATION, supra note 43, at 1; CARTER, PROVINCES, supra note 43, at 11.
54. David Dudley Field, Codification, 20 AM. L. REV. 1, 2 (1886).
David Dudley Field declared, “[T]hat only is truly law which has been provided beforehand.”55 In response, Carter contended that it was fair to presume that people were familiar with common law rules, because the common law was based on custom, and “[t]he term [custom] itself imports that it is known to all.”56 He explained: “A man can hardly live in society without knowing how men act—that is, what custom is. . . . Custom is of all things the one most universally known.”57

Carter’s contention that judges and citizens in a common law system could determine the single, correct resolution to any legal question depended on the uniformity of custom. If Carter had conceded the existence of multiple, competing customs, he also would have had to acknowledge that judges simply selected which custom to follow, and therefore that a citizen could not know the law before a judge declared it. Carter thus frequently stated that the customs of the people were “universal” and that there was a uniform “national standard of justice.”58 Because judges themselves were “part of the community,” they “knew” and “felt” the common standard of justice and relied on it when deciding cases.59 The notion of universal custom also allowed Carter to suggest that the common law was actually more democratic than legislation, particularly when the legislature was dominated by corrupt and plutocratic interests.

Customs . . . being common modes of action, are the unerring evidence of common thought and belief, and as they are the joint product of the thoughts of all, each one has his own share in forming them. In the enforcement of a rule thus formed no one can complain, for it is the only rule which can be framed which gives equal expression to the voice of each.60

Carter acknowledged that parties often disagreed about the specific rule to be derived from custom in a particular case, but he rarely conceded that such clashing positions might be rooted in conflicting customs within the community itself.61 Carter could not, of course, deny that there were variations in conduct among individuals.62 He argued, however, that such differences had largely disappeared as American society had progressed toward universal norms of behavior embodying fair dealing and coopera-

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56. CARTER, ORIGIN, GROWTH & FUNCTION, supra note 44, at 255.
57. Id. at 77-78. For an extended discussion by Carter on these points, see id. at 225-28.
58. See, e.g., CARTER, PROPOSED CODIFICATION, supra note 43, at 41; Carter, Ideal and Actual, supra note 44, at 229.
59. CARTER, PROVINCES, supra note 43, at 48. Because New York judges were directly elected, it was not quite as audacious to wrap them in the cloak of democracy as it would have been if they were appointed.
60. CARTER, ORIGIN, GROWTH & FUNCTION, supra note 44, at 143.
61. Id. at 78.
62. Id. at 123.
tive self-restraint. 63 When confronting examples of widespread conduct that conflicted with these supposedly uniform habits and values, Carter played semantic games, terming them “bad practices” rather than “customs.” 64

In sum, Carter’s argument, brewed in the cauldron of the codification wars, was that there was an absolute identity between the common law and “the social standard of justice,” or “custom.” “[C]ustom is not simply one of the sources of law from which selections may be made and converted into law by the independent and arbitrary fiat of a legislature or a court, but . . . law, with the narrow exception of legislation, is custom.” 65 Carter’s view that each and every decision by a common law judge reflected shared ethical standards required him to describe the decision-making process in a manner markedly different from Langdell.

IV. LANGDELL’S CLASSICAL ORTHODOXY

Before examining the contrasts between Carter’s and Langdell’s common law methodologies, it is necessary to review the contours of Langdell’s “classical orthodoxy.” Professor Thomas Grey, the author of Langdell’s Orthodoxy, argues that “legal theories are defined by the relations they establish among five possible goals of legal systems: comprehensiveness, completeness, formality, conceptual order and acceptability.” 66 According to Grey’s scheme, comprehensiveness concerns the ability of a legal system, from a procedural perspective, to provide one and only one resolution of every dispute within its jurisdiction. 67 The completeness of a legal system describes the degree to which the system’s substantive norms provide a single “right” answer for every matter arising under it. Legal systems fall short of completeness if they contain (as perhaps they inevitably do) substantive gaps or inconsistencies that require decision makers to exercise discretion. 68 Formality concerns the extent to which a legal system dictates the correct resolution of cases according to “demonstrative (rationally compelling) reasoning.” 69 Conceptual order refers to a legal system’s quality of having a limited body of coherently-related general principles that themselves generate substantive bottom-level rules. 70 Finally, the goal of acceptability is the pursuit of justice and wise policy. A legal system is acceptable “to the extent that it fulfills the ideals and de-

64. See id. at 613-14.
65. CARTER, ORIGIN, GROWTH & FUNCTION, supra note 44, at 173.
67. Id. at 6-7.
68. Id. at 7-8.
69. Id. at 8.
70. Id. at 8-9.
Comprehensiveness is the least important element in Grey’s discussion of Langdell’s jurisprudence, for it is a procedural factor with no obvious relationship to the other four, substantive goals. According to Grey, the foundation for classical orthodoxy was the mutually reinforcing interplay of the next three goals on his list: completeness, formality, and conceptual order.72 “The heart of classical theory was its aspiration that the legal system be made complete through universal formality, and universally formal through conceptual order.”73 The goal of acceptability was, in Grey’s view, irreducibly in tension with the logically ordered system represented by the previous three goals. “To let considerations of acceptability directly justify a bottom-level rule or individual decision would violate the requirement of conceptual order, on which the universal formality and completeness of the system depended.”74

According to Grey, Langdell’s response to this tension was to push acceptability to the margins of his jurisprudence. In classical orthodox thought, considerations of policy and morality were allowed into the system at the level of general principles, but they influenced lower-level rules and specific decisions only so long as they did not undermine universally formal conceptual order.75 Consider, for example, the situation in which one person promises another a reward for performing some task. Should the promisor be able to revoke his offer if the promisee has almost, but not entirely, completed the task? Langdell argued yes. He thought the systematic order of contract law, based on the principle of bargained-for consideration, demanded this result even though it “may cause great hardship and practical injustice.”76

Bruce Kimball’s recent work takes issue with Grey’s portrait of Langdell. In a historiographic study of scholarship about Langdell, Kimball criticizes Grey’s heavy focus on Langdell’s Summary of the Law of Contracts, to the exclusion of his work in the fields of procedure, equity, and commercial law and his law school casebooks.77 Kimball concludes, “[C]lassical orthodoxy does not fully comprehend the complexity of Langdell’s jurisprudence, which needs to be reassessed in light of a broader and

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71. Id. at 10.
72. These qualities are not necessarily dependent on each other. For example, informality does not in and of itself prevent a legal system from being complete or conceptually ordered. Id. at 7-8, 8 n.27. Moreover, a lack of conceptual order does not invariably mean that a system is informal. Id. at 9 n.29.
73. Id. at 11.
74. Id. at 15.
75. Id.
deeper review of Langdell’s writings, both published and archival.”

In a subsequent article, Kimball conducts such a reassessment of Langdell’s contracts scholarship. He concludes: “Far from conforming to a closed, formal system modeled on deductive logic or geometry, Langdell’s mode of reasoning . . . is three dimensional, exhibiting a comprehensive yet contradictory integration of induction from authority, deduction from principle, and analysis of acceptability, including justice and policy.” Although Kimball in this article adds important texture to Grey’s depiction of Langdell, he does not remove the Harvard dean from the rank of classicists. First of all, Kimball’s own list of Langdell’s significant contributions to contract doctrine includes several foundational features of classical contract law: the movement toward abstraction; the identification of offer, acceptance, and consideration as the primary dimensions of contract; and the introduction of the bargain theory of contract. Moreover, Kimball ultimately makes quite tentative and modest claims about the role of justice and policy in Langdell’s jurisprudence. Although he points to examples in which Langdell appealed to acceptability to supplement his logical derivation of bottom-level rules, Kimball never goes so far as to suggest that Langdell was willing to sacrifice formal conceptual reasoning to reach a preferred result in a particular case. To the contrary, Kimball acknowledges that Langdell “wanted to be, or felt he should be, a pure legal formalist,” that he “remained committed to . . . inductive and parsimonious abstraction,” and that he thought the formal legal system “provides procedural consistency and evenhandedness, but does not aim at substantive justice in the particular dispute.”

In short, even after Kimball’s revision, Langdell remains firmly a classicist, at least in his contracts scholarship. Indeed, Kimball himself appears to conclude that Langdell was a “moral classicist” of the type identified by Siegel. Moreover, as I explain in the next section, there were striking similarities between Langdell’s classical common law vision and David Dudley Field’s proposed system of codification, at least as Carter portrayed it. Carter’s writings against the Civil Code thus indirectly demonstrate the stark contrast between his own jurisprudence and that of

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78. Id. at 323.
80. Id. at 346.
81. Id. at 382-86.
82. Id. at 391.
83. Id. at 394.
84. Id. at 395.
85. Id. Thomas Grey’s scheme thus remains a helpful tool for analyzing Langdell’s jurisprudence. Siegel has demonstrated that this scheme is useful for describing all classical legal thought, not just the sterile, amoral variety Langdell has long been thought to embody. See Siegel, Joel Bishop’s Orthodoxy, supra note 10, at 220-23; Siegel, John Chipman Gray, supra note 10, at 1518-27.
Langdell.\textsuperscript{86}

V. CODE FORMALISM AND ITS ALTERNATIVES

Carter depicted Field's code as striving for completeness, formality, and conceptual order at the expense of equitable outcomes. Indeed, as examined in detail below,\textsuperscript{87} Carter's crusade against codification was, above all, a battle against deductive reasoning. In his eyes, the primary advantage of the common law approach over code systems was the power common law judges possessed to resolve individual cases according to the demands of justice. Whereas codification would compel courts to decide particular matters by mechanical deduction from the principles and rules set forth in the code, the common law achieved case-specific fairness by avoiding such rigid formality. Although Carter mounted this justice-based defense of the common law against Field, not Langdell, he might as well have been arguing with the Harvard dean himself.

A. Formal Conceptualism in the Civil Law Tradition

Carter had good reason to equate codification with mechanical formalism, for such logical rigidity characterized the legal systems of the many civil law countries that had adopted codes over the previous hundred years. The drafters of the Prussian \textit{Landrecht}, enacted in 1794 under Frederick the Great, intended their enormous code to be complete—that is, to serve as the sole basis of decision for every case.\textsuperscript{88} The jurists who prepared the French Civil Code of 1804 (the \textit{Code Napoléon}) were aware of the Prussians' utter failure to articulate a rule for every fact situation. They thus embraced the much more modest goal of setting forth general principles and maxims to be developed and applied by judges and jurists. Nevertheless, the revolutionary impulses and rationalist tendencies of the early nineteenth century shaped the reception of the \textit{Code Napoléon} in France and in the many other European and Latin American countries that adopted it. In all these jurisdictions, the Code tended to be viewed as a

\textsuperscript{86} Carter himself never remarked on the similarities between code formalism and Langdell's jurisprudence. Oliver Wendell Holmes did, however. In 1887, he remarked, "It has long seemed to me that the ablest of the agitators for codification, [Englishman] Sir James Stephen, and the originator of the present mode of teaching, Mr. Langdell, start from the same premises to reach seemingly opposite conclusions. The number of legal principles is small, says, in effect, Sir James Stephen, therefore codify them. The number of legal principles is small, says Mr. Langdell, therefore they may be taught through the cases which have developed and established them." Oliver Wendell Holmes, \textit{The Harvard Law School: Judge Holmes' Oration}, 3 L.Q. Rev. 118, 121 (1887).

\textsuperscript{87} See infra Sections V.A., V.B.

\textsuperscript{88} JOHN HENRY MERRYMAN, THE CIVIL LAW TRADITION: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE LEGAL SYSTEMS OF WESTERN EUROPE AND LATIN AMERICA 29 (2d ed. 1987). The \textit{Landrecht} of 1794 contained over seventeen thousand provisions intended to resolve every possible dispute without any need for judicial interpretation. This quixotic effort was, of course, a failure, as uncertainties arose and courts were forced to interpret the code rather than apply it mechanistically. \textit{Id.} at 29, 39.
clear and complete source of all law. 89

In an influential work, *The Civil Law Tradition*, John Henry Merryman describes the general views that civil law countries share about the nature, source, and role of law. 90 The reality in civil law jurisdictions has always, inevitably, strayed from these ideals. Nonetheless, nineteenth-century jurists clung to these core principles stubbornly, even when violating them in practice. Modern civil law theorists, by contrast, have assumed an increasingly flexible attitude toward traditional civil law principles, although Merryman contends that the pure model continues to shape their mindset as a kind of "folklore." 91

At the center of the civil law tradition lay notions of legislative positivism and the separation of powers. Judges were meant to perform only the relatively minor function of mechanically applying statutory provisions to the facts at hand. 92 The lawmaking power lay solely in the legislature and, to the degree the legislature delegated it, in the executive and the administrative organs of the state. 93 In a codified legal system, such legislative positivism demanded that the code be totally coherent, consistent, and complete, so that judges had no room to make law themselves. 94 The insistence that judges not make law was joined to a related emphasis on the importance of legal certainty. Civil law jurists believed that certainty was best ensured by a decision-making process insulated from judicial discretion.

89. *Id.* at 32-33. Jeremy Bentham and John Austin, influential nineteenth-century legal philosophers in Great Britain, also shared the vision of a complete code, although they did not succeed in persuading their countrymen to enact one. MAURICE EUGEN LANG, CODIFICATION IN THE BRITISH EMPIRE AND AMERICA 28-58 (1924). German jurists quarreled about the possible adoption of a unified national code throughout much of the nineteenth century. The debate commenced with a famous 1814 exchange between Thibaut and Savigny over the advisability of codification. Savigny, who opposed codification, prevailed in this dispute, and his arguments gave birth to the historical school of jurisprudence. See generally Reimann, *supra* note 2. Nevertheless, a body of German jurists continued to push for codification, and they ultimately succeeded with the adoption of the German Civil Code of 1896, which went into effect in 1900.

90. Merryman defines a legal "tradition" as "a set of deeply rooted, historically conditioned attitudes about the nature of law, about the role of law in the society and the polity, about the proper organization and operation of a legal system, and about the way law is or should be made, applied, studied, perfected, and taught." MERRYMAN, *supra* note 88, at 2.

91. See, e.g., *id.* at 46-47. By presenting my discussion of the civil law tradition in the past tense, I thus do not intend to imply that the tradition is dead today.


93. Civil law jurists also recognized, through various intellectual contortions, that custom was a source of law, although a subsidiary and not especially significant one. MERRYMAN, *supra* note 88, at 23. Supporters of codification in America tended to downplay the importance of custom even in the common law system they sought to replace. New York Civil Code supporter Robert Ludlow Fowler remarked, "Even if Mr. Carter intended to refer to custom as a source of law, his reference entirely overlooks the fact that custom has never, in this State, been in any way a fertile source of law." ROBERT LUDLOW FOWLER, CODIFICATION IN THE STATE OF NEW YORK 9 (1884).

Another central feature of the civil law approach was its rejection of the authority of judicial precedent. Stare decisis was flatly inconsistent with civil law theorists' legislative positivism. Because judicial decisions were not themselves sources of law, courts could not be bound by prior decisions. Moreover, while many common law jurists viewed the doctrine of stare decisis as a foundation for certainty, their civil law counterparts tended to see any judicial power over legal development as fostering uncertainty. Therefore, in civil law countries, unlike in common law jurisdictions, there was no official judge-created body of law. Civil law judges felt freer than their English and American counterparts to depart from prior judicial interpretations of statutory provisions, even interpretations by higher courts.

If the code was supposed to be the sole basis for deciding every case, how did civil law jurists deal with situations in which there were gaps (lacunae) in the code, or in which the strict application of code provisions produced clearly inequitable results? In short, they adopted an approach to code interpretation similar to the conceptual logical formalism of Langdell's common law jurisprudence. James Herget and Stephen Wallace explain the dominant nineteenth-century civil law view concerning statutory gaps:

For the positivists there was no gap problem. The positive laws, including the authorized rules of construction and interpretation, were the only sources to which a judge could resort in deciding a case. . . . In this view, the law could not logically have any gaps. Law was autonomous, a closed universe of given rules. To admit of gaps would be to admit that judges could decide cases according to something other than law! Positivists would concede that there could be and were problems of legal construction and interpretation, and the application of law to a particular case could sometimes be difficult. But the problem was one of logic and the meaning of words.

Civil law thinkers manifested a similarly formalistic attitude toward the problem of unfair outcomes. They recognized that resolving matters through the mechanical application of code provisions would sacrifice case-specific fairness, but the dominant view in the civil law tradition was

95. Merryman, supra note 88, at 22, 36.
96. Id. at 49-50.
97. Id. at 46-47. Merryman notes that in modern practice, civil law judges are in fact influenced by prior decisions, even though stare decisis is not central to the civil law approach, as it is to the common law system. Id. at 47. See also Dawson, supra note 92, at 400-31.
98. James E. Herget & Stephen Wallace, The German Free Law Movement as the Source of American Legal Realism, 73 VA. L. REV. 399, 404 (1987). Civil law jurisdictions have gradually accepted the inevitability of lacunae and the appropriateness of judicial interpretation when they occur. However, to preserve the illusion that courts do not make law, many writers have extensively expounded on the supposedly nondiscretionary bases for such interpretation. See Merryman, supra note 88, at 43-46.
that the interest of certainty outweighs that of equity. 99 Merryman explains:

In its general sense, equity refers to the power of the judge to mitigate the harshness of strict application of a statute, or to allocate property or responsibility according to the facts of the individual case. . . . It is a recognition that broad rules, such as those commonly encountered in statutes, occasionally work harshly or inadequately, and that some problems are so complex that it is not possible for the legislature to dictate the consequences of all possible permutations of the facts. . . . It clearly implies a grant of discretionary power to the judge. But in the civil law tradition, to give discretionary power to the judge threatens the certainty of the law. As a matter of legal theory, the position has been taken that judges have no inherent equitable power. They may from time to time be granted authority to use equity in the disposition of a case, but this grant of power will be expressly made and carefully circumscribed in a statute enacted by the legislature. 100

Because equity was a legislative prerogative rather than a judicial one, a judge was not free to pursue justice in an individual case by departing from the clear application of an unambiguous provision. Describing the attitude of the dominant “exegetical school” of French jurists in the latter part of the nineteenth century, John P. Dawson writes, “It was improper to mention ‘equity,’ to assess the weight of competing interests, or make estimates of consequences.” 101 Jaro Mayda terms the prevailing approach to codes among nineteenth-century civil law jurists “exegetic positivism.” In his words, these jurists combined “the positivist myth that legislated law is exclusive and self-sufficient” with the “exegetic method . . . of erecting upon the legislative text a system of concepts handled in closed circuit by means of formal logic, independently of the changing world of facts.” 102

At the end of the century, some French scholars challenged this dominant mode of code interpretation. They recognized that “a mere self-contained body of logical rules failed before the infinite variety of problems which progressing industrialisation in particular raised in France as everywhere else.” 103 By far the most important such jurist was François Gény, who, in his influential Méthode d’Interprétation et Sources en Droit Privé Positif (1899), argued that a judge confronted with a gap in the law

100. *Id.* at 49.
101. DAWSON, *supra* note 92, at 394. Modern civil law jurists generally agree that courts can properly reinterpret statutory provisions to produce acceptable resolutions of cases in light of changing social circumstances. MERRYMAN, *supra* note 88, at 45-46. It is important to recognize, however, that such “evolutive interpretation” is deemed appropriate only when there is some ambiguity in the statute requiring interpretation in the first place. Much of the scholarship regarding “evolutive interpretation” is dedicated to establishing that such interpretation does not constitute judicial lawmaking. *Id.*
103. WOLFGANG GASTON FRIEDMANN, LEGAL THEORY 161 (1953).
must freely search for the rule of decision among the needs and values of society.\textsuperscript{104}

Gény was followed in the early twentieth century by the German "free law" school, including scholars such as Hermann Kantorowicz, Eugen Ehrlich, and Ernst Fuchs. These jurists, who were vital inspirations for Roscoe Pound and, through him, the American legal realists, expanded on Gény’s arguments with reference to the German Civil Code, which went into effect in 1900. They contended that the logical and conceptual method of code interpretation was a deceptive cloak for creative judging. They urged judges to candidly embrace their role as creative law makers and, with the aid of social science, to base their decisions on sources outside the formal law.\textsuperscript{105}

The debate between Carter and Field took place in the 1880s, however, without the benefit of these later insights by Gény and the free law theorists. In civil law countries that had embraced codes by that time, the vision of law as a logically deductive, self-contained system remained largely unchallenged. Therefore, Carter and his allies naturally assumed that codification would bring the same characteristics to New York law. Because they saw the common law as flexible and equitable, and valued it for these qualities, they were thus predisposed to oppose Field’s efforts.

B. The Contest over the Significance of American Codification

1. Field’s Modest Claims

Although Field and his allies eagerly trumpeted the proposed New York Civil Code’s coherence and clarity, they vigorously disclaimed any ambition of enacting a complete code that would be the exclusive source of law, as were the codes of continental Europe. Field remarked:

What do we mean by codification? Not that which many lawyers imagine it to be. They conjure up a phantom and then proceed to curse it and to fight it. Their imaginations portray it as a body of enactments governing and intended to govern every transaction in human affairs, present and future, seen and unforeseen [sic], universal, unchangeable and exclusive. That is not our meaning.\textsuperscript{106}

Field frequently reiterated this point, on one occasion punctuating it with a direct dig at Carter: "Nobody but an idiot supposes that."\textsuperscript{107}

The New York codifiers seem to have concluded that they had to frame

\textsuperscript{104} See MAYDA, \textit{supra} note 102, at 5-6; Herget & Wallace, \textit{supra} note 98, at 409-11.

\textsuperscript{105} On the free law movement, see Herget & Wallace, \textit{supra} note 98, at 411-17. On its influence on Pound and the realists, see \textit{id.} at 422-34.

\textsuperscript{106} Field, \textit{Codification}, \textit{supra} note 54, at 1-2.

\textsuperscript{107} REP. NINTH ANN. MEETING A.B.A. 68-69 (1886).
their proposal as a moderate one to win support from at least some members of the state’s relatively conservative bar.\footnote{8} Therefore, they usually presented the prospect of codification in evolutionary rather than revolutionary terms.\footnote{9} Field and his supporters frequently pointed out that the Civil Code was made up primarily of principles and rules already settled by common law judges.\footnote{10} Moreover, as discussed below, they suggested that the code would play a less dominant role in New York’s legal system than it did in civil law jurisdictions. Common law precedent would remain in force where not directly displaced by code provisions, and judges would continue to serve a vital function. Field’s proposal, they argued, would thus make the law of the state more certain and accessible while retaining the common law’s flexibility.\footnote{11}

To preserve an important role for the common law, Field granted the courts an important role in filling the Civil Code’s gaps. He directly addressed the phenomenon of gaps in the code’s introduction.

\begin{quote}
\textit{If there be an existing rule of law omitted from this Code, and not inconsistent with it, that rule will continue to exist in the same form in which it now exists ... and if new cases arise, as they will, which have not been foreseen, they may be decided, if decided at all, precisely as they would now be decided, that is to say, by analogy to some rule in the Code, or to some rule omitted from the Code and therefore still existing, or by the dictates of natural justice.} \footnote{12}
\end{quote}

By rules “omitted from the Code and therefore still existing,” Field meant common law doctrines developed by the courts.

Civil law theorists would have agreed with Field so far as he asserted that courts should decide cases not directly addressed by the code by using analogies to code provisions or, as a last resort, the principles of natural

\footnote{8}{See, e.g., \textsc{David Dudley Field, A Short Response to a Long Discourse: An Answer to Mr. James C. Carter’s Pamphlet on the Proposed Codification of Our Common Law} 8-9 (n.p. 1884) (“The objection once taken that [the Civil Code] proposed some changes ... this objection I say has been yielded to, in order to disarm the opposition; and as the Code now stands, it contains only a few inconsiderable changes from the existing law, and these such only as I think every one must admit to be desirable.”).}

\footnote{9}{See, e.g., \textit{id.} at 9 (“The truth is that all the cry about there being something dangerous or revolutionary in the Code is the offspring, either of malignant opposition, or ignorance, or of prejudice.”). The New York codifiers’ approach was thus very different from that of their counterparts in California. The latter, in light of California’s youth and its desire to achieve respect in other states and in foreign nations, decided that it was strategically wise to present codification as a revolutionary advance. Grossman, \textit{California Mentality}, supra note 2, at 635-39.}

\footnote{10}{See, e.g., \textsc{David Dudley Field, Law Reform in the United States and Its Influence Abroad} 17 (St. Louis, Review Publ’g 1891) (“Code, as used in [New York], does not mean a new system of law, or indeed new laws at all, but merely a compilation of existing law with needed amendments.”).}

\footnote{11}{This approach likely reflected not only political calculation, but also Field and his allies’ own common law breeding.}

\footnote{12}{\textit{Introduction, Civil Code}, supra note 28, at xix.}
Field diverged from his continental counterparts, however, by also allowing courts to continue to refer to the common law, a body of rules derived solely from judicial precedents. Robert Ludlow Fowler, the author of a major pamphlet supporting Field’s code, reassured his readers that codification would not “arrest the spontaneous development of the common law.” He declared, “All writers on codification agree that the development of new law beyond and in addition to that expressed in a code is inevitable . . .” In other words, the common law would live on to fill gaps in the code.

Lacunae were not the only problem intrinsic to codification, however; there was also the dilemma of inequitable outcomes resulting from the direct application of clearly applicable code provisions. As discussed above, civil law theorists generally thought it was better to accept the occasional unfair result than to sacrifice certainty or compromise legislative supremacy. In the paragraph from the introduction to the Civil Code quoted above, Field seemed to manifest a similar reluctance to permit courts to stray from the direct application of statutory provisions; he allowed the continuation of common law rules only when those rules were “not inconsistent with” code provisions. Fowler, however, suggested that courts might look to common law precedents to modify an unjust result even if the language of the Civil Code clearly dictated that result. He asserted that the anticodifiers erred by assuming that the Code provides for all cases and that new difficulties, clearly beyond the equity of the statute, will be dealt with improperly. If codification were, in fact, to put an end to the proper solution of new difficulties or to circumscribe the common law judicial powers, we might well pause before entering upon systematic codification.

The proposed Civil Code itself contained language demonstrating that Field was not quite a purist with regard to legislative positivism. The code was consistent with civil law theory so far as it declared: “Law is a rule of

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113. MERRYMAN, supra note 88, at 44-45.
114. Interestingly, Field suggested that even if common law precedents were preserved to supplement the code, his system still would not be complete, that is, it would not provide a solution for every case. He noted, “In cases where the law is not declared by the Code . . . [and] an analogy cannot be found, nor any [common law] rule which has been overlooked and omitted, then the courts will have either to decide, as at present, without reference to any settled rule of law, or to leave the case undecided, as was done by Lord MANSFIELD, in King v. Hay . . . trusting to future legislation for future cases.” Introduction, CIVIL CODE, supra note 28, at xviii. See MERRYMAN, supra note 88, at 39-40 (discussing similar approaches in France and Germany); Grey, supra note 5, at 7 n.20. Field thus indicated that the legal system he proposed for New York was not only incomplete, but also not comprehensive—certain matters would simply remain unresolved.
115. Fowler, supra note 93, at 52.
116. ld.
117. Supra text accompanying note 112.
118. Fowler, supra note 93, at 18-19.
property and of conduct, prescribed by the sovereign power of the state." Civil law jurists would not, however, have agreed with the next provision, which stated that "the will of the sovereign" was expressed not only by the Constitution and by acts of the legislature and subordinate legislative bodies, but also by "the judgments of the tribunals enforcing those rules, which, though not enacted, form what is known as the customary or common law."

Field thus enshrined the authority of judicial precedent in a manner totally alien to the civil law. He did not clearly explain in either his writings or the code itself whether court decisions interpreting code provisions should be treated as binding precedent. He left no doubt, however, that cases not covered by the code would be decided "precisely as they would now be decided," that is, based on prior court decisions and the doctrine of stare decisis (as well as by reference to other code provisions and natural justice).

Field's affirmation that the common law would survive codification, at least in the code's interstices, seems curious in light of his repeated attacks on the common law's "judge-made" character. After all, one of Field's primary arguments in favor of codification was that it would preserve the separation of powers. There is obvious tension between Field's acknowledgment of the continuing authority of judicial precedent and his argument that judicial lawmaking "will commend itself to no one in this country of popular institutions where it is a fundamental idea that the functions of government should be devolved upon distinct departments . . . ."

Perhaps, as an intellectual matter, Field resolved this dissonance by adopting John Austin's view that the legislature tacitly delegated its sovereign power to the courts for limited purposes. Field himself does not appear to have articulated this theory in writing. But Fowler, one of his more jurisprudentially sophisticated supporters, referred to Austin's argument, remarking: "The analytical jurists have demonstrated that under any advanced type of government laws are evolved in two modes, by the legislature proper, and by the various subordinate persons possessing law-

120. Id. § 3. The code then explicitly provided, "The evidence of the common law is found in the decisions of the tribunals." Id. § 5.
121. See supra text accompanying note 54; see .
122. Field, Reasons for Adoption, supra note 28, at xvi.
123. Id. § 3. The code then explicitly provided, "The evidence of the common law is found in the decisions of the tribunals." Id. § 5.
124. See supra text accompanying note 54; see also Introduction, CIVIL CODE, supra note 28, at xxi-xxiii, xxx-xxxiii (other articulations of the separation of powers point).
making powers. Among the latter are the judges . . . ."\textsuperscript{126}

By denying that his code was meant to be a complete system of law, Field resisted his opponents’ charge that he was a grandiose idealist, dedicated, like England’s Jeremy Bentham, to extirpating the common law and making the law judge-proof. The political advantages of Field’s modest pose were clear. It allowed code supporters to present Field’s scheme as an incremental, pragmatic step rather than a wholesale rejection of Anglo-American jurisprudence. Fowler observed, “Mr. Field has always, in . . . respect [to the issue of completeness], rejected the notions of his scientific allies, thereby giving . . . evidence of the eminently practical direction of his labors.”\textsuperscript{127}

2. Carter’s Depiction of Field as Legal Imperialist

By contrast, it behooved Carter, as the leader of the anticodification forces, to magnify the differences between Field’s proposal and the common law status quo. If the proponents of codification could persuade legislators that the Civil Code was merely an inoffensive, sensible way to make the law more certain and accessible, Carter and his colleagues would have a difficult time defeating it. They thus had to present a convincing case that Field’s plan would suddenly, significantly, and detrimentally transform New York’s legal system.

As mentioned previously, Carter and his allies pointed accusingly to numerous unacknowledged substantive alterations to the state’s law contained in Field’s Civil Code. The anticodifiers argued not only that these revisions would foster general confusion, but also that many of the particular changes were unwise, or even corrupt.\textsuperscript{128} But in Carter’s view, the real radicalism of Field’s code lay not in its substantive content, but in its ambition to provide the sole basis for deciding every single case. He contended that the code would supplant decisional law more completely than Field acknowledged and would reduce judges’ role to the mechanical application of statutory language. In short, Carter attempted to portray Field’s Civil Code as an arrogant, grand scheme that would render New York’s legal system indistinguishable from that of Napoleon’s.\textsuperscript{129}

Carter’s portrait of Field as a jurisprudential revolutionary hinged on his assertion that Field intended the Civil Code to be a complete system of law. Carter sneered at his rival’s claim that the code did not profess to

\textsuperscript{126} Fowler, supra note 93, at 9.
\textsuperscript{127} Id. at 52. Fowler makes clear that by “scientific” codifiers, he means Bentham and Austin, among others. Id. at 40-41.
\textsuperscript{128} See supra text accompanying note 41.
\textsuperscript{129} Carter frequently emphasized that codes were characteristic of despotic states, whereas the common law typified democracies and free societies. See, e.g., Carter, Proposed Codification, supra note 43, at 6-9.
provide for all future cases, but only "to give the general rules upon the
subjects to which it relates, which are now known and recognized."¹³⁰
Field could have put such an explicit limitation in the code itself, Carter
observed, but he did not do so, because "this would have utterly destroyed
his code, qua code, by converting it into a ridiculous digest."¹³¹ Carter
concluded that Field "either did not mean that his code should have the
limited operation he asserts for it, or he intended to conceal his meaning
while he was urging its adoption."¹³²
Carter argued that a complete code was simply incompatible with jus-
tice, for no code could ever contain a sufficient number of rules to fairly
resolve every dispute that might arise. He summarized the problem as fol-
lows:

Codification . . . consists in enacting rules, and such rules must, . . .
from their very nature, cover future and unknown, as well as past and
known cases; and so far as it covers future and unknown cases, it is
no law that deserves the name. It does not embody justice; it is a
mere jump in the dark; it is a violent framing of rules without refer-
ence to justice, which may or may not rightly dispose of the cases
which may fall under them.¹³³

In the introduction to his Civil Code, Field disclaimed any intent to offer
a rule for every case. He asserted that the code "cannot provide for all
possible cases which the future may disclose. It does not profess to pro-
vide for them. All that it professes is to give the general rules upon the
subjects to which it relates which are now known and recognised."¹³⁴ Carter
pointedly responded that the code’s generality was in fact its most
insidious feature.

This notion that the operation of a rule may be restricted by making it
more general, seems highly absurd. Every one must see that the more
general an enacted rule is, the more of future unknown cases it will
cover. Suppose a general rule were enacted that promises made upon
consideration were binding. This, if it is made to mean anything,
means that all such promises are binding, and the rule would cover a
multitude of invalid promises, such as those made by infants or in-
sane persons, or fraudulent promises, or promises against public pol-
icy.¹³⁵

A code could be universally fair only by setting forth every exception to
every rule, and then every exception to every exception. As Carter ob-

¹³⁰. Introduction, Civil Code, supra note 28, at xviii.
¹³¹. CARTER, ORIGIN, GROWTH & FUNCTION, supra note 44, at 274.
¹³². Id. at 274.
¹³³. CARTER, PROPOSED CODIFICATION, supra note 43, at 33.
¹³⁴. Introduction, Civil Code, supra note 28, at xviii.
¹³⁵. CARTER, ORIGIN, GROWTH & FUNCTION, supra note 44, at 274.
served, drafting such a code was an impossible task, because the complex
affairs of society generated an innumerable variety of disputes and thus an
innumerable variety of ethical problems. 136 In short, Carter concluded that
because the very process of reasoning from the general to the particular
conflicted with the demands of justice, codification would inevitably pro-
duce unfair outcomes.

3. The Derogation Rule and the Example of California

Carter’s assertion that the Civil Code’s text alone would dictate the re-
sult of almost every case had a firm basis in the language of the draft code
itself. The provision affirming the continuing authority of the common
law, discussed above,137 seemed to be largely negated by two other provi-
sions. One of these stated, “In this State there is no common law, in any
case, where the law is declared by the five Codes.” 138 In other words, the
code would sweep away all judicial precedents in its path. Another sec-
tion ensured that this path would be a wide one. It declared, “The rule that
statutes in derogation of the common law are to be strictly construed, has
no application to this Code.” 139 This provision was critical, for the com-
pleteness of the code hinged on it.

The Civil Code’s provision regarding derogation abandoned a canon of
statutory construction generally observed by American courts. As one late
nineteenth-century treatise writer wrote, “[I]n this country, the rule has as-
sumed the form of a dogma, that all statutes in derogation of the common
law, or out of the course of the common law, are to be construed
strictly.” 140 Another scholar elaborated, “It is not presumed that the legis-
lature intended to make any innovation upon the common law further than
the necessity of the case required.” 141

California, which, as discussed above, enacted a revised version of
Field’s Civil Code in 1872, ultimately embraced the derogation rule in an
effort to combine the benefits of codification with the flexibility and fair-

136. CARTER, PROPOSED CODIFICATION, supra note 43, at 36.
137. Supra text accompanying note 120.
138. CIVIL CODE, supra note 119 § 6.
139. Id. § 2032. Interestingly, sections 6 and 2032 appeared almost as far apart in the Civil Code
as possible; the latter was the third-to-last section. It is possible that Field separated them to obscure
their combined impact.
141. 2 JOHN LEWIS, SUTHERLAND’S STATUTES AND STATUTORY CONSTRUCTION 862 (2d
ed. 1904). This appears to be a paraphrase of 1 JAMES KENT, COMMENTARIES ON AMERICAN LAW 464
(New York, O. Halsted 1826). Roscoe Pound later condemned the derogation rule as an obstacle to
necessary legislative innovation. He researched its history and acidly concluded that “this wise and
ancient rule of the common law is, in substance, an American product of the nineteenth century,”
rooted in judicial antipathy toward legislative intrusion. Roscoe Pound, Common Law and Legisla-
tion, 21 HARV. L. REV. 383, 402 (1908). As discussed below, however, in the context of the codifica-
tion debate, the derogation rule was embraced not to undermine progressive legislation, but to preserve
for codified jurisdictions the flexibility and fairness of common law decision making.
ness of common law decision making. In 1884, John Norton Pomeroy, an eminent treatise writer and the first dean of the Hastings College of Law, published an influential multipart article entitled *The True Method of Interpreting the Civil Code*, in which he opposed making the Civil Code the sole, or even the primary, source of California law. He argued that judges should instead view the Civil Code, whenever possible, as merely a declaration of existing common law rules and interpret it using common law precedents.

Except in the comparatively few instances where the language is so clear and unequivocal as to leave no doubt of an intention to depart from, alter, or abrogate the common-law rule concerning the subject matter, the courts should avowedly adopt and follow without deviation the uniform principle of interpreting all the definitions, statements of doctrines, and rules contained in the code in complete conformity with the common-law definitions, doctrines, and rules, and as to all the subordinate effects resulting from such interpretations.  

As one scholar has observed, Pomeroy’s purpose was to establish a method by which the code would be read “as completely as possible as if it did not change a thing.” The California Supreme Court explicitly adopted Pomeroy’s interpretive method in 1888.

In 1885, shortly after Pomeroy’s death, the Association of the Bar of the City of New York’s Special Committee to Urge the Rejection of the Proposed Civil Code resolved that Pomeroy’s article be reprinted and circulated in New York to illustrate the dangers of enacting Field’s code. The ABCNY issued it as a pamphlet titled *The “Civil Code” in California*. Because the Civil Code enacted in California was largely identical to the New York draft, Pomeroy’s criticisms were especially useful to the New

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142. *John Norton Pomeroy, The ‘Civil Code’ in California* 51 (1885) (reprint of John Norton Pomeroy, *The True Method of Interpreting the Civil Code*, 3 W. COAST REP. 585, 657, 691, 717 (1884); 4 W. COAST REP. 1, 49, 109, 145 (1884)). Although the language of the California Civil Code offered a somewhat better basis for Pomeroy’s interpretive approach than did Field’s New York draft, it was hardly clear what method of interpretation the California version called for. The California Code Commissioners had added a section to Field’s code stating, “The provisions of this Code, so far as they are substantially the same as . . . the common law, must be construed as continuations thereof, and not as new enactments.” CAL. CIV. CODE § 5 (1872). However, this section, which seemed to support the application of the derogation doctrine championed by Pomeroy, was paired with one revoking the doctrine in language equivalent to that in the Field code. *Id.* § 4 (1872). The relationship between these apparently inconsistent provisions was perplexing. Not surprisingly, Pomeroy did not refer to them at all in setting forth his argument. For a general discussion of the complicated relationship between the California Civil Code and the common law, see Izhak Englard, *Li v. Yellow Cab Co.—A Belated and Inglorious Centennial of the California Civil Code*, 65 CAL. L. REV. 4 (1977).


144. *Sharon v. Sharon*, 16 P. 345 (Cal. 1888). The *Sharon* court’s embrace of Pomeroy’s mode of interpretation was, however, apparently limited to unclear code provisions, like the one at issue in that case. The court did not consider Pomeroy’s contention that even an unambiguous code provision should be construed as a continuation of the common law, including subordinate common law rules inconsistent with the code’s text.
Yorkers' anticodification campaign.\textsuperscript{145} He blasted Field's work as a bramble of "defects, imperfections, omissions, and . . . inconsistencies," the uncertainty of which was exacerbated by the drafters' "unnecessary practice of abandoning well-known legal terms and phrases . . . and of adopting instead thereof an unknown and hitherto unused language and terminology."\textsuperscript{146} Pomeroy argued that the theory of interpretation he recommended would ameliorate the confusion caused by these flaws.\textsuperscript{147}

More important for purposes of this discussion, Pomeroy also criticized the overgenerality of the Civil Code's provisions.

In considering the language of the civil code, the fact must be constantly remembered that it does not purport to embody in a statutory form all of the existing rules of the law upon any subject whatsoever. It contains only general definitions, the statements of general doctrines, and a few very special rules. The great mass of the special rules of the law, applicable to particular circumstances, may be to some extent inferences from the doctrines which are formulated, but they are certainly not expressed in the text of the code.\textsuperscript{148}

Pomeroy argued that because the Civil Code omitted most rules governing particular fact situations, it engendered unfair outcomes. He explained, "Statutory rules once enacted cannot be readily modified and expanded by the courts so as to cover new facts and relations not included within their expressed terms."\textsuperscript{149} Pomeroy asserted that this rigidity was a major flaw, for an ideal legal system "should be flexible, containing provisions for exceptions to [its] general requirements, so that when a case does not fall within the reason, although it may within the letter, of a regulation, it shall not be controlled by such rule contrary to justice and equity."\textsuperscript{150}

In Pomeroy's view, if a codified doctrine were "interpreted textually, with no reference to the pre-existing law," it would be "rigid and inflexible in its operation, and capable of applying to one condition of fact alone."\textsuperscript{151} Consequently, "[a]ll the flexibility, justice, and equity of the common law doctrine would be lost at one blow."\textsuperscript{152} Pomeroy contended that the only way to solve this problem was by embracing a strong version

\textsuperscript{145} In a prefatory note to the pamphlet, the special committee remarked that because the California code was "for the most part, a copy" of Field's proposed Civil Code for New York, Pomeroy's conclusions were "of peculiar value to the legislators of New York, and to all others whose duty or curiosity may excite in them an interest in the question of Codification of the Common Law." Special Committee of the New York City Bar Association to Urge the Rejection of the Proposed Civil Code, Introduction to POMEROY, supra note 142, at 3.

\textsuperscript{146} POMEROY, supra note 142, at 6-7.

\textsuperscript{147} Id. at 7.

\textsuperscript{148} Id. at 32.

\textsuperscript{149} Id. at 53.

\textsuperscript{150} Id. (quoting from his own treatise, MUNICIPAL LAW).

\textsuperscript{151} Id. at 55.

\textsuperscript{152} Id.
of the derogation rule, that is, "by interpreting all the provisions of the code as declaratory of the common law or equitable doctrines and rules, unless the intent to make a change clearly appears from the unequivocal language of the text."153 In other words, judges should reject a direct textual approach and instead read each code provision as "simply declaratory of the established common law general doctrine, without modification," so that "all the special rules on the subject, laid down by the courts, by which persons are declared to be liable under a great variety of special circumstances, would still remain in full force . . . ."154

In short, Pomeroy maintained that the Civil Code should play an extremely minimal role in California's legal system. He urged judges to turn to the common law, not only to clarify ambiguities and resolve conflicts in the code, but also to derive lower-level rules that were flatly inconsistent with the code's general language. He asserted that courts should not "interpret each provision of the code textually, according to its literal terms, without reference to the pre-existing law or equity."155 Pomeroy's court-centered vision of code interpretation stood in stark contrast to the legislative positivism of civil law jurists, and his condemnation of how the Civil Code's general provisions produced unfair outcomes in specific cases posed a challenge to all European-style codification.

Although Pomeroy and Carter, working on opposite coasts, appear to have arrived at their conclusions independently, they offered many parallel arguments.156 Carter echoed Pomeroy's criticisms of the Civil Code's ambiguities and gaps.157 More important, Carter voiced similar concerns about the code's excessive generality. He, too, believed that the instrument's broadly-stated provisions were ill-equipped to address the manifold variety of factual circumstances confronted by courts. Indeed, Carter took this argument farther than Pomeroy; whereas the Californian did not reject the theoretical possibility of a satisfactory complete codification,158 Carter argued that justice was so fact-specific that no code could, even in theory, resolve every case fairly. In other words, because the very notion of codi-

153. Id. at 62.
154. Id. at 63.
155. Id. at 62.
156. Carter apparently wrote his first anticodification pamphlet, THE PROPOSED CODIFICATION OF OUR COMMON LAW, in late 1883, and it was published in early 1884. Pomeroy's series of articles appeared in the WEST COAST REPORTER shortly afterward, in September and October 1884. Neither author mentioned the other in these works.
157. See, e.g., CARTER, PROPOSED CODIFICATION, supra note 43, at 104 (The Civil Code's provisions on the Law of General Averages are "heavily charged with both mischievous uncertainty and with positive error."); CARTER, ARGUMENT, supra note 43, at 24 (quoting Pomeroy's assertion that the code was "full of defects, imperfections, omissions, and even inconsistencies").
158. See POMEROY, supra note 142, at 67 ("It may be possible to draw up a code of the private civil jurisprudence, to which the principle of interpretation which I have thus advocated would not necessarily apply.") Nevertheless, Pomeroy indicated that it would be extraordinarily difficult to draft a code clear, complete, and flexible enough to make his nonderogation approach unnecessary.
Carter, like Pomeroy, believed that the liberal application of the derogation doctrine would help assuage the problems caused by codification, and he highlighted the Civil Code's express abrogation of the derogation rule as evidence of Field's jurisprudential imperialism. However, unlike Pomeroy, who was attempting to minimize the negative effects of an already-enacted code, Carter was fighting to prevent codification from occurring in the first place. Therefore, instead of dwelling on the benefits of the derogation rule, Carter concentrated on preserving New York's uncodified status. Nevertheless, Pomeroy and Carter made essentially the same argument, namely, that a code unmoored from the common law was deficient because cases decided under it were resolved, based not on the justice of the particular situation, but on cold deduction from principles and rules.

In light of this reasoning, Carter's outrage at the prospect of codification would have been hollow if the common law was itself characterized by soulless logical reasoning. He had to explain how the common law, unlike a code system, provided case-specific justice. In doing so, Carter, as shown below, painted a most un-Langdellian portrait of the manner in which common law judges decided cases.

VI. CARTER'S UN-LANGDELLIAN COMMON LAW METHODOLOGY

Both Langdell and Carter recognized that deducing the solution to specific cases from general rules was sometimes incompatible with justice. They responded to this tension in opposite ways, however. Langdell, in Thomas Grey's terms, permitted "acceptability... to influence decision only subject to the constraint of universally formal conceptual order."163

159. See infra Section VI.B.

160. CARTER, ORIGIN, GROWTH & FUNCTION, supra note 44, at 308.

161. In contrast to Pomeroy, Carter did not discuss the derogation rule extensively. Roscoe Pound was thus wrong when he caustically identified Carter as one of the leading proponents of the rule. Roscoe Pound, The Scope and Purpose of Sociological Jurisprudence, 24 HARV. L. REV. 591, 601 (1911). Pound intimated that Carter's support of the doctrine was part of a general attack on progressive legislation. In fact, however, Carter discussed the derogation rule in a context wholly unrelated to progressive reform. He pointed to the Civil Code's explicit renunciation of the rule simply to support his contention that Field intended to totally uproot the common law. CARTER, ORIGIN, GROWTH & FUNCTION, supra note 44, at 308-10.

162. If the New York legislature had adopted Field's code, New York courts would have had more trouble than California courts concluding that the derogation principle should guide code interpretation. While both the California Civil Code and Field's New York draft contained explicit rejections of the derogation principle, the California version, unlike the New York one, counterbalanced this provision with another declaring, "The provisions of this Code, so far as they are substantially the same as... the common law, must be construed as continuations thereof, and not as new enactments." See supra note 142.

163. Grey, supra note 5, at 15. The same could be said of Langdell's classicist disciple on the Harvard faculty, Samuel Williston. Williston observed, "[I]n trying to do justice between parties to a
Carter, in a reversal of this formula, believed that formal conceptual order should affect the resolution of particular cases only subject to the constraint of acceptability.

Impelled by his opposition to codification, Carter thus articulated a vision of the common law that is difficult to characterize as classical at all. In Grey’s terms, “[T]he heart of classical theory was its aspiration that the legal system be made complete through universal formality, and universally formal through conceptual order.” 164 Carter certainly viewed the common law as a complete legal system, that is, one that provided a correct solution for each and every case. In his mind, however, neither conceptual order nor formal reasoning was a significant factor in the common law’s completeness. Allusions to the conceptual and formal aspects of the common law occasionally appeared in Carter’s writings, just as references to justice sometimes showed up in Langdell’s. But for Carter, conceptual and formal considerations were never especially important and were always strictly subsidiary to the goal of resolving each case equitably. Carter was not an amoral classicist, or even a moral classicist, but a non-classical moralist.

Carter’s portrait of common law decision making is, in critical respects, one that most modern scholars would not associate with Gilded Age jurists. It is, instead, reminiscent of the legal realists who rebelled against Langdell’s legacy in the twentieth century. When reading the following examination of Carter’s common law method, it is interesting to keep in mind that many aspects of his approach—his anticonceptualism, his anti-formalism and rule skepticism, his restrictive approach to stare decisis, his belief in the importance of extralegal sources—anticipated trends usually thought not to have flowered in the United States until after his death. Later in this Article, I will address the similarities between Carter and the legal realists in detail.165

A. Carter’s Rejection of Conceptualist Formalism

Thomas Grey explains, “A legal system is conceptually ordered to the extent that its substantive bottom-level rules can be derived from a small number of relatively abstract principles and concepts, which themselves form a coherent system.” 166 By this definition, Carter’s common law was

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164. Grey, supra note 5, at 11.
165. Infra Section VIII.
166. Grey, supra note 5, at 8.
an almost entirely nonconceptualist system.

Carter sometimes paid lip service to the benefits of systematic order in law. For example, even as he rejected codification, he acknowledged:

A book containing a statement in the manner of a Digest, and in analytical and systematic form of the whole unwritten law, expressed in accurate, scientific language, is indeed a thing which the legal profession has yearned after. . . . It would refresh the failing memory, reproduce in the mind its forgotten acquisitions, exhibit the body of the law, so as to enable a view to be had of the whole, and of the relation of the several parts.167

On another occasion, Carter observed that “whoever aspires to be a thoroughly accomplished lawyer” must “comprehend [legal] rules as parts of a classified and orderly system exhibiting the law as a science.”168

However, Carter never viewed the systematic presentation of law as more than a somewhat useful mnemonics device and research aid for practicing lawyers. He did not believe that a desire for conceptual order had shaped the common law in the past, and he vigorously rejected any attempt to allow such an aspiration to guide its development in the future. He derided English codifiers, like Jeremy Bentham, John Austin, and James Fitzjames Stephen, who complained that the common law was “destitute of system.”169

Their views . . . are the views of professors of law, whose lives are devoted, not like those of lawyers and judges, to the practical administration of law, but to teaching it, and lecturing about it. . . . The defect thus suggested is, in a practical point of view, of but a moderate degree of importance. If justice is, in fact, in any nation well administered, if the affairs of men are regulated by a wise and cultivated body of legal rules, and if these can be learned by the professional class with such certainty as to enable it to furnish trustworthy advice and guidance, the mere circumstance that such rules cannot be found set down in words and arranged in orderly and systematic form, is not, of itself, a very serious matter.170

Carter rejected the notion that rules of decision were logically deduced from a coherent system of abstract principles. He mocked Bentham for “imagining that a system of law could be created per saltum by spinning out through purely logical processes the consequences of a series of original intellectual conceptions.”171

The lack of conceptualism in Carter's common law jurisprudence

167. CARTER, PROPOSED CODIFICATION, supra note 43, at 96-97.
168. CARTER, ORIGIN, GROWTH & FUNCTION, supra note 44, at 1.
169. CARTER, PROPOSED CODIFICATION, supra note 43, at 71.
170. Id. at 72-73.
171. Id. at 70.
emerges clearly from his descriptions of how courts resolved cases for which there was no direct precedent. Classicists suggested that judges addressed such situations by determining the appropriate top-level general principle and then deductively deriving a lower-level rule for the case at hand from that principle. In 1891, Ezra Thayer (who would later become Dean of Harvard Law School) described the process as follows:

If the present facts do not directly fall within any case, or any hard-and-fast rule already settled, the first inquiry of the judge is for decided cases similar to this. Instances are produced, each showing the law on a particular state of facts, and presenting an analogy to the case in hand more or less direct. These cases are scrutinized, classified, distinguished; the wider principles which they illustrate, and which are claimed by the contending parties to include the present case, are determined and tested by a comparison with other branches of the law; and thus a decision is finally reached.\[172\]

Thayer thought that this entire process—both the “extraction” of the broader principle from the precedents and the correct resolution of the case at hand by deduction from that principle—were formal and nondiscretionary.

It is true that with a new state of facts it is in a sense impossible to say, under our system, that the law exists before the case is decided. Yet if principles exist which make it certain how the case will be decided, it is the same, from a practical point of view, as if the law previously existed.\[173\]

Carter occasionally described the common law method for deciding new cases in a way that, on the surface, seemed somewhat similar to the classical approach. For example, he wrote:

Judges and advocates—all together—engage in the search. Cases more or less nearly approaching the one in controversy are adduced. Analogies are referred to. The custom and habits of men are appealed to. Principles already settled as fundamental are invoked and run out to their consequences; and finally a rule is deduced which is declared to be the one which the existing law requires to be applied to the case.\[174\]

Carter’s references to “rules” and “analogies” and “deduction” give a formal veneer to this passage, the most classical account of common law decision making he ever articulated. But even here, his allusion to “customs and habits” hints at the profound difference between his approach.

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173. Id. at 181 n.2. Thayer repeatedly uses the word “extract” to describe the first stage of the process. Id. at 182-84.
and that of Langdell, who denied considerations of "acceptability" any determinative force in the lower levels of his system. Indeed, immediately following this passage, Carter elaborated on his description in a way that further manifested the contrast between him and the classicists.

In all this, the things which are plain and palpable are, (1) that the whole process consists in a search to find a rule; (2) that the rule thus sought for is the just rule—that is to say, the rule most in accordance with the sense of justice of those engaged in the search; (3) that it is tacitly assumed that the sense of justice is the same in all those who are thus engaged—that is to say, that they have a common standard of justice from which they can argue with, and endeavor to persuade each other; (4) that the field of search is the habits, customs, business and manners of the people, and those previously declared rules which have sprung out of previous similar inquiries into habits, customs, business and manners. 175

As Thomas Grey observes, Langdell excluded fairness concerns from the lower levels of his system because "to let considerations of acceptability directly justify a bottom-level rule or individual decision would violate the requirement of conceptual order, on which the universal formality and completeness of the system depended." 176 By contrast, Carter welcomed direct considerations of the customary standard of justice into the lower levels of his system—conceptual order be damned.

Carter often seemed to omit higher-level abstract concepts from his common law jurisprudence altogether. In the classical orthodox approach, there were relatively few general principles (concepts such as consideration in contract and proximate cause in tort), but they were numerous enough to form a coherent system unto themselves and occupy law students for three full years. 177 Carter, by contrast, reasoned down from just one broad principle: be fair. In his own words, "Apart from, and independent of, known facts, there is no such thing, in human apprehension, as law, except the broad and empty generalization that justice must be done." 178

The classicist Ezra Thayer identified Carter's neglect of principles and rules as the chief flaw in his jurisprudence. After criticizing Bentham for focusing only on abstract rules and overlooking their application to facts, Thayer continued:

Some of [Bentham's] opponents, on the other hand, lay hold of what may be called the fact end of the process, the end which is especially emphasized by common-law methods, and forget the rule... Mr.

175. Id.
176. Grey, supra note 5, at 15.
177. See id. at 9 (identifying consideration and proximate cause as classical concepts).
Grossman... seems especially open to this charge of considering only the facts on the one hand and the source of law [that is, custom] on the other, and of squeezing out, so to speak, the *tertium quid*, the rule itself, which lies between. 179

The contrast between Carter and Langdell is exemplified by their respective discussions of ratified infant contracts, the one legal problem they both addressed at some length. Under the common law, a minor (an “infant” in legal parlance) lacks capacity to contract, and any contract he enters into is therefore voidable. In other words, if an individual enters into a contract with a minor and then sues under the contract, the minor can successfully defend himself by pleading the defense of infancy. What is the correct result, however, if the defendant, out of the goodness of his heart, reaffirms his contractual obligation after he reaches the age of majority and is then sued under the contract? In general, promises made without consideration are not actionable. Nevertheless, since 1586, the common law has treated such ratified infant contracts as binding. 180 Langdell’s and Carter’s explanations for this result were markedly different.

Langdell derived almost all of contract law from the principle of bargained-for consideration. Consequently, he embraced the common law’s longstanding view that a promise is not binding if the promisor is simply affirming the existence of a moral obligation to perform. 181 In such an instance, even if the promisee previously provided the promisor with something of value, no contract exists because the current (renewed) promise did not induce the consideration. 182 Langdell criticized the contrary position, adopted by the great English jurist Lord Mansfield.

Whether [Mansfield’s] theory was that the antecedent moral obligation furnished a sufficient consideration for the promise, or that such a promise was binding without a consideration, may not be clear; but the former theory is the one that has commonly been attributed to him, and hence the moral obligation which was supposed to make the promise binding has acquired the name of moral consideration. The other theory, however, would have been less untenable, and less mischievous in its tendency. It would indeed have been liable to the serious objection of involving judicial legislation, but the theory of moral consideration was liable to the much greater objection, at least in a scientific point of view, that it could only succeed at the expense

181. LANGDELL, *supra* note 76, at 89-90.
of involving a fundamental legal doctrine in infinite confusion.183

In Langdell's eyes, Mansfield was not only wrong, but wrong in a way that undermined the conceptual order of the common law of contracts.

Still, Langdell had to confront the inconvenient fact that courts, in Mansfield's time and since, actually did enforce various types of gratuitous promises to do what the promisor was already under a moral obligation to do—including, for example, promises to pay debts contracted during infancy.184 Langdell struggled to justify the courts' recognition of ratified infant contracts in a manner consistent with his scientific approach. In other words, he sought to explain the doctrine in a way that neither violated the principle of bargained-for consideration nor depended on the courts' moral judgment. He arrived at the following rationalization:

The contract of an infant, not being void, but merely voidable, can be ratified by the infant after he comes of age, and a new promise operates as a ratification. The action, however, must be brought on the original contract, and the new promise must be used simply to repel the defence of infancy in the event of its being pleaded.185

Langdell thus unpersuasively suggested that the upholding of ratified infant contracts was the inexorable result of logical deduction from higher principles.

Carter, by contrast, felt no impulse to force this problem into a conceptual scheme. It is worth quoting Carter's analysis at length to highlight the difference between him and Langdell.

What did the judge do to whom the case was first submitted of a contract made by an infant and ratified after he became of age? He observed that it was an infant's contract, and therefore at first it seemed assignable to [that] excepted class; but he noticed the new feature of ratification after full age. He recurred to the instances which made up the class of infants' contracts. He found that none of them exhibited this feature. He then inquired whether that feature was a material one; that is to say, whether the case ought to go into the same class with the others, or into a new class to be made for it with different legal consequences for its characteristic. In this inquiry the action of his predecessors supplied him with no controlling guide. He was obliged to determine for himself. And what was the real problem which he had to solve? Simply this: what does justice require? He was to apply to this case the social standard of justice; not simply to repeat what had been done before, but to make an original application

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183. LANGDELL, supra note 76, at 89.
184. Other examples provided by Mansfield and noted by Langdell were promises to pay debts barred by the statute of limitations and promises by bankrupt individuals to pay debts from which they had been discharged. Id.
185. Id. at 91.
of it. He was not, however, without aids which his existing knowledge supplied. He found indeed that there was no new consideration for the ratification; but he also found that, in prior cases, the courts had enforced promises in the nature of ratification. He found that the original consideration was perfect, and the subsequent ratification sufficient evidence that the original contract was not tainted with any unfairness or imposition. Justice, as he understood it (and his understanding presumably represented that of the society in which he lived), required that this contract should be performed; in other words, that a new class be made for such cases.

In this passage, Carter makes nods to formal reasoning, and even conceptual reasoning, but these elements ultimately bend to the needs of justice—not, as for Langdell, the other way around.

B. "Rules Are Made For Fools"

Carter traveled extensively overseas with John Cadwalader, a prominent New York City lawyer and perhaps his closest friend. On one such occasion, when they were vacationing together at a hunting lodge in Scotland, Cadwalader wrote a letter home in which he remarked, "Carter says—who plays Bridge according to his own rules—that Rules were made for fools."

In law, as in card games. Carter frequently exhibited a striking degree of skepticism about legal rules. In other words, he rejected not only conceptualist formalism, but even nonconceptualist formalism. A legal system does not have to conceptualist to be formal. A jurist may embrace concrete bottom-level rules without demanding that they be derived from a coherent system of higher level principles. As Thomas Grey remarks, "Non-conceptualist formalism is a common attitude among lawyers; they want clear rules, but place little importance on more abstract doctrinal formulations." Carter, however, often seemed to deny the very possibility of determinate legal rules.

As discussed above, Carter argued that the main problem with codification was the injustice that inevitably resulted when courts applied general rules to particular circumstances. Carter sometimes followed this line of reasoning to its ultimate conclusion—a rejection of legal rules themselves.

It is of the essence of a... rule that it creates, or supposes, a class of instances to which it is to be applied. The class may be narrowly and cautiously limited; but within its scope it embraces future and unknown, as well as present and known cases. The essential nature of

186. CARTER, PROVINCES, supra note 43, at 26-27.
188. Grey, supra note 5, at 9 n.29.
classification consists of selecting qualities of objects, and declaring that all which possess such qualities, whatever others they may exhibit, belong to the class. When, therefore, any case arises for disposition under a Code, if it present the features belonging to a class created by it, it must be dealt with the same as other instances in that class, no matter what additional and theretofore unknown features it may present, which ought to subject, and would have subjected, it to a wholly different disposition, had the new features been present to the mind of the codifier. . . . No rule whatever can be framed which will not do this.

Carter maintained that the common law was superior to a code system precisely because it could resolve every matter equitably, in light of the particular facts. Because the very notion of a rule implies some degree of generalization, Carter sometimes depicted the common law as avoiding rules altogether.

It was difficult, however, for Carter to square his rule skepticism with the common law doctrine of stare decisis. After all, the vast body of judicial precedents set forth innumerable bottom-level rules that supposedly provided an uncontroversial basis for resolving many cases. If a judge hearing a matter found a prior case with essentially identical facts, stare decisis ordinarily demanded that he decide the case at hand the same way. Carter, a successful practitioner, recognized the power of precedent. Indeed, at times, he discussed the role of precedent in a manner that made him sound like a rule-bound formalist.

[A] large number of [judgments] declare that the particular transactions described are like, or substantially like, some other transactions which had previously engaged the attention of the courts and had been decided in a particular way, and the like decision is therefore made in the particular case under consideration; in other words, the case is decided by an appeal to known precedent, or to known precedents. . . . The operation . . . of the tribunals has consisted simply in scrutinising the features of the transactions and placing them in some already determined class in which they belonged, the judgment pronounced being nothing but the legal consequence of the fact that they belonged to a particular class.

Carter acknowledged that the doctrine of stare decisis sometimes denied common law judges the flexibility they needed to keep the law in line with changing social norms. He maintained that legislation was warranted in such situations.

[S]ociety in its progress and development outgrows its old usages and essays to form new ones. The uniformity and persistency at which

the judicial office always aims, become a barrier to this development; and
the need is felt of an agency less fettered by precedent and
clothed with a power somewhat resembling the creative function. It
is the office of legislation to supply this need. 191

Nevertheless, if Carter had adopted a stringent version of stare decisis,
he would have undermined his own primary argument for the superiority
of the common law over a code—namely, that the former, unlike the lat-
ter, was capable of resolving each case according to the dictates of justice.
The common law’s embrace of binding precedent potentially made it just
as vulnerable as a code to the charge of sacrificing fairness for certainty.
Field and his allies frequently made precisely this assertion. Field pointed
out that “the Courts have not greater liberty to decide right without a code
than with it. The rules which govern the Judges in their decisions are con-
tained in precedents.” 192 To emphasize the contrast between the common
law and codification, Carter thus had to downplay the significance of stare
decisis.

Consequently, Carter whittled away the doctrine into insignificance. First,
he argued that the only relevant data emerging from a precedent
were the facts and the result.

The judge never undertakes to decide anything more than the precise
case brought before him for judgment. He considers the facts of that
case, and . . . he pronounces judgment, and there stops. He does not
even declare, at least not as a necessary part of his function, what the
law is. He is not bound to write an opinion. He usually does write
one, stating his views upon the legal questions. But this is of no
binding force. The strictest doctrine of stare decisis requires subor-
dinate tribunals to follow, not the opinion, but the judgment; and the
obligation is of no force in a future case presenting materially differ-
ent aspects. If the court in its opinion lays down rules in general
terms which might embrace cases differing from the one decided,
such declaration of rules is provisional only, and subject to modifica-
tion in any future case presenting materially different features. 193

As Carter noted in the last sentence of this quotation, a common law
judge is not bound by a precedent if the case at hand presents facts “mate-
rially different” from the prior decision. The second critical feature of
Carter’s effort to cabin stare decisis was his embrace of an extremely lib-

192. Letter from David Dudley Field to the California Bar, in 1 SPEECHES, ARGUMENTS, AND
MISCELLANEOUS PAPERS OF DAVID DUDLEY FIELD, supra note 122, at 354. Robert Fowler similarly
argued: “Another great objection to case-law is that the vast agglomeration of decisions tends to make
the law one of precedent and not one of principle; judges and lawyers are so overwhelmed and con-
founded by the array of authority that in desperation they shield themselves behind some ill-
considered precedent without regard to substantial justice in the given case. Fowler, supra note 93,
at 49.
193. CARTER, PROPOSED CODIFICATION, supra note 43, at 27.
eral view of what constituted "material" distinctions. In his eyes, virtually every case heard by a court was a "new" case. He recognized that the "great mass of the transactions of life are . . . repetitions of what has before happened—not exact repetitions, for such never occur—but repetitions of all substantial features."194 But such transactions rarely generated legal disputes, because "they have once or oftener been subjected to judicial scrutiny and the rules which govern them are [therefore] known. They arise and pass away without engaging the attention of lawyers or the courts."195 Those cases that reached a courtroom were, for the most part, "exceptional" cases.196 "The great bulk of . . . litigation springs out of transactions which present material features never before exhibited, or new combinations and groupings of facts."197

Carter emphasized that the "infinite number of diversities" in human affairs generated countless new questions of fairness. "In the State of New York, each successive day witnesses acts, millions in number, each one of which may, by possibility, become the source of dispute, and call for judicial decision, and no two of them be alike!"198 And because society constantly evolved, there would never be a shortage of fresh problems for courts to address. Carter explained:

The notion that society ever has reached, or ever will reach, a state of equilibrium and rest, so that the transactions of tomorrow will be mere repetitions in substance of the transactions of to-day [sic] is a vain illusion. There is no part of the universe which is not forever under the dominion of change, and no where [sic] does it proceed with such activity as in the realm of man.199

If virtually all cases heard by the courts exhibited novel material features, the significance of stare decisis was limited indeed. Carter asserted that a judge hoping to decide a case solely by reference to reported precedents would almost always discover that "there is no rule truly 'known' which governs it."200 The rules pronounced by judges in prior cases "are to be taken in reference to the facts which have elicited the opinions . . . and whenever a case arises presenting different aspects, the rule is subject to modification and adaptation as justice or expediency may dictate."201

Carter viewed justice as so fact-specific that at times he seemed to challenge the very notion of framing legal rules in advance. He virtually sneered at the "vast body of so-called rules found in our digests and trea-
tises and mentioned in the reports of decided cases. . . None of them are absolute. They are all provisional and subject to modification."\textsuperscript{202} He declared:

\textit{The fact must always come before the law.} Apart from known, existing facts, present to the mind of the judge . . . he cannot even ask, and still less answer, the question, what is the law? . . . \textsuperscript{[P]}rivate law does not consist in a series of logical deductions drawn from original definitions and capable of existing independently of the material, or moral world.\textsuperscript{203}

Carter pithily summed up his rule skepticism as follows: "[A]ll \textit{just} law . . . can have, in human apprehension, no existence apart from the facts."\textsuperscript{204}

It bears repeating that Carter did not deny that judicial precedents were relevant to common law decision making. They provided analogies and helped guide the court's inquiry. In Carter's words, the judge's task was "to apply the existing standard of justice to the new exhibition of fact, and to do this by ascertaining the conclusion to which right reason, aided by rules already established, leads."\textsuperscript{205} Carter's antiformalism lay in his conviction that precedents, though useful, did not ordinarily provide an indisputable rule of decision for the case at hand. He explained:

It is not that no rule is known which is applicable to the transaction; there may be many which have a bearing on it. Several different rules—all just in their proper sphere—are competing with each other for supremacy. The question is not whether the rules are right or wrong; they may all be right; but which must give way to the other; or whether a modified and partial operation must not be given to all, or some. It would be a fatal error to force upon such transactions a rule which had arisen out of different ones. It would be sacrificing justice for the sake of uniformity, whereas diversity is everywhere the characteristic of justice.\textsuperscript{206}

This discussion anticipated, by almost half a century, legal realist Walter Wheeler Cook's well-known assertion that "legal principles—and rules as well—are in the habit of hunting in pairs."\textsuperscript{207}

\textbf{C. The Question of Certainty}

Carter's depiction of the common law seemed to sacrifice certainty for

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{202} Carter, Origin, Growth & Function, supra note 44, at 233.
\item \textsuperscript{203} Carter, Provinces, supra note 43, at 28.
\item \textsuperscript{204} Carter, Proposed Codification, supra note 43, at 32.
\item \textsuperscript{205} Id. at 29-30.
\item \textsuperscript{206} Carter, Provinces, supra note 43, at 35.
\item \textsuperscript{207} Walter Wheeler Cook, Book Review, 38 Yale L. J. 405, 406 (1929). For a further discussion of this parallel, see infra text accompanying notes 284-286.
\end{itemize}
the sake of fairness. This was a risky strategy, for the uncertainty of the common law was one of the main themes of codification proponents. According to code advocates, this uncertainty was caused primarily by the obscurity of common law reasoning and the uncontrolled proliferation of precedents. Carter's contention that the fact-specific common law did not establish clear rules in advance of actual disputes provided his opponents yet another basis for maintaining that the existing system was too uncertain. Robert Fowler, for example, acknowledged that the common law might more flexibly resolve problems raised by peculiar constellations of facts, but he denied that codification "increases the proportion of injustice in the given case . . . to such an extent as to outweigh the benefits to be derived from the added certainty and the compactness of expression found in a code." Carter did not view the issue of certainty as a vulnerability, however. First, he argued that regardless of codification's effect on certainty, the "necessity of enforcing justice in particular instances . . . is imperative, and can be subordinated to no other object." Then he went further, attacking the codifiers' premise that statutory law offered greater certainty than the common law. Indeed, he confidently asserted that the common law was more certain than a codified system.

Carter did not hold up the common law as an absolute guarantor of legal certainty. Rather, he asserted that uncertainty was unavoidable in any legal system because it "proceeds from causes quite beyond human control." It was not "the fault of lawyers or judges, or of the system of our jurisprudence" but rather "inherent in the order of nature." Uncertainty was inevitable because the endless emergence of unique factual circumstances constantly raised new ethical problems. "It should [be] remembered, that the questions with which the law deals, and consequently the law itself, are incessantly changing. Most of the uncertainty and doubt does not arise in consequence of any failure to settle old questions, but from the perpetual birth of new points of controversy." Carter urged his readers not only to acknowledge this uncertainty, but to embrace it.

Nor is this uncertainty to be deprecated. It is rather to be welcomed, met, and surmounted. It is the discipline of human nature. It furnishes the conditions upon which moral and intellectual progress are made. "Progress is the child of struggle, and struggle is the child of difficulty." What would become of science, reason, and morals, if new problems were not incessantly presenting themselves for solu-

208. Morriss, supra note 2, at 369.
209. Fowler, supra note 93, at 13.
211. Id. at 114.
tion. What progress would be possible in law, if justice could be frozen into a rigid body of unchangeable rules?\textsuperscript{214}

Carter readily acknowledged that under the common law, the answer to novel questions was sometimes unclear to the citizenry until judges, the experts on the application of the social standard of justice, resolved them. Nevertheless, the common law provided the people with a solid ground of day-to-day certainty, because it was based on their own customary morality. They could conduct their affairs with "ordinary prudence . . . in the full confidence that the rules of law which govern their transactions, should they ever be challenged, would be the simple dictates of justice and common sense intelligently ascertained and applied."\textsuperscript{215}

In a code system, by contrast, courts' decisions were based not on the social standard of justice, but on the words of a statute. Carter argued, first, that this approach engendered uncertainty because "human language is, at best, so inaccurate an instrument, there being often numerous different senses in which the same word is understood that there are, and always will be, a multitude of doubts concerning the meaning of the best drawn statutes."\textsuperscript{216} An even more important cause of uncertainty in a code system, according to Carter, was the irresistible tendency of law to conform to the social standard of justice, even in the face of unambiguously contrary statutory language.

Whenever a statute is found to work injustice in consequence of the failure of its framers to suitably provide for cases which they could not foresee, an opposition arises against the operation of the law. If the injustice be gross, the moral sense is shocked. . . . The courts recoil from the office of enforcing the law. Doubts are entertained concerning the meaning of the statute. The plain sense of the words is insisted upon by one side, the improbability that such injustice could have been intended, by the other. The difficulty is usually resolved by the employment of the subtle arts of interpretation, and the obvious meaning of the language is expounded away in the favor of the interests of justice. Who does not know that of all the manifold sources of uncertainty in law none is so fruitful as the attempt to apply a statute to a case falling within its terms, but which, not having been foreseen by its framers, does not fall within its spirit?\textsuperscript{217}

In short, Carter asserted that the common law's embodiment of customary morality did not make it less certain than a codified system. To the contrary, the common law's reflection of the social standard of justice was the very source of its superiority in this respect.

\textsuperscript{214} CARTER, PROVINCES, supra note 43, at 37.
\textsuperscript{215} CARTER, PROPOSED CODIFICATION, supra note 43, at 37.
\textsuperscript{216} Id. at 83.
\textsuperscript{217} Id. at 37-38.
D. Law Outside the Books

Carter's conviction that justice ("acceptability" in Thomas Grey's terms) should be the ultimate determinant of every case required not only that he relegate, and sometimes entirely reject, classical ideals such as conceptualism and formalism, but also that he embrace a very un-Langdellian view of the sources of law. Langdell asserted that "law is a science, and... all the available materials of that science are contained in printed books." 218 For the Harvard dean, the common law decisions stored in the law library were "the ultimate sources of all legal knowledge." 219 Carter, by contrast, did not believe that law could autonomously generate a correct solution to every case. He thus recognized, at least by the end of his career, that judges often had to look outside the law books.

Interestingly, Carter initially seemed to embrace what legal realist Jerome Frank would later (in reference to Langdell) deride as "library law." 220 Carter's early attitude may have been related to his role as the first president of the Harvard Law School Association, the institution's alumni organization. Langdell's innovative case method, premised on the theory that the common law was a self-sufficient coherent system, was a great point of pride for the school. 221 At the Association's first meeting, in 1886, Carter delivered an address in which he praised the case method and thus articulated a book-centered vision of law.

I think that the methods that are now pursued, so far as I understand them, are a vast improvement over those with which I was acquainted when I was a member of the School. What is it that students go to a law school to learn?... What is this thing which we call "law," and with the administration of which we have to deal? Where is it found?... It is found, and it is alone found, in those adjudications, those judgments, which from time to time its ministers and its magistrates are called upon to make in determining the actual rights of men.... The purpose of [the case method] is to study the great and principal cases in which are the real sources of the law, and to extract from them the rule which, when discovered, is found to be superior to all cases. 222

How did Carter reconcile his assertion that law was found only in reported cases with his belief that judges resolved cases according to the so-

219. Id.
221. For Langdell's introduction of the case method and its influence at Harvard and other institutions, see generally William P. Lapiana, Logic and Experience (1994).
cial standard of justice? Ultimately, he could not do so, but it took him a while to recognize the tension. In The Provinces of the Written and the Unwritten Law (1889), Carter maintained that by linking the law to the social standard of justice, he did “not, of course, mean to imply that the judge . . . makes any direct inquiry into public opinion.” He continued:

The fabric of the national law is a vast system of rules which are the product of that opinion, gathered from time to time by the labors of his predecessors, aided by the skill and learning of a numerous professional body . . . . It is here that the social standard of justice stands ascertained and declared; and the function of the judge is to apply it, as it has been applied before, or, when new questions arise, to determine them according to the analogies which the system reveals to him.

Even in this case-centered description of judicial decision making, Carter acknowledged, if only indirectly, that the common law was not entirely autonomous. After all, if judicial precedents reflected the social standard of justice, principles external to “law in the books” must have entered the common law system somehow. In Provinces, Carter suggested that judicial decisions reflected the social standard of justice as an inevitable consequence of the fact that judges were “in close intercourse and sympathy with the mass of the people.” In other words, popular customs shaped the law even if judges looked only at case reports. Carter explained that the social standard of justice “is ascertained and made effective by the judges, who know it and feel it because they are part of the community.”

The next year, Carter started explicitly to back away from his suggestion that the common law was simultaneously autonomous and a product of the social standard of justice. In The Ideal and the Actual in the Law (1890), as noted previously, Carter asserted that the “field of search” in which judges looked for the law was “the habits, customs, business and manners of the people, and those previously declared rules which have sprung out of previous similar inquiries into habits, customs, business and manner.” Carter now apparently recognized that judges purposively examined not only law books, but also society itself.

Near the end of the final lecture of Law: Its Origin, Growth, and Function (1907), his posthumously-published book, Carter revisited the topic of Harvard Law School’s case method. This time, he qualified his praise of the method in a way that illustrates how far he had traveled from Lang-

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224. Id. at 13.  
225. Id.  
226. Id. at 48.  
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dell’s “library law.” Perhaps out of loyalty to his alma mater, which had 
offered to host the (never-delivered) series of lectures the book comprised, 
Carter acknowledged that Harvard’s case method was the “correct” ap-
proach for teaching law students. But now, in stark contrast to his 1886 
speech, and in terms that foreshadowed legal realism, he emphasized how 
little a purely case-educated law school graduate really knew about law.

These volumes [of reported cases] . . . are but a part of the great terri-
tory of fact which it is the business of the lawyer and jurist to ex-
plore. Life itself is a moving spectacle of numberless forms of con-
duct the study of which is necessary to the full equipment of the 
lawyer or the judge. . . . Herein we find the reason why lawyers of 
sound practical sense and knowledge of affairs so often acquit them-
seves both at the Bar and on the Bench better than others who may 
be much more accomplished in the learning of books. They have 
been studying diligently and to good purpose the facts of human con-
duct as they are displayed in the great book of life. The actual meth-
ods and systems of trade, commerce, and finance embrace great 
realms of fact in which legal principles lie implicit and disclose 
themselves to careful investigation. All the actions of men . . . are the 
proper theme of the lawyer’s study. And then too there is the internal 
world, the realm of consciousness, equally necessary to be studied 
and equally fruitful in results, for it is here that the secret springs, the 
real causes of all conduct are discerned.228

Carter’s critique of the case method echoes his assessment of Langdell 
himself. In 1869, when Harvard president Charles Eliot was considering 
appointing Langdell as the dean of the law school, he sought and received 
Carter’s opinion. Carter, who had known Langdell since they attended 
college and law school together at Harvard, praised him as a “scholar of 
the first order.”229 He then, however, remarked on Langdell’s limited suc-
cess as a practitioner and ascribed it to Langdell’s idealistic refusal to soil 
himself with the muck of “the world as he found it.”230 Carter observed 
that “if [Langdell] is wanting in any of the qualities, which you are seek-
ing to secure, it will be found to be in aptitude of affairs and the skill and 
resources to deal with society and men as he finds them.”231

Carter’s portrait of Langdell as a detached intellectual, ill-suited for 
practice, raises the question of whether Carter’s own jurisprudence was 
shaped in part by his long experience as a practicing lawyer. As I will dis-
cuss later in this Article,232 Carter’s career as a litigator may have instilled

228. CARTER, ORIGIN, GROWTH & FUNCTION, supra note 44, at 338-39.
229. Letter from James C. Carter to Charles W. Eliot, President, Harvard University (Dec. 20, 
1869) (quoted in LAPIANA, supra note 221, at 12-13).
230. Id.
231. Id.
232. See infra Section VIII.
in him an anticonceptualist and antiformalist outlook on law that undergirded his jurisprudential arguments against the Civil Code. Interestingly, the anticodification writings of other practicing attorneys show similar qualities.

VII. THE ANTICLASSICAL APPROACH OF OTHER ANTICODIFICATION WRITERS

Stephen Siegel, commenting on my earlier work on Carter, suggests that Carter’s location “outside the fold of classical legal thought” was “idiosyncratic” in the Gilded Age. However, an examination of the writings of contemporaneous anticodification writers demonstrates that Carter was no maverick.

A. Albert Mathews

Albert Mathews was a lawyer who helped Carter organize the Association of the Bar of the City of New York in 1869. In 1881 (two years before Carter wrote his first anticodification pamphlet), Mathews prepared *Thoughts on Codification of the Common Law*, a tract that the ABCNY printed and circulated as part of its campaign against Field’s Civil Code. In this piece, Mathews explored the sources and nature of the common law in order to explain its superiority to a code system. In doing so, he, like Carter, drew a picture of the common law in which conceptual order was largely absent and formal reasoning was, at most, a minor feature.

Mathews placed justice at the center of his jurisprudence. He defined the *unwritten law* (that is, the common law) as “the recognized will of [a] community . . . based upon its notions of natural justice, good morals, and good policy.” Mathews’ chief argument against codification, like Carter’s, was that justice was too fact-specific to be embodied in generally applicable rules. He, too, was concerned about the “single additional, or omitted circumstance” that might make the application of a rule unfair in a new case.

To attempt to create a code of laws out of abstract notions of justice . . . would not be very likely to be successful. It might be comparatively easy to lay down a few simple abstract rules, but so soon as the law-giver descended to particulars, in the absence of concrete facts to guide his judgment, the laws of his imaginary empire would be, necessarily, either tyrannical or abortive. It seems to be a task

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234. MARTIN, supra note 37, at 15.
236. *Id.* at 16.
beyond the wit of man to foresee [sic] what special cases may arise, or thus to provide for contingencies that he cannot anticipate.\(^\text{237}\)

Mathews, sounding strikingly like Carter, concluded that “when [a] rule is to be found only in the Procrustean Bed of a written Code, the letter of the statute must prevail over any fitting modification of that rule which unforeseen circumstances may come to require, and justice may be thus surely defeated.”\(^\text{238}\)

According to Mathews, the common law, in contrast to a codified system, could resolve each matter fairly. It could “be adapted, by wise administration, to the exigencies of particular cases of conflict as they arise.”\(^\text{239}\) Mathews’ stress on the “plastic” nature of the common law impelled him, like Carter, to narrow the doctrine of stare decisis into practical insignificance. He argued that each precedent was

necessarily limited to the precise concatenation of facts. . . . It is the duty of a court of justice to ascertain and apply [the unwritten law] so far only as respects the particular concrete combinations of facts properly presented to it requires. . . . [I]t is no part of its province to formulate general rules, or even principles, beyond what the particular case before it demands.\(^\text{240}\)

Mathews’ de-emphasis of the force of precedent also provided him with a response to the codifiers’ claim that the vast, unorganized body of common law cases was too burdensome for practicing lawyers. He was untroubled by the accumulation of precedents, he explained, because they themselves did not constitute the law. “Cases are not principles; they are only valuable as illustrations. If they are not beneficial no one is compelled to use them; and, whoever wastes his time on them, may blame none but himself.”\(^\text{241}\)

Mathews vigorously rejected the notion that common law judges “made” law.\(^\text{242}\) He did not, however, devote much effort to explaining where judges “found” the law, if they did not make it. Mathews did not believe that courts decided cases through inexorable logical deduction; he expressly denied that the common law was “an exact science.”\(^\text{243}\) Moreover, he did not explicitly assert, as Carter would, that the “social standard of justice” or “custom” provided the objectively correct answer for every case. Ultimately, Mathews’ answer to the code proponents’ charges of common law judicial lawmaking boiled down to a meek, “You, too.”

\(^{237}\) Id. at 13-14.
\(^{238}\) Id. at 16.
\(^{239}\) Id.
\(^{240}\) Id. at 15.
\(^{241}\) Id. at 22.
\(^{242}\) Id. at 23-26.
\(^{243}\) Id. at 21.
argued, "Whether formulated by a Code, or illustrated by a precedent, such rules must still be applied to cases as they arise, according to judicial 'notions of reason and justice.'"  

Mathews would leave it to Carter to construct a detailed theory as to how common law decision making could be both nondiscretionary and invariably fair.

B. R. Floyd Clarke

In 1898, another New York practitioner, R. Floyd Clarke, published a lengthy book titled *The Science of Law and Lawmaking*. This volume, written for laymen, was, in essence, an extended jurisprudential attack on codification.

Like Carter, Clarke maintained that justice should be the central value of law. He contended that law “involves politics, political economy, and ethics.” Clarke also echoed Carter’s argument that codification would undermine the law’s moral basis. He described code decision making as a process of deductive reasoning, from general rules to specific facts. He explained:

Under the Code System the rule prescribed deals with something which is never found in actual life. The Code rule deals with a certain combination of facts which never occurs solely, or alone, in the outside world. The Code rule deals, therefore, with an abstraction of the human mind, and not with the facts as they exist.

The problem with this type of reasoning, for Clarke as for Carter, was that it inevitably led to unjust decisions. "Where... questions of equity or inequity arise, dependent upon different combinations of fact, it is not always easy to lay down beforehand a rule which will produce a correct decision of all the possible cases that may arise.“

Clarke asserted that common law decision-making “attempts to arrive at a fair and just result in the particular case.” He contrasted the wholly inductive approach of the common law with the deductive reasoning that characterized a codified system. "The first and most important investigation [of the common law judge] is into the facts of the particular case—facts which have already happened and are now presented for observation

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244. *Id.* at 25.
245. *R. Floyd Clarke, The Science of Law and Lawmaking: Being an Introduction to Law, a General View of Its Forms and Substance, and a Discussion of the Question of Codification* (1898). It is unclear why Clarke published such a book when he did, more than a decade after Field’s effort to codify New York’s private law had gasped its final breath in the state legislature.
246. *Id.* at 24.
247. *Id.* at 255.
248. *Id.* at 25.
249. *Id.* at 239.
250. *Id.* at 238. *Induction* describes reasoning from the particular to the general; *deduction* describes reasoning from the general to the particular.
and decision. Given the facts, the attempt is made to decide the case so that justice will result."251 In classicist common law methodology, the induction of general principles from specific cases was followed by the deductive derivation of the rule for the case at hand. Clarke, by contrast, excluded deduction from the common law process altogether. He acknowledged that the common law judicial method often seemed deductive on the surface, because the court invoked previously established general principles. But he continued:

Even in these instances, however, the true inductive nature of a common law decision is manifest; for the selection of the general rule which shall be applied to the facts of the given case is not dependent on a hard and fast interpretation of the language in which such general truth has been expressed, as including or not including the case in question, but rather upon a process of classing the individual case by its facts with cases of like combinations of fact, and so bringing it under a general principle which, when applied to the facts, will produce substantial justice.252

For Clarke, as for Carter, the driving principle behind every common law decision was "Let justice be done in this case."253 And, as Ezra Thayer pointed out in criticizing Carter, this principle cannot be the basis for a coherent system of logically derived rules. Indeed, Clarke explicitly downplayed the benefits of "formal organization." He acknowledged that codes were superior to the common law in this respect, but he continued:

The advantage to be derived from scientific excellence in this particular may, however, be obtained at too great a cost.

For it must ever be borne in mind that the phenomena a system of justice deals with, are the special disputes among men; not the abstract conceptions of general principles. The excellence of a system depends upon whether, in effect, justice is done between man and man.254

Clarke, a notably mediocre thinker, tried awkwardly to impose an almost Langdellian language of logic over his justice-centered vision of the common law. Nevertheless, despite his muddled talk of induction and deduction, of rules and principles, Clarke ultimately manifested little concern for either conceptual order or formality. For him, as for Carter, these values were subsidiary to achieving an acceptable decision in each case. Clarke made this point clear in summarizing the common law method of judging:

251. Id. at 249.
252. Id. at 250.
253. Id. at 240.
254. Id. at 309-10.
The great mass of existing rules and exceptions established by de-
cided cases, and apparently affecting the decision to be made, are
sifted and explained, limited and followed, with a view, upon the
principles of logic, equity and political economy applicable, to make
those apply which will produce the desired just result in the case at
hand.\footnote{Id. at 239.}

Whereas Carter clung to the notion that common law decisions were
nondiscretionary because judges derived them from a homogeneous social
standard of justice, Clarke, writing two years before the turn of the cen-
tury, took the modernist step of portraying the common law as almost en-
tirely untethered. He bluntly spoke of judges “creating” legal rules\footnote{See, e.g., id. at 238.} and
freely described the common law as “judge-made law.”\footnote{See, e.g., id. at 98, 238.} Despite this
difference, however, the two lawyers fully agreed that the common law’s
goal was case-specific justice and that conceptual order and formal reason-
ing played only a minimal role in common law decision making.

VIII. PRACTITIONERS’ JURISPRUDENCE?

The codification debate, more than any other issue of the late nineteenth
century, forced practicing lawyers to grapple publicly with large jurispru-
dential questions. The struggle against codification thus inspired an ex-
traordinary flowering of literature in which attorneys defending the com-
mon law, such as Carter, Mathews, and Clarke, thoughtfully examined
their role, and that of judges, in the existing legal system.\footnote{For other illustrations of this literature, see, for example, DANIEL H. CHAMBERLAIN, UNANSWERABLE OBJECTIONS TO CODIFICATION (n.p., n.d.); WILLIAM B. HORNBLOWER, IS CODIFICATION OF THE LAW EXPEDIENT? (n.p., 1888); THE ARGUMENTS OF THE HONORABLE WILLIAM D. SHIPMAN AND FREDERIC R. COUDERT, ESQUIRE, BEFORE THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE OF THE SENATE OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK (Worcester, Mass., Press of Chas. Hamilton 1881); JOHN R. STRONG, A MEMORANDUM UPON THE PROPOSED “CIVIL CODE” (New York, Henry Bessey, Printer 1884); Thomas Thacher, The Law's Uncertainty, 23 J. SOC. SCI. 125 (1887).} The vision of
the common law they articulated in these writings was probably shaped in
part by their experience as practitioners.

Because litigators tend to focus on the facts of particular cases and on
the flexibility of legal rules, they may have been particularly inclined to
reject the conceptual formalism embodied by both complete codification
and Langdellian classicism. Perhaps the daily representation of clients in
actual matters led Carter and other practitioners to focus on fine factual
distinctions more than on abstract principles. In a speech to graduating
law students at Columbian University (now George Washington Univer-
sity), Carter offered advice on “how to direct your attention when you
come to engage in the practical work of the lawyer.” He told the students:

Inasmuch as your science consists in the observation of facts with which it deals, and those facts are the transactions of men, you cannot study them too closely. You will often find, what every practicing lawyer has found, that much of the difficulty and uncertainty you meet with in the study of any particular case does not come, as one is apt to think, from ignorance of the law, but from a too hasty and insufficient observation of the facts. . . . It has often happened to me that clients would come to me with cases in respect to which they would have an undoubting conviction that the right was on their side, an opinion I was not able at first to confirm, but, upon subsequent reflection, I would become converted to their views. The reason was that I would be thinking upon the abstract rules of law instead of closely studying the facts, while they, living and moving in the facts and in the customs and usages which men observe, really possessed views of the law clearer and juster than my own.

Carter’s practice experience may also have instilled in him a belief in the contingency and manipulability of legal reasoning. In the same speech, Carter remarked:

The lawyer is not charged in any case with the duty of finally determining which side is right, but of finding grounds and reasons for defending the side upon which he is retained. . . . Lawsuits are not conflicts in which all arguments upon the one side are right and upon the other wrong; they are conflicts between rival and competing rules and principles, all of which are true within certain limits but some of which must give way to the superior force of others.

Although Carter never abandoned his conviction that there was, in fact, a correct answer to every case, he attributed the law’s determinacy not to the legal reasoning process, but to the social standard of justice on which the law was based.

Even though Carter took obvious pride in his own erudition, there is an anti-intellectual undercurrent to his writing, directed at those who devoted their lives entirely to affairs of the mind. He described supporters of codification in dismissive terms similar to those he used to characterize Langdell. Jeremy Bentham was “a man of pre-eminent intellectual ability, but not an experienced lawyer, or a safe guide upon any subject.” The codifiers’ calls for more systematic order were “the views of professors of

260. Id.
261. Id. at 12.
262. CARTER, PROPOSED CODIFICATION, supra note 43, at 70.
law, whose lives are devoted, not like those of lawyers and judges, to the practical administration of law, but to teaching it, and lecturing about it.\textsuperscript{263}

Clarke, like Carter, suggested that his anticodification stance, and his anticonceptualism generally, derived from insight he acquired as a practicing lawyer.

No amount of theory is equivalent to actual practice; and in generalizing on a subject without actual contact with the things themselves, we are apt to lose sight of facts, and be misled by false analogies. In reading the theoretical jurists, a practical lawyer receives the impression that had Bentham, Austin, and some others, ever taken an active part in the actual practice of law... they would have preferred as a practical guide the incoherent mass of material preserved in our common law reports to the most scientific code that the human mind could possible produce.

The philosopher in his closet, viewing all things by the dry light of generalization, naturally loses sight of the individual cases, and the difficulties inherent in their true solution. His only problem is to generalize these cases into some order and coherence...

The practitioner, on the other hand, looks only at the problem of the special case presented. His difficulty is to find light to guide him to a correct decision of the case in hand...\textsuperscript{264}

This is not to say that Gilded Age practitioners unanimously opposed codification. After all, David Dudley Field himself was an active attorney. Moreover, at its 1886 annual meeting, the American Bar Association, by a vote of 58 to 41, adopted the following resolution offered by Field: "The law itself should be reduced, so far as its substantive principles are settled, to the form of a statute."\textsuperscript{265}

Nevertheless, in considering the attitudes of practicing lawyers toward codification, it is important to define carefully what is meant by the term \textit{codification}. Clarke, like Carter, railed against a complete code that "professes to, and is intended to, state all the rules that may be applicable to that province of the law of which it is a Code."\textsuperscript{266} The lawyers attending the 1886 ABA meeting were not opining on such an instrument. Field, in his comments preceding the vote, emphasized the limited significance of his resolution. He stressed that a vote for the resolution did not represent support for general codification, but merely for the position that principles

\textsuperscript{263} Id. at 72.
\textsuperscript{264} CLARKE, supra \textit{note} 245, at 100.
\textsuperscript{265} REP. NINTH ANN. MEETING A.B.A., \textit{supra} \textit{note} 107, at 74.
\textsuperscript{266} CLARKE, \textit{supra} \textit{note} 245, at 97.
of law should be stated in statutory form when it was feasible to do so.\textsuperscript{267} And although he remarked that he personally supported the adoption of a code, he emphasized that he did "not mean by it a book which shall contain within its covers all the rules of law which are to govern all the transactions of men in all future time."\textsuperscript{268} In short, the ABA’s approval of Field’s resolution cannot be interpreted as anything like an endorsement of European-style complete codification.

Supporters of codification viewed the practicing bar not only as a barrier to enacting a code, but also as a primary cause of the legal uncertainty and disorder they were striving to alleviate in the first place. The \textit{Albany Law Journal}, in an article supporting codification, thus asserted that lawyers should not be involved in drafting the code. The article maintained that the practicing lawyer has been, as it were, counting the bricks in every case he argued before a bench or jury, instead of considering the philosophy and higher analogies of the legal principles involved. . . . Arguments of particular points, even of law and not of fact, are arguments on facts, and not on the expansiveness of laws or of their natural relations to one another, but only on their relation to facts. . . . The facts in each case admit of no deduction. It is only the law involved in these facts that admits of such ratiocinative development. . . . [The practicing lawyer’s] functions . . . savor too much of the concrete to foster a philosophic spirit. . . . His eloquence, poetry, imagination, rhetoric and philosophy, all have a point that are [sic] fit only for lodgment in earth, and not for the broad basis of philosophical structures.\textsuperscript{269}

Although practicing lawyers do not usually think of themselves as jurisprudential thinkers, they inevitably develop jurisprudential notions. They do not frequently articulate these broad legal theories, even to themselves. At times, however, a controversy arises in the world of legal practice that requires members of the bar systematically to analyze the overall nature of the system within which they work. The codification dispute of the late nineteenth century was such a moment. And the resulting portrait of the common law painted by these lawyer-jurists was resoundingly different from that offered by Christopher Columbus Langdell. Instead, the anticodifiers’ vision of the common law foreshadowed, by several decades, the views of the aggressively anti-Langdellian legal realists.

IX. CARTER AND LEGAL REALISM

After World War I, the assault on legal classicism in general, and on

\textsuperscript{267} \textit{REP. NINTH ANN. MEETING A.B.A.}, \textit{supra} note 107, at 66, 68.

\textsuperscript{268} \textit{Id.} at 68.

Langdell in particular, was advanced by a group of scholars commonly known as the legal realists. The realists, who were particularly dominant at Yale and Columbia Law Schools, played a critical role in shaping legal academic discourse during the 1920s and 1930s. Although the realists largely ignored Carter in their own writings, there were striking similarities between his jurisprudence and theirs. The question of why the realists neglected Carter is an interesting and complex one that I have examined elsewhere. Here, I will limit my discussion to the ways in which Carter prefigured legal realism, regardless of the extent of influence he had over it.

A. Antiformalist Legal Reasoning

Consider, for example, Carter's and the realists' respective views on the significance of legal rules. The realists insisted on the indeterminacy of common-law rules, at least in those cases where the law was unclear enough to warrant litigation and appeal. If the realists had paid attention to Carter, they would have realized that his work anticipated their own in this respect. As explored above, a visceral resistance to generalization lay at the core of Carter's jurisprudence. In his view, the application of general rules to concrete cases “does not embody justice; it is a mere jump in the dark; it is a violent framing of rules without reference to justice.” The fact that common law judges did not decide cases through the deductive application of rules was, Carter argued, the basis for the common law’s superiority to codified systems.

Like Carter, the realists thought that deduction from general concepts and rules was an unwise and unjust method of decision making. Laura Kalman explains: “The realists did not place their faith in the rules and concepts the conceptualists derived. For these were formed by classifying

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271. As Morton Horwitz has pointed out, "[D]efining Legal Realism with precision is not all that easy." Horwitz, supra note 7, at 169. The term legal realist has most commonly been applied to antiformalist law professors, especially those with a social-scientific orientation, during the 1920s and 1930s. See, e.g., Laura Kalman, Legal Realism at Yale: 1927-1960 (1986); John Henry Schlegel, American Legal Realism and Empirical Social Science (1995). Morton Horwitz urges that the definition be expanded to include earlier critical thinkers (including Pound and Holmes), sophisticated doctrinal writers, administrative law scholars, and various scholars in related non-law disciplines. Horwitz, supra note 7, at 182-85. For purposes of this discussion, I use the term legal realist in the prior, more limited sense.


273. See Wilfrid E. Rumble, Jr., American Legal Realism: Skepticism, Reform, and the Judicial Process 48-106 (1968). Rumble observes that although a few realists were almost entirely nihilistic with regard to legal rules, the majority limited their rule skepticism to the application of rules in contested cases. Id. at 96-97.

274. CARTER, PROPOSED CODIFICATION, supra note 43, at 33.
disparate fact situations under the same rubric, and an opposition to the search for unity implicit in conceptualistic abstractions lay at the core of Legal Realism. Karl Llewellyn, a leading realist, declared that one central aspect of the realist creed was the "belief in the worthwhileness of grouping cases and legal situations into narrower categories than has been the practice in the past. This is connected with the distrust of verbally simple rules—which so often cover dissimilar and non-simple fact situations."

The realists' attitude toward the doctrine of stare decisis echoed Carter's and reflected their similar fact-specific approach to legal reasoning. As discussed above, Carter minimized the force of stare decisis in two ways: (1) by contending that the only relevant data contained in a precedent were the facts and the result, and (2) by claiming that most cases that reached litigation presented the court with materially distinguishable facts. Legal realist Herman Oliphant tried to cabin precedent in an almost equivalent manner. In *A Return to Stare Decisis*, he argued that the only aspect of precedents that was "susceptible of sound and satisfying study" was "what courts have done in response to the stimuli of the facts of the concrete cases before them." He observed that a precedent could be deemed to govern a very narrow range of fact situations, a very broad range, or any gradation between, depending on how tightly it was tied to its particular circumstances. Like Carter, Oliphant wanted jurists to lean toward the pole of factual precision and thus to avoid excessive generalization in the application of precedents.

Oliphant perceived a lamentable historical trend in the opposite direction. Interestingly, however, he did not contend that the embrace of abstraction actually impelled courts to make unfair decisions. Like Carter, he believed that common law judges, regardless of legal formalities, tended to resolve cases in accordance with their sense of justice.

Judges are men, and men respond to human situations. When the facts stimulating them to the action taken are studied from a particular and a current point of view, which our present classification prevents, we acquire a new faith in stare decisis. From this viewpoint we see that courts are dominantly coerced, not by the essays of their predecessors, but by a surer thing, by an intuition of fitness of solu-

275. *KALMAN, supra* note 271, at 22.
277. *See supra* Section VI.B.
279. *Id.*
280. *Id.* at 220-22. He remarked, "While the law was thus grouping the transactions of life into larger and larger piles, held together by common attributes more and more accidental, life rolled on, always concrete, always specific, but becoming more and more diversified with ominous speed." *Id.* at 221.
tion to problem, and a renewed confidence in judicial government is engendered.\footnote{Oliphant, supra note 278, at 225-26.}

Oliphant’s ultimate goal was not to prevent general propositions from deciding concrete cases, for, in his mind, courts rarely actually resolved matters in this way. His true aim was to convince judges to embrace a “conscious and methodological empiricism” that would help them accomplish their practical ends.\footnote{Id. at 228.}

Other realists had a similarly limited view of the importance of stare decisis. Llewellyn, for example, sounded quite like Carter when he expressed skepticism about the “rules” created by judicial precedents.

Every case lays down a rule, the rule of the case. The express ratio decidendi is prima facie the rule of the case, since it is the group upon which the court chose to rest its decision. But a later court can reexamine the case and can invoke the canon that no judge has power to decide what is not before him, can, through examination of the facts or the procedural issue, narrow the picture of what was actually before the court and can hold that the ruling made requires to be understood as thus restricted. In the extreme form this results in what is known as expressly “confining the case to its particular facts.” This rule holds only of redheaded Walpoles in pale magenta Buick cars.\footnote{Karl N. Llewellyn, The Bramble Bush: On Our Law and Its Study 72 (Oceana Publications 1960) (1930). Llewellyn also emphasized how judges often used a “loose view” of precedent to take advantage of prior rulings that supported the result they were trying to reach. Id. at 74. The combination of these two techniques made it “possible to void the past mistakes of courts, and yet to make use of every happy insight for which a judge in writing may have found expression.” Id. at 75.}

Realists stressed not only the manipulability of the process by which courts drew rules from precedents, but also the indeterminacy of the process by which judges deductively applied these rules to new facts. Realist literature emphasized the point that more than one rule was frequently available for the same fact situation. Oliphant, for example, asserted, “The choice between the legal principles competing to control the new human situations involved in the cases we pass upon is not dictated by logic.”\footnote{Oliphant, supra note 278, at 228.} Llewellyn similarly argued that “in any case doubtful enough to make litigation respectable the available authoritative premises—\emph{i.e.}, premises legitimate and impeccable under the traditional legal techniques—are at least two, and . . . the two are mutually contradictory as applied to the case at hand.”\footnote{Llewellyn, supra note 276, at 1239.} Most memorably, Walter Wheeler Cook declared: “Legal principles—and rules as well—are in the habit of hunting in pairs.”\footnote{Cook, supra note 207, at 406.}
In modern scholarship, the realists of the 1920s and the 1930s receive most of the credit for developing these assaults on the logical pretensions of the classicists. As described in this Article, however, anticodifiers like Carter, Mathews, and Clarke displayed similar rule skepticism several decades earlier. Indeed, in 1889, Carter used language almost identical to that of Oliphant, Llewellyn, and Cook to describe the common law method for deciding new cases: “It is not that no rule is known which is applicable to the transaction; there may be many which have a bearing on it. Several different rules—all just in their proper sphere—are competing with each other for supremacy.”

B. Custom

The oft-repeated adage that the legal realists believed “the law is determined by what the judge had for breakfast” is an absurd caricature. The realists did not think court decisions were simply arbitrary. After all, they viewed the legal scholar’s role as largely a predictive one, and the very possibility of prediction implies some degree of order and regularity. The realists unanimously agreed, however, that formal rules and logical reasoning did not dictate legal results. They therefore sought to identify explanations external to the law itself for judicial decisions. One of these explanations was custom. Modern scholars disagree on just how central the notion of custom was to the realist jurisprudence of the 1920s and 1930s. It seems fair to state, however, that anticlassicist legal thinkers of that era were generally interested in the relationship between law and custom, broadly conceived.

Moreover, there was a particular strand of realism that focused intensively on custom, in a way strikingly reminiscent of Carter. The preferred

288. At least one scholar has attempted, unsuccessfully, to trace the origins of this saying. See Charles M. Yablon, Justifying the Judge’s Hunch: An Essay on Discretion, 41 Hastings L.J. 231, 236 n.16 (1990).
289. Llewellyn, in his 1931 description and defense of the Legal Realism movement, stated that the realists agreed “there is less possibility of accurate prediction of what courts will do than the traditional rules would lead us to suppose (and what possibility there is must be found in good measure outside these same traditional rules).” But he adamantly denied that the realists embraced uncertainty. He explained, “The immediate result of the preliminary work thus far described has been a further, varied series of endeavors; the focussing [sic] of conscious attack on discovering the factors thus far unpredictable, in good part with a view to their control.” Llewellyn, supra note 276, at 1241-42.
290. Compare Thomas C. Grey, Modern American Legal Thought, 106 Yale L.J. 493, 503 (1996) (book review) (The realists saw adjudication as “intuitive dispute resolution in light of unconsciously absorbed custom.”), and American Legal Realism 233 (William W. Fisher III et al. eds., 1993) (“While most Realists debunked the notion of legal doctrine working independently as a motive force in social life, it was only extremists among them such as Underhill Moore who considered that legal rules were wholly determined by custom or culture, having no gravitational power of their own.”), with G. Edward White, From Sociological Jurisprudence to Realism: Jurisprudence and Social Change in Early Twentieth-Century America, 58 Va. L. Rev. 999, 1015 (1972) (The realists’ view of human behavior as idiosyncratic “was subversive of collective behavior standards based on external phenomena. . . .”).
term among these realists, however, was not *custom*, but *mores*. This word choice reflected the impact of William Graham Sumner (1840-1910), a tremendously popular and influential Professor of Political and Social Science at Yale. Sumner’s most widely-read work, *Folkways: A Study of the Sociological Importance of Usages, Manners, Customs, Mores, and Morals* (1906), introduced the term *mores* into the everyday vocabulary of American academia. Sumner used the word *folkways* generally to refer to all naturally evolving, unconsciously followed patterns of behavior within a group. Those folkways with the most directive force over society were, according to Sumner, *mores*, which he defined as “folkways with the connotations of right and truth in respect to welfare, embodied in them.” Mores were folkways “raised to a different plane,” because they were “capable of producing inferences, developing into new forms, and extending their constructive influence over men and society.” Sumner contended that all laws, indeed all societal institutions, were “ produced out of mores.” Similarly to Carter, he asserted, “Legislation . . . has to seek standing ground on the existing mores, and it soon becomes apparent that legislation, to be strong, must be consistent with the mores.” Despite the obvious parallels between Sumner’s work and Carter’s, there is no evidence that either scholar directly influenced the other.

Sumner’s impact on legal scholarship became evident in the 1910s, particularly in the pages of the *Yale Law Journal*, which printed a number of pieces discussing the relationship between mores and law. In 1917, for example, the Journal published *The Dead Hand of the Common Law*, by Yale Law School Professor and legal realist Arthur Corbin. In this piece, Corbin drew on Sumner’s analysis of mores, and perhaps also on Carter’s work, to praise common law decision making.

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291. See RICHARD HOFSTADTER, SOCIAL DARWINISM IN AMERICAN THOUGHT 53, 55 (1955); HARRIS E. STARR, WILLIAM GRAHAM SUMNER 373-82 (1925); Grossman, The Ideal and the Actual of James Coolidge Carter, supra note 37, at 376-77.

292. WILLIAM GRAHAM SUMNER, FOLKWAYS: A STUDY OF THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE OF USAGES, MANNERS, CUSTOMS, MORES, AND MORALS (Ginn & Co. 1940) (1906).

293. *Id.* at 2-3.

294. *Id.* at 38.

295. *Id.* at 30.

296. *Id.* at 53. For Sumner’s discussion of the relationship between mores and law, see *id.* at 53-57.

297. *Id.* at 55.

298. Sumner almost certainly cannot have inspired Carter, for *Folkways*, the first piece in which Sumner articulated his theories in a manner similar to Carter, was not published until the year after Carter’s death. It also seems unlikely that Carter’s work inspired Sumner; *Folkways* does not include a single citation to Carter’s work. M.J. Aronson ascribed the similarity between the ideas of Carter and Sumner to the fact that each represented “the culmination of a current of thought which permeated the intellectual life of the last quarter of the nineteenth century”—the “naturalistic evolutionism” of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer. M.J. Aronson, *The Juridicial Evolutionism of James Coolidge Carter*, 10 U. TORONTO L. J. 1, 1 (1953).
A very large part of legislation must always be ex post facto and it is this sort of judicial legislation [common law decision making] that gives satisfaction. In spite of occasional outcry, it works. It may sometimes be difficult to decide a concrete case after it has occurred, but it is far easier than to decide it in advance in the form of a general rule. By this process we get better law, law more nearly in harmony with prevailing custom and desire and with the justice of the present day. A litigant is less likely to be surprised and pained by a decision based upon rules thus established than he is by decisions based on statutes. Judicial rules, in new cases as well as in old cases, are drawn from the mores of society as the judges know them; and they are stated anew in each case with specific reference to a case the facts of which are historically complete. The litigant will not be greatly surprised at the mores, because his daily life is ordered by them and he has helped, generally unconsciously, to make them. 299

The subsequent volume of the Yale Law Journal included an article by Sumner’s disciple, A.G. Keller, analyzing how law “is a sort of crystallization of the mores.” 300

Sumner’s influence on the legal academy became especially manifest in 1919, when the editors of the Yale Law Journal placed an unsigned note titled “Social Mores, Legal Analysis, and the Journal” at the start of an issue. In this note, the editors remarked that the Journal, under the inspiration of the late Yale Law School Professor Wesley Hohfeld, had recently been concentrating on the classification of legal concepts and on “the necessity of a more exact terminology leading to a more accurate legal analysis.” 301 Now was the time, the editors suggested, to shift the Journal’s attention to another critical matter: the fact that “law forms but a part of our ever-changing social mores, and that it is the function of lawyers, of jurists, and of law schools to cause the statement and the application of our legal rules to be in harmony with the mores of the present instead of those of an outgrown past.” 302 The editors acknowledged that Hohfeld’s conceptions were indispensable to the creation of any restatement or reclassification of the law, but they continued:

[W]e must realize and confess that no restatement or classification is final. If our ancestors supposed ‘justice’ to be eternal and ‘law’ to be a series of unchangeable a priori rules from which decisions of all special cases could be deduced, so also they supposed the world to be

300. A.G. Keller, Law in Evolution, 28 YALE L.J. 769, 775 (1919); see also Arthur L. Corbin, Conditions in the Law of Contract, 28 YALE L.J. 739 (1919) (examining the effect of mores); John E. Young, The Law as and Expression of Community Ideals and the Lawmaking Functions of the Courts, 27 YALE L.J. 1 (1917).
302. Id. at 83-84. It is unclear why the editors did not acknowledge the recent articles in the Journal, discussed above, concerning law and mores.
flat and to be the fixed center about which the firmament revolved. 303

The Journal's editors thus considered an examination of the relationship between law and mores to be a necessary counterbalance to conceptualism, even Hohfeld's sophisticated (and arguably subversive) version of conceptualism. 304 The note, quoting Sumner, continued:

[History affords the perspective in which we can observe that "law" changes with the mores of the community and that "the mores can make anything right." No ingenious arrangement of fundamental legal concepts, no mere machinery or terminology, however exact, can determine for us what the existing law is or what we shall make it for the future. That will be determined, now as in the past, by the varying feelings and customs and desires and needs of men. Hence those who state or who administer the law must be wise to the mores of their own times, must keep perpetually up to date. 305

The editors closed the note by soliciting submissions "making use of the new analysis and showing an understanding of the connection of the mores and the law, the mores of marriage and the family, the mores of production and business, the mores of organized human society." 306

Although the topic of mores can hardly be said to have dominated the Yale Law Journal in the years following this call for papers, its pages (as well as those of other law reviews) were peppered with references to mores, folkways, Sumner, and Keller during the 1920s and 1930s. 307 Throughout this period, Corbin remained the leading voice in the legal academy on the subject of mores. He played an instrumental role in training, hiring, nurturing, and inspiring the second generation of realists, and the concept of mores thus inevitably influenced their jurisprudence. 308 Corbin, by his own admission, did not attempt to support his assertions with empirical data. 309 By contrast, the later realists strove to support their claims about custom and law with varying degrees of investigational rigor. Corbin sounded more like Carter than did any other realist precisely because of the general and nonempirical quality of his statements about the relationship between mores and law.

303. Id. at 85.
304. For a discussion of Hohfeld's relationship to progressive legal thought, see Horwitz, supra note 7, at 151-56.
305. Social Mores, supra note 301, at 85.
306. Id. The editors' note cited Carter's Law: Its Origin, Growth, and Function, but only for a point regarding the supposed ex post facto quality of judicial decision making. Id. at 85, n.5.
307. I confirmed this point by using the database HeinOnline to perform a search of these terms in the Yale Law Journal and other legal periodicals.
308. For a discussion of Corbin's role in building Yale into the premier realist law school, see Kalman, supra note 271, at 98-107. Kalman repeatedly refers to "first generation realists" and "second generation realists."
Nevertheless, discussions of custom evocative of Sumner’s and Carter’s work can also be found in the writing of the second-generation realists. For example, Max Radin observed:

The court can select the precedents or the interpretation of a statute which will lead to a result in accordance with the manners and customs of the people, and the court very commonly does so. . . . And it must not be forgotten that judges also are people and, to a considerable extent, the court’s own feeling of justice is adequately met if its decisions create a situation in accord with the manners and customs of the people. 310

Karl Llewellyn asserted that “law observance is a question not of legal rules, but of the formation of folkways that can be and will be learned chiefly without direct reference to particular rules.” 311 He described how the realists studied the “set-up of men’s ways and practices and ideas on the subject matter of the controversy . . ., in the hope that this might yield a further or even final basis for prediction.” 312 Llewellyn included, in this type of scholarship, not only the painstaking empirical studies of societal practices by his contemporaries, but also the “more or less indefinite reference to custom [by] the historical school.” 313

The realists’ approach to custom was less simplistic than Carter’s. Llewellyn, for example, criticized “the vast vagueness of Carter’s picture,” pointing to his failure adequately to address the “multiformity and conflict of subgroup ‘customs,’” and situations in which officials created law in the absence of custom, or even in contradiction to it. 314 Nonetheless, the realists’ parallel turn to custom reflected a similar impulse to identify objective, “scientific” bases for judicial decisions apart from formalistic legal reasoning. Both Carter and the realists portrayed the study of law as an empirical, value-free enterprise. Llewellyn famously declared that a common characteristic of realist scholarship was “the temporary divorce of Is and Ought for purposes of study. . . . This involves during the study of what courts are doing the effort to disregard the question what they ought to do.” 315 Carter had used almost exactly the same language a quar-

310. MAX RADIN, THE LAW AND MR. SMITH 34 (1938); see also Max Radin, The Theory of Judicial Decisions: Or How Judges Think, 11 A.B.A. J. 357, 362 (1925) (“We need not fear arbitrariness. Our Cokes and Mansfields and Eldons derive their physical and spiritual nourishment from the same sources that we do. They will find good what we find good, if we will let them.”).


312. Llewellyn, supra note 276, at 1244.

313. Id.


315. Llewellyn, supra note 276, at 1236. For the leading account of the battle between the realists and their critics over the question of ethics and values, see EDWARD A. PURCELL, JR., THE CRISIS OF DEMOCRATIC THEORY 159-78 (1973). Morton Horwitz argues that historians, by narrowly defining the Legal Realist movement to include primarily social-science-oriented scholars of the 1920s and
ter century earlier: “I have sought to discover those rules only which actually regulate conduct, not those which ought to regulate it. Science asks primarily only what is, not what ought to be.”

C. Practitioner’s Outlook

The realists also shared Carter’s practitioner’s mentality. Although the realists’ level of practice experience varied greatly, it is probably fair to say that most of them, inspired by Oliver Wendell Holmes’s pragmatic and predictive “bad man” theory of the law, manifested a practice-oriented ethos to at least some extent.

In 1933, Jerome Frank, who had the most practice experience of the leading realists, expressly championed the practitioner’s perspective—or at least what he thought should be the practitioner’s perspective. In his article Why Not a Clinical Law School?, Frank asserted that law schools should hire experienced attorneys as professors and should reform legal education to “get in intimate contact with what clients need and with what courts and lawyers actually do.” He disparaged Langdell’s case method as the invention of a pathetic, isolated man with “an obsessive and almost exclusive interest in books.” Many years earlier, Carter had similarly, though more gently, criticized the Harvard case method’s exclusive reliance on law books, remarking that “[t]hese volumes...are but a part of the great territory of fact which it is the business of the lawyer and jurist to explore.”

Just as Carter had scoffed at the “so-called rules found in our digests

1930s, have understated Realism’s ethical concerns and political commitments. HORWITZ, supra note 7, at 169-92. Horwitz’s argument depends mostly on expanding the list of “realists,” however; he does not really demonstrate (or even try to demonstrate) that the scholars traditionally identified as realists prioritized questions of ethics and values.

316. CARTER, ORIGIN, GROWTH & FUNCTION, supra note 44, at 145.
317. On one extreme was Walter Wheeler Cook, who did not practice at all before entering legal academia. Cook was the first person in many years to be appointed to the Columbia Law faculty without any practice experience. SCHLEGEL, supra note 271, at 28-35; WILLIAM TWINING, KARL LLEWELLYN AND THE REALIST MOVEMENT 37 (1973). At the other end of the spectrum was Jerome Frank, who was a successful corporate lawyer in Chicago and New York for sixteen years before he published his first book, LAW AND THE MODERN MIND. Despite the long association he had with Yale Law School, Frank continued to practice throughout his life—on Wall Street, in the federal government, and finally as a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit. See generally ROBERT JEROME GLENNON, THE ICONOCLAST AS REFORMER: JEROME FRANK’S IMPACT ON AMERICAN LAW 15-37 (1985). In the middle were realists such as Karl Llewellyn, who, before joining academia, practiced for about two years in the legal department of a bank and in a major New York City firm. TWINING, supra, at 101-02. Llewellyn’s biographer surmises that his practice experience, however brief, affected his jurisprudence. Id. at 102.

318. Oliver Wendell Holmes, The Path of the Law, 10 HARV. L. REV. 457, 459 (1897) (“If you want to know the law and nothing else, you must look at it as a bad man, who cares only for the material consequences which such knowledge enables him to predict.”).
319. Frank, supra note 220, at 913.
320. Id. at 908.
321. CARTER, ORIGIN, GROWTH & FUNCTION, supra note 44, at 339.
and treatises and mentioned in the reports of decided cases,"322 Frank de-

rided the "so-called legal rules and principles" on which law professors

focused.323 In Frank's view, this excessive attention to rules and princi-

ples left students ill-prepared for practice.

Now no sane person will deny that a knowledge of those rules and

principles... is part of the indispensable equipment of the future

lawyer. For such knowledge is of some limited aid in guessing what
courts will do.... But the tasks of the lawyer do not pivot around
those rules and principles. The work of the lawyer revolves about
specific decisions in definite pieces of litigation.... What the courts
will decide in specific cases involving the rights of specific clients
under specific acts, documents, or transactions must, therefore, be the
center of the lawyer's thinking.324

Frank, like Carter, considered conceptual formalism to be an impractical
fantasy of detached academicians.

As Frank himself recognized, there is no inevitable correlation between
litigation experience and a resistance to formal conceptualism.325 But the
language of both the post-Civil War anticodifiers and the post-World War I
legal realists suggests that in examining the history of American legal
thought, it is useful to consider the possibility that the jurisprudence of
practicing lawyers (and of law professors with a practice background) has
been shaped by their practical experience.

D. Codification and Restatement

The parallels between Carter and the legal realists are perhaps most evi-
dent when one examines realist discussions of codification. With respect
to this subject, it is interesting to start with Oliver Wendell Holmes. The
very first scholarly article Holmes ever published was titled Codes, and
the Arrangement of the Law. It appeared in 1870 in the American Law
Review and was reprinted by the Harvard Law Review in 1931, during the
heyday of the legal realist movement.326 Despite the article's early date, it
is worthwhile to consider it in this context, because Holmes was such a
powerful influence on the realists of the 1920s and 1930s.327

322. Id. at 233.
323. Frank, supra note 220, at 910.
324. Id. at 910-11.
("[L]awyers are intensely practical men and their concern is with the lives and property of their clients.
Why, then, ... is generality so highly prized by lawyers at the expense of particularity?").
326. Oliver Wendell Holmes, Codes, and the Arrangement of the Law, 44 HARV. L. REV. 725
(1931) (previously published in 5 AM. L. REV. 1 (1870)). The Harvard Law Review reprinted this
article as part of a collection of four Early Writings of O. W. Holmes, Jr., with an introduction by Felix
Frankfurter. Frankfurter noted that the essays "pose juristic issues still, or, more accurately, again in
controversy." Id. at 720.
327. See Fisher, supra note 290, at 3 (discussing the realists' celebration of Holmes and frequent
Grossman, a transitional figure, did not altogether reject the value of conceptual ordering. Although he denied that general principles decided concrete cases, he acknowledged that such principles (in Thomas Grey's words) "focused attention on the competing considerations relevant to the decision, providing guidance by confining the range of argument." Thus, in *Codes, and the Arrangement of Law*, Holmes remarked that a "well-arranged" and "connected" statement of "the whole body of the law" would be a valuable thing.

The importance of it, if it could be obtained, cannot be overrated. In the first place it points out at once the leading analogy between groups. . . . The perfect lawyer is he who commands all ties between a given case and all others. But few lawyers are perfect, and all have to learn their business. A well-arranged body of the law would not only train the mind of the student to a sound legal habit of thought, but would remove obstacles from his path which he now only overcomes after years of experience and reflection.

Because a single author might not have the capacity to prepare an entire "philosophically arranged corpus juris," Holmes suggested that the task be assigned to a group of scholars working for the government. He opposed giving the work of these public employees the status of legislation, however; he favored some sort of unenacted treatise rather than a true code. Holmes justified this position as follows:

New cases will arise which will elude the most carefully constructed formula. The common law, proceeding, as we have pointed out, by a series of successive approximations—by a continual reconciliation of cases—is prepared for this, and simply modifies the form of its rule. But what will the court do with a code? If the code is truly law, the court is confined to a verbal construction of the rule as expressed, and must decide the case wrong. If the court, on the other hand, is at liberty to . . . take into account that the code is only intended to declare the judicial rule, and has done so defectively, and may then go on and supply the defect, . . . the code is not law, but a mere text-book recommended by the government as containing all at present known on the subject.

Holmes recognized that logic sometimes clashed with good sense when it came to the resolution of specific matters, and he thought courts should favor the latter on such occasions: "Law is not a science, but is essentially empirical. Hence, although the general arrangement should be philoso-

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citations to his works).
328. Grey, supra note 5, at 44.
329. Holmes, supra note 326, at 727.
330. Id. at 726-27.
331. Id. at 726.
Holmes's position on codification was thus very like Carter's. Both men, for the same reasons, opposed the enactment of a code with the force of a statute, but both also recognized the merit of a well-arranged statement of the common law. Carter similarly remarked that a book containing a statement in the manner of a Digest, and in analytical and systematic form of the whole unwritten law, expressed in accurate, scientific language, is indeed a thing which the legal profession has yearned after. . . . It would refresh the failing memory, reproduce in the mind of its forgotten acquisitions, exhibit the body of the law, so as to enable a view to be had of the whole, and of the relation of the several parts. 333

In the final analysis, however, Carter probably assigned less value to logically arranged principles than did Holmes—particularly the young Holmes.

When the realists addressed the issue of codification decades later, there was little, if any, call for the adoption of a complete code and the abandonment of the common law method. The once energetic codification movement had splintered into an occasionally successful push for uniform state laws in discrete areas, on the one hand, and the American Law Institute's scheme to produce an unenacted but authoritative Restatement of the common law, on the other. Consequently, the realists had little to say about the wisdom of true codification. Nevertheless, at least one major realist directly critiqued the notion of a European-style code. In his influential book, Law and the Modern Mind, Jerome Frank attacked the premises of complete codification in a manner that highlights the similarities between legal realism and Carter's jurisprudence.

In Frank's eyes, codification in its pure form was simply another variety of the "legal fundamentalism" championed by the Langdellians. 334 He mocked those jurists who had contended throughout history, in his words: "Let us end all this confusion by adopting a code. Let us once and for all by statute enact a carefully prepared body of rules sufficiently complete to settle all future controversies." 335 Frank observed that in each such instance, from Frederick the Great's Prussia to Napoleon's France to modern Germany, "the hope of attaining a large measure of legal certainty by codification proved vain. It produced not certainty, but sterile logic-chopping." 336 Frank continued:

Where code-worship has prevailed in code-governed countries, the

332. Id. at 728.
333. CARTER, PROPOSED CODIFICATION, supra note 43, at 96-97.
334. FRANK, supra note 325, at 53 (Chapter VI titled "Beale, and Legal Fundamentalism").
335. Id. at 200.
336. Id. at 203.
real judicial process of adaptation has been concealed under the guise of formal exactness. . . . In attempts to achieve a perfect code covering all imaginable cases, we encounter again the old dream of legal finality and exactitude. Once this dream took the form of a belief in a list of rules directly God-derived. Belief in a man-made code, which shall be exhaustive and final, is essentially the same dream in another form, but a form which hides from superficial study the nature of the dream. But a dream it is, nevertheless. For only a dream-code can anticipate all possible legal disputes and regulate them in advance. 337

Frank’s psychoanalytical terminology and scornful attitude toward religion, qualities that pervaded his book, would have been foreign to Carter. But Carter would have wholly agreed with Frank’s assertion that codes are invariably flawed because “no one can foresee all future combinations of events. . . . Situations are bound to occur which the legislature never contemplated when enacting the statutes.”338

Carter also would have concurred with Frank’s contention that “the attempt to have the courts apply statutes as if indeed they were all-sufficient . . . leads to no small measure of uncertainty.”339 Carter maintained that judges, in their efforts to make statutes produce fair outcomes, used “subtle arts of interpretation” that heightened uncertainty.340 Frank similarly explained:

Except in those cases which happen to be explicitly covered by the code, the judicial interpreter takes out of the code provisions exactly what he puts in. In spite of, or perhaps more accurately, because of, this false appearance of purely logical interpretation, the decisions become unpredictable. For where the code is silent, the conventional theory of so-called “interpretation” requires the judge to decide cases by analogy to some code rule, and the selection of the rule thus to be applied by analogy involves, of course, the exercise of a flexible discretion to a far larger extent than is acknowledged by the exponents of the theory or by the judges who believe that they are adhering to the theory. 341

In stark contrast to Carter, Frank adamantly insisted that judges “made” law. He did not mention Carter in Law and the Modern Mind, but he surely would have dismissed Carter’s customary theory as simply another example of a “childish” belief in predetermined law. 342 Nevertheless, 337. Id. at 203-04.
338. Id. at 204.
339. Id. at 205.
341. FRANK, supra note 325, at 205-06. Interestingly, Frank did not categorically reject all codification. In an appendix to his book, he remarked that “a code deliberately devised with reference to the desirability of growth and stated in terms of general guiding and flexible principles may some day prove to be the way out of some of the difficulties of legal administration in America.” Id. at 337.
342. Id. at 204, 207. Frank praised John Dickinson’s criticism of the “early 19th Century theory
there is surprising overlap in the work of the two scholars; Carter antici-
pated by almost fifty years Frank’s analysis of the consequences of applying general code provisions to particular cases.

By the legal realists’ time, there was no serious effort to adopt a system of complete codification in the United States. During the last years of the nineteenth century, as it became clear that Field’s campaign to codify the entire common law would fail, scholars and practitioners interested in codification had turned their attention to establishing uniform codes in particular substantive areas for adoption by the states. This effort remained very much alive in the 1920s and 1930s. Indeed, the legal realist Karl Llewellyn became one of the leading figures in this second-wave codification movement.

The American Bar Association (ABA) hatched the uniform code movement in the early 1890s, as Field’s campaign for his Civil Code, and Field himself, were breathing their last. 343 The National Conference of the Commissioners on Uniform State Laws (NCCUSL), which the ABA helped establish, met for the first time in 1892. By the 1930s, the commissioners had produced uniform acts in a variety of discrete commercial subjects, some of which had been adopted by a majority of the states. 344

In the late 1930s, Llewellyn started planning what would become the uniform code movement’s greatest triumph: the Uniform Commercial Code (UCC). The NCCUSL and the American Law Institute jointly drafted and revised the UCC during the 1940s and 1950s, and every state but Louisiana eventually adopted it. Although many scholars and lawyers worked on the UCC, Llewellyn, the chief reporter for the code, was indisputably the individual with the greatest influence over it. 345 The UCC reflected Llewellyn’s realist ideals in various ways. 346

The fact that Llewellyn dedicated much of his career to preparing and promoting a code does not, as one might suppose, reflect an important distinction between the realists and Carter. Llewellyn, like Jerome Frank, unambiguously rejected the idea of a continental-style code providing for every case within its scope. 347 Indeed, in his 1931 encyclopedia article on Carter, Llewellyn wholly sympathized with his subject’s condemnation of complete codification. He agreed that Field’s Civil Code was “ill considered.” Nevertheless, in the article, Llewellyn suggested that codification,

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343. Field died in 1894.
345. See TWINING, supra note 317, at 270-340 (assessing the extent of Llewellyn’s influence over the UCC).
347. TWINING, supra note 317, at 308.
properly done, could be beneficial. He remarked, "[Carter's] argument attacks not codification as it is—a fresh and fertile start for case law, which at its best already incorporates existing tendencies—but the utopian ideal of the blinder advocates of codification: a closed system, 'certain'—and dead." 348

Indeed, if the UCC had appeared during his lifetime, Carter might have acknowledged that it was a noble effort, so far as any code could be noble. As Richard Danzig argues with respect to Article II of the UCC, "[T]he animating principle behind [Llewellyn's] theories and this legislative achievement is, paradoxically, . . . a renunciation of legislative responsibility and power." 349 Like Carter, Llewellyn preferred a flexible, contextual, court-centered decisional process. He thus did not intend the UCC to provide a resolution for every case in advance. Danzig observes:

Whereas a code functioned for such diverse thinkers as Frederick the Great, Austin, or Williston as a means of dictating a result, Llewellyn's UCC Article II more often operated as a means of dictating a method. That method was designed to prompt decision not according to the letter or the logic of a statute or a juristic concept but rather according to the "situation-reason." 350

Carter was a champion of the common law, and the UCC was, in the words of one scholar, "drafted in the expectation that it would be interpreted by common law trained lawyers and judges." 351 The UCC explicitly incorporates the principles of common law and equity unless they are "displaced" by particular code provisions. 352 Moreover, it repeatedly directs courts to consider what would be "reasonable" under the circumstances. 353 And Carter would certainly have approved of the fact that the UCC makes "usage of trade" a presumed component of commercial agreements. 354 Ultimately, however, it is impossible to know how Carter would have responded to an open-ended code like the UCC, for although he might have admired certain features of the instrument, he likely would have been hesitant to compromise his anticodification stance.

It is also unclear how Carter would have responded to the American Law Institute's Restatement project. The ALI, founded in 1923, was (and remains) an organization composed of law professors, judges, and practicing lawyers dedicated to the "improvement of law." 355 As noted above, it

348. Llewellyn, supra note 314, at 244.
349. Danzig, supra note 346, at 622.
350. Id. at 632.
351. TWINING, supra note 317, at 312.
353. For a list of sections in Article II of the UCC that use "reasonable" or similar open-ended terms, see Danzig, supra note 346, at 634.
355. The American Law Institute, About the American Law Institute, http://www.ali.org/
Yale Journal of Law & the Humanities

cooperated with the NCCUSL in the preparation of the Uniform Commercial Code. However, its primary mission, at the time of its formation, was to prepare a comprehensive Restatement of the common law. By 1944, the ALI had produced what it believed to be an authoritative Restatement of the law in each of nine subject areas.\(^{356}\)

Like David Dudley Field, the proponents of the Restatement project hoped to alleviate the problems of legal uncertainty and complexity by setting forth the fundamental principles of the common law in a logically ordered form. Despite the similar motives behind codification and the Restatements, however, Carter's opposition to the former does not necessarily imply that he would have resisted the latter. Indeed, Carter seemed to declare his support for something like a Restatement, remarking, "A statement of the whole body of the law in scientific language, and in a concise and systematic form . . . would be of priceless value."\(^{357}\)

In considering how Carter would have responded to the ALI Restatement project, it is important to keep in mind a critical difference between Field's Civil Code and the Restatements: the ALI never intended for the latter to be enacted into law.\(^{358}\) Indeed, the institute rejected the statutory path for reasons that closely paralleled Carter's anticodification arguments. As Nathan Crystal has observed, the ALI worried that if the Restatements were enacted, "the flexibility of the common law would be lost, . . . courts would be bound simply to follow the statute and 'injustice would result in many cases presenting unforeseen facts.'"\(^{359}\) Perhaps Carter would have endorsed the Restatements so long as they remained unenacted and thus avoided these problems.

Then again, Carter might have opposed the Restatements in the form they actually assumed. His response might have been similar to that of the realists, who initially viewed the ALI's project as a useful effort to ease legal uncertainty, but whose "alienation . . . was complete" by the time the final versions were published.\(^{360}\) Although the ALI did not pursue legislative enactment, it inherited the assumption of many code advocates that

\(^{356}\) Id.

\(^{357}\) CARTER, PROVINCES, supra note 43, at 45.


\(^{359}\) Crystal, supra note 358, at 245 (quoting ALI PROCEEDINGS, 1923, pt. I, at 24 (1923)).

\(^{360}\) Id. at 247. The early support of the Restatement project by at least some legal realists is exemplified by realist Arthur Corbin's service as the principal assistant to the Chief Reporter of the Restatement of Contracts, classicist Samuel Williston. See GRANT GilMORe, THE DEATH OF CONTRACT 59 (1974). In addition, in the early 1920s, realists Herman Oliphant and Karl Llewellyn expressed cautious optimism about the Restatements. Crystal, supra note 358, at 245-46. Nathan Crystal proposes that the realists' growing disaffection with the Restatements was more a result of their own intellectual evolution than of any change in the nature of the Restatement project itself. Id. at 247-48.
legal doctrines could be abstracted away from their factual contexts. As G. Edward White has observed, the realists ultimately rejected the Restatement's embrace of taxonomic logic and the "coherence and relevance of the legal rules themselves." Realist Hessel E. Yntema remarked, "[M]ost of the data to which attention should be given in a responsible formulation of law have to be excluded in the preparation of the Restatement—data as to the practical needs to be met and as to the appropriateness of the means of regulation employed to meet them." Criticizing the Restatement's character as a "statement of the general principles of the common law, not dissimilar to the European codes," Yntema observed, "It is something of an irony that Carter's argument [that a good digest of the law would be of 'priceless value'] is employed to support a Restatement of the Law which has a purpose and many of the characters which he opposed."

X. CONCLUSION

The debates over codification described in this Article demonstrate that jurisprudential strands identified almost exclusively with twentieth-century legal realism were substantially present, if not necessarily dominant, during the late nineteenth century. I thus challenge the long-dominant mode of periodizing the history of American legal thought.

Karl Llewellyn's 1960 book *The Common Law Tradition* was premised largely on the notion of "period style," which he defined as

the general and pervasive manner over the country at large, at any given time, of going about the job, the general outlook, the ways of professional knowhow, the kind of thing the men of law are sensitive to and strive for, the tone and flavor of the working and of the results.

Llewellyn divided American legal history into a pre-Civil War "Grand Style" and a post-Civil War "Formal Style," the latter epitomized by Langdell. In an appendix to *The Common Law Tradition*, Llewellyn felt compelled to mention that his "period style" idea had been germinating in his mind for almost thirty years. He remarked, "I do not want the recent social science stirrings toward a 'style' concept to lead to any idea

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361. See generally Crystal, *supra* note 358 (laying out the personal, institutional, and jurisprudential continuities between the codification movement and the Restatement project).
362. White, *supra* note 358, at 34.
364. Id. at 469. Dean Charles E. Clark of Yale Law School, also a realist, similarly compared the Restatement to a code. See Kalman, *supra* note 271, at 27.
367. Id. at 519-20.
that I am just joining what promises to become the next fad." 368

Llewellyn's concern was justified; during the 1970s, the period-style approach did become something of a fad in the field of American legal history. In The Ages of American Law, Grant Gilmore identified an "Age of Discovery," an "Age of Faith," and an "Age of Anxiety." 369 He argued that Langdell epitomized the Age of Faith, observing: "A better symbol [of the age] could hardly be found; if Langdell had not existed, we would have had to invent him." 370

Gilmore's successors, likely inspired by the "paradigm-shifting" model of intellectual history set forth in Thomas Kuhn's extraordinarily influential Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 371 continued the tendency of dividing American legal history into discrete eras. In The Transformation of American Law, Morton Horwitz distinguished the "protective, regulative, paternalistic and . . . moral" law prior to the American Revolution from the "flexible, instrumental conception of law" between 1776 and 1850, and then demarcated the latter period from a subsequent reign of "legal formalism." 372 In a seminal 1980 article, Duncan Kennedy, while making allowance for the "spurious precision of dates," delineated three eras of "legal consciousness": "Pre-Classical legal thought flourished between 1800 and 1860 and declined between 1860 and 1885. Classical legal thought emerged between 1850 and 1885, flourished between 1885 and 1935, but was in rapid decline by 1940. Modern legal thought emerged between 1900 and 1930 and survives to this day." 373

In its sophisticated guises, the periodizing scholarship of the 1970s and 1980s did not cartoonishly portray legal history as a sequence of wholly distinct homogeneous eras. Nonetheless, that generation's commitment to the idea of deterministic structures of legal consciousness sometimes led it to neglect the diversity and complexity of the jurisprudence of different periods, particularly the late-nineteenth century. Indeed, when I was in graduate school in the early 1990s, a prominent legal historian I knew would not believe, until I showed him, that any leading jurist of the 1880s

368. Id. at 519.
370. Id. at 42.
371. THOMAS S. KUHN, THE STRUCTURE OF SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTIONS (1962). Peter Novick has observed: "Kuhn's ideas were quickly taken up by scholars in fields far removed from the natural sciences. It would be hard to nominate another twentieth-century American academic work which has been as widely influential; among historical books it would appear to be without serious rival." PETER NOVICK, THAT NOBLE DREAM: THE "OBJECTIVITY QUESTION" AND THE AMERICAN HISTORICAL PROFESSION 526 (1988).
373. Kennedy, supra note 7, at 23. See also Gordon, Legal Thought and Legal Practice, supra note 8, at 97 (identifying "three distinct versions of the ideology of legal science": the "antebellum Whig-Federalist version," the "Liberal version," and the "Progressive version").
could possibly have flatly declared that judges make, rather than find, the common law. (The example I provided him, interestingly, was David Dudley Field, speaking in favor of codification.\textsuperscript{374})

As Stephen Siegel observes, there is now a growing body of literature that attempts to supply a "more textured and multifaceted" portrait of Gilded Age legal thought.\textsuperscript{375} Siegel remarks: "At the least, the current revisionism is rendering a simple portrait more complex. It is replacing an overarching theoretical structure, which is the type of historiography that modern historians tend to spurn, with their much beloved 'thick description.'"\textsuperscript{376} Similarly, a 2006 article by Christopher Waldrep reviews how recent studies of Gilded Age legal thought have focused on "particular people" and "particular places" to "question an earlier generation's historical generalizations" and challenge "paradigmatic assertions" about American jurisprudence.\textsuperscript{377}

I have attempted to further this paradigm-shattering mission in this Article. I do not claim that James Coolidge Carter was himself the paradigmatic legal thinker of the Gilded Age. I do, however, reject the notion that Langdell's brand of amoral legal science typified the period, and I also question the complete hegemony of "classicism" broadly defined. More generally, I intend my examination of the anticlassicism of the Gilded Age anticodifiers, and their commonalities with the realists, to promote a healthy wariness of sweeping characterizations of any era in American legal history.

\textsuperscript{374.} See, e.g., FIELD, CODIFICATION: AN ADDRESS, supra note 55, at 15 (rejecting code opponents' claim "that the judges do not make but only declare the common law. Who made this common law, if the judges did not?").

\textsuperscript{375.} Siegel, The Revision Thickens, supra note 233, at 635 (2002).

\textsuperscript{376.} Id. at 637 (discussing Manuel Cachán, Justice Stephen Field and "Free Soil, Free Labor Constitutionalism": Reconsidering Revionism, 20 LAW & HIST. REV. 541 (2002) and Grossman, Mugwump Jurisprudence, supra note 3).