The State Constitution's Cruel or Unusual Punishment Clause: The Basis for Future Death Penalty Jurisprudence in Florida?

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THE STATE CONSTITUTION'S CRUEL OR UNUSUAL PUNISHMENT CLAUSE: THE BASIS FOR FUTURE DEATH PENALTY JURISPRUDENCE IN FLORIDA

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DONNA E. BLANTON

Excessive fines, cruel or unusual punishment, attainder, forfeiture of estate, indefinite imprisonment, and unreasonable detention of witnesses are forbidden.¹

I. INTRODUCTION

THE Florida Constitution's cruel or unusual punishment clause, found in article I, section 17, historically has been ignored by the Florida Supreme Court in capital cases.² The court generally decides capital cases on Eighth Amendment grounds, occasionally citing the Florida constitutional provision, but rarely construing it differently or distinguishing it from its federal counterpart.³ However, the supreme court's lockstep approach to the Eighth Amendment provision and article I, section 17 may be changing. Three Florida Supreme Court cases decided in 1991 and 1992 signal a new approach to state constitutional jurisprudence that may lead to an independent interpretation of article I, section 17.

The court in 1992 sent a clear message in Traylor v. State⁴ that it intends to rely on the state constitution to protect individual liberties, particularly in criminal cases. The case includes strong language about federalism and the primacy of the Florida Constitution in the majority opinion by Justice Shaw and in the separate opinions by Justices

¹. FLA. CONST. art. I, § 17.
³. See, e.g., Raulerson v. State, 358 So. 2d 826 (Fla.), cert. denied, 439 U.S. 959 (1978) (holding that capital punishment is not per se violative of either the Eighth Amendment or article I, § 17 with no separate discussion of the state constitutional provision). See also LeCroy v. State, 533 So. 2d 750, 758 (Fla. 1988) (Barkett, J., dissenting) (arguing that imposing the death penalty on juveniles violates the Eighth Amendment and article I, § 17 and treating the federal and state constitutional provisions as indistinguishable), cert. denied, 492 U.S. 925 (1989); Ten-Year Retrospective, supra note 2, at 803.
⁴. 596 So. 2d 957 (Fla. 1992).
Kogan and Barkett. Traylor deals specifically with constitutional provisions relating to self-incrimination and the right to counsel, but the court's message regarding the importance of the state constitution's Declaration of Rights is not limited to those provisions and is instead viewed as a broad statement about the importance of state constitutional law.

The court held in Tillman v. State that the requirement that the death penalty be administered proportionately comes in part from the state constitution's express prohibition against unusual punishment. The court noted that it is "unusual" to impose death based on facts similar to those in cases where death was found to be improper. Additionally, the court stated in a footnote that the use of "or" in the phrase "cruel or unusual punishment" indicates that alternatives were intended. The footnote suggests, without explicitly stating, that

5. Justice Shaw's opinion states:
When called upon to decide matters of fundamental rights, Florida's state courts are bound under federalist principles to give primacy to our state constitution and to give independent legal import to every phrase and clause contained therein. We are similarly bound under our Declaration of Rights to construe each provision freely in order to achieve the primary goal of individual freedom and autonomy. Id. at 962-63 (footnote omitted).

As did Justice Shaw in the majority opinion, Justice Kogan wrote at length about federalism and encouraged both judges and lawyers to put increased emphasis on the Florida Constitution:
Clearly, state constitutional issues must be considered first whenever fundamental rights are at stake. Far too often, both bench and bar fail even to consider the possibility that some principle of the Florida Constitution may be dispositive of the issue. This practice clearly is contrary to the two central policies upon which the doctrine of primacy rests.

First, primacy promotes judicial economy. As is obvious to all, lawyers and courts need address federal claims only if no violation is found under the Florida Constitution. . . . Second and most importantly, primacy gives the state Constitution the respect and effect its framers manifestly intended it to have. The Florida Constitution is not a nullity to be ignored. Its words are not meaningless. When the state constitution creates a fundamental right, that right must be respected, even if no similar right is recognized by the federal courts. Id. at 982-83 (Kogan, J., concurring in part and dissenting in part).

Justice Barkett wrote: "I agree with the recital of the law on federalism. It is, of course, axiomatic that Florida can interpret its constitution independently of the federal courts." Id. at 974 (Barkett, J., concurring in part and dissenting in part).

6. Article I of the Florida Constitution encompasses the Declaration of Rights.

7. Randolph Pendleton, Go Beyond U.S. To Protect Accused, Court Says, FLA. TIMES-UNION, Jan. 20, 1992, at B1. The court in Traylor upheld the second-degree murder conviction of John Edward Traylor for the fatal stabbing of a woman in Jacksonville in 1980. Pendleton found it noteworthy that rather than disposing of the case in a short opinion, the court wrote at length about the relationship between the federal and state constitutions and the protections the state constitution provides the accused.

8. 591 So. 2d 167, 169 (Fla. 1991).

9. Id.

10. Id. n.2.
“cruel or unusual” in the Florida Constitution is different from “cruel and unusual” in the United States Constitution. Tillman represents the first time that the court has found independent meaning in article I, section 17 in a capital case.

The third recent case that may be important in future state constitutional jurisprudence is Department of Law Enforcement v. Real Property, a decision that provides a framework for resolving state due process issues and elevates the protection of property rights under the Florida Constitution. The court found in Real Property that the substantive due process component of article I, section 9 (the Florida Constitution’s due process clause) protects “the full panoply of individual rights” from unjustified interference by the State. This statement suggests that personal rights declared throughout the constitution give substantive content to the state due process clause. In Real Property the court also specifically mentioned article I, section 17, noting that Floridians have a substantive right to be free from “excessive punishments.” Although Real Property is not a capital case and does not deal with the cruel or unusual punishment clause, it nonetheless illustrates the court’s willingness to explore article I, section 17 and to interpret it independently of the Eighth Amendment. Much like Traylor, the Real Property decision signals the court’s intention to rely exclusively on the Florida Constitution to resolve an array of constitutional issues.

This Comment interprets the signs that the Florida Supreme Court intends to rely more frequently on the Florida Constitution in the context of “New Federalism,” the phrase most often used to describe the trend of state courts to construe their own constitutional provisions more broadly than the United States Supreme Court construes similar federal provisions, particularly in the area of individual rights. This Comment outlines the development of New Federalism; reviews

11. The Eighth Amendment reads: “Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.” U.S. Const. amend. VIII.
12. 588 So. 2d 957 (Fla. 1991).
13. The case dealt with the procedures used by the State to execute a property seizure and forfeiture under the Florida Contraband Forfeiture Act. For a thorough discussion of Real Property and its implications for various provisions of the Florida Constitution’s Declaration of Rights, see 1991 Survey, supra note 2, at 181.
14. 588 So. 2d at 960.
16. 588 So. 2d at 964. The phrase comes from the title of article I, § 17, which has no independent significance. The construction of a constitutional provision is determined by its text, not its title. Fla. Const. art. X, § 12(h). The discussion of “excessive punishments” in Real Property results in a different approach to forfeiture than is found in Eighth Amendment jurisprudence. See 1991 Survey, supra note 2, at 219.
Florida's role in the movement; discusses other states' death penalty cases that are based on state constitutional provisions; explores the history and application of article I, section 17; and recommends that the Florida Supreme Court use the prohibition against cruel or unusual punishment to develop death penalty jurisprudence different from that created by the United States Supreme Court.

II. NEW FEDERALISM

Before the United States Constitution existed, most of the American colonies had constitutions containing specific fundamental rights limiting the power of state governments. Drafters of the Bill of Rights relied heavily on these state constitutions. The first ten amendments to the United States Constitution, in fact, were intended as a simplified version of similar state constitutional provisions, and their purpose was to extend corresponding protections to the federal government. Further, framers of constitutions in states admitted to the Union after the United States Constitution was adopted—such as Florida—used other state constitutions, not the federal Constitution, as their models.

The amendments in the federal Bill of Rights were rarely invoked until after the Civil War and the adoption of the Fourteenth Amendment, and even then, many more years passed before they were applied to state action. State constitutions thus served as the primary protectors of individual liberties. The Warren Court in the 1960s dramatically changed federal constitutional law by extending to the states most of the protections of the Bill of Rights. This "incorporation doctrine" deeply involved state courts in construing federal constitutional law, but it overshadowed state constitutional interpretation. The profound changes in the relationship between the state and federal courts created by the incorporation doctrine resulted in such a de-emphasis of state constitutional interpretation that law schools offered few classes in state constitutional law and casebooks rarely mentioned state constitutions. Consequently, many lawyers today—trained to

19. Abrahamson, supra note 18, at 27.
think in terms of federal constitutional law—do not think of raising state constitutional issues in their claims.23

In the 1970s and 1980s, as the Burger and Rehnquist Courts began reducing protections provided by the Bill of Rights, some state court judges began looking to their own constitutions.24 Justice Brennan is often credited with providing impetus to the New Federalism movement by writing in 1977 that state courts should look to state constitutions to protect individual liberties.25 Brennan wrote: "[S]tate courts cannot rest when they have afforded their citizens the full protections of the federal Constitution. State constitutions, too, are a font of individual liberties, their protections often extending beyond those required by the Supreme Court's interpretation of federal law."26 Influential state court judges, such as Hans Linde of Oregon and Shirley S. Abrahamson of Wisconsin, also began touting the use of state constitutions to expand protections.27 Although the image of New Federalism is that of a completely "liberal" movement, some studies show that the adoption of Burger and Rehnquist Court doctrines by state courts far exceeds their rejection.28 The important point is that state courts are increasingly looking to their own constitutions—rather than to the federal Constitution—to develop their own jurisprudence, be it "liberal" or "conservative."29

23. Robin Sher, How To Fight for Civil Liberties, HUMAN RIGHTS, Winter 1992, at 12 (noting the lack of a vigorous and sustained effort by the practicing bar to promote and develop state constitutional law). See also Traylor v. State, 596 So. 2d 957 (Fla. 1992) (Kogan, J., concurring in part and dissenting in part) (noting that both bench and bar often fail to consider the possibility that some principle of the Florida Constitution may be dispositive of a particular issue).

24. Acker & Walsh, supra note 22, at 1312-13; Brennan, supra note 20, at 495.

25. Brennan, supra note 20, at 491.

26. Id.

27. See, e.g., Abrahamson, supra notes 18 & 21; Hans A. Linde, E Pluribus—Constitutional Theory and State Courts, 18 GA. L. Rev. 165, 178 (1984) ("My own view has long been that a state court always is responsible for the law of its state before deciding whether the state falls short of a national standard, so that no federal issue is properly reached when the state's law protects the claimed right.").


29. Numerous studies have shown the rise in state constitutional interpretation in the past two decades. One survey shows that state supreme courts recognized rights under state constitutions in only three cases from 1950-59, and in only seven cases from 1960-69. In the 1970s, however, those courts recognized state constitutional rights in 124 cases, and they did so in 177 cases from 1980 to 1986. Acker & Walsh, supra note 22, at 1312 n.74 (citing Ronald K.L. Collins et. al., State High Courts, State Constitutions, and Individual Rights Litigation Since 1980: A Judicial Survey, 13 HASTINGS Const. L.Q. 599, 600-01 & table 1 (1986)). Another study shows that since 1970, state supreme courts have issued more than 450 opinions concluding that individuals have greater rights under the state constitution than under the federal Constitution. John C. Cooper, Beyond the Federal Constitution: The Status of State Constitutional Law in Florida,
A. How State Courts Insulate Their Decisions

The Supremacy Clause of the *United States Constitution* prohibits state courts from interpreting their constitutions less stringently than the federal Constitution. However, as the United States Supreme Court has repeatedly recognized, nothing prevents state courts from granting greater protections than are provided by the federal Constitution. In *Michigan v. Long*, the Supreme Court spelled out the guidelines that state courts must follow to insulate their decisions from federal review. The case stands for the proposition that a state court must make a “plain statement” that it is relying on adequate and independent state law grounds in its decision. Otherwise, a presumption is created that federal law has been applied and federal courts will consider the state court’s decision as fair game for review. The *Long* decision has been credited with increasing the trend toward reliance on state constitutions in state court decisions.

Although state constitutional provisions can be interpreted differently from those in the federal Constitution even when the provisions are worded identically, textual differences often serve as a starting point for an alternate interpretation. The difference in wording often prompts research into the history of a state constitutional provision, an exercise that sometimes uncovers drafters' intentions that are different from those of the federal Constitution's drafters. Perhaps more importantly, the legitimacy of state courts premising decisions on state constitutions is most apparent and least often questioned when the wording of the provisions is different. A state court taking a state constitutional provision that is phrased identically to a federal provision and suddenly exchanging decades of jurisprudence by the United States Supreme Court for its own interpretation almost assur-

30. U.S. Const. art. VI, para. 2.
33. Id. at 1041-42.
34. Acker & Walsh, supra note 22, at 1311.
35. Linde, supra note 27, at 181-82 ("The first step is to overcome the sense that divergence from Supreme Court doctrines is more legitimate when the state's text differs from its federal counterpart than when they are the same. In truth, the state court is equally responsible for reaching its own conclusion in either case.").
36. Linde, supra note 27, at 182-84.
edly will be accused of judicial activism. Even Justice Brennan, writing in his famous law review article about the increased reliance on state constitutions by state courts, indicated some surprise at such interpretations when the state and federal provisions were identically phrased, though he did not question the state courts' authority to differ with the federal interpretation.\(^8\)

In the context of constitutional provisions governing imposition of the death penalty, fifteen of the thirty-six states that impose capital punishment have provisions in their state constitutions virtually identical to the Eighth Amendment's prohibition against "cruel and unusual punishments."\(^9\) Fourteen states, including Florida, prohibit cruel "or" unusual punishments; five states prohibit "cruel" punishments; and two states have no analogous provision.\(^40\) Courts and scholars disagree as to whether the differences in the wording of these provisions are significant.\(^41\)

B. Florida's Role in the New Federalism

The Florida Supreme Court currently is perceived as a leader of the New Federalism movement, largely because of recent decisions based on the state constitution's privacy provision that Florida voters approved in 1980.\(^42\) In its annual review of the Florida Supreme Court, the Miami Review wrote in 1990: "Striking the parental consent requirement for abortions in last fall's T. W. gave Florida instant standing within The New Federalism, the movement to use state law to expand civil rights."\(^43\) The National Law Journal also took notice:

During the past several years, the Florida court has climbed aboard the New Federalism bandwagon, deploying the state Constitution's right-to-privacy clause to catapult civil rights far beyond federal

\(^8\) Brennan, \textit{supra} note 20, at 495 ("[M]ore and more state courts are construing state constitutional counterparts of provisions of the Bill of Rights as guaranteeing citizens of their states even more protection than the federal provisions, \textit{even those identically phrased}.") (emphasis added).

\(^9\) Acker & Walsh, \textit{supra} note 22, at 1321 n.112-15.

\(^40\) Acker & Walsh, \textit{supra} note 22, at 1321 n.112-15.

\(^41\) Acker & Walsh, \textit{supra} note 22, at 1321-22 & n.116. Cases interpreting some of these state constitutional provisions are discussed in Part III, \textit{infra}.

\(^42\) FLA. CONST. art. I, § 23. \textit{See In re T.W.}, 551 So. 2d 1186 (Fla. 1989) (holding that Florida statute requiring parental consent for abortion of unmarried minor is unconstitutional under provisions of article I, § 23 guaranteeing right to privacy). \textit{See also In re Guardianship of Browning}, 568 So. 2d 4 (Fla. 1990) (holding that right to privacy protects decision of individual in certain circumstances to forgo life-sustaining treatment).

constitutional limits. As a result, Florida has become the first southern state to join activist courts like Oregon, California and New Jersey as a guiding light for courts throughout the nation.44

Although the Florida Supreme Court has interpreted other state constitutional provisions differently from the federal Constitution, most of those interpretations have not attracted the national attention of the privacy rulings.45

The Florida Supreme Court’s interpretation of the Florida Constitution’s prohibition against unreasonable searches and seizures, however, drew considerable attention in the 1980s. The Florida court, drawing the ire of law enforcement officials and legislators who would have preferred adherence to increasingly conservative United States Supreme Court decisions, construed the state constitutional provision as providing more protections than the Fourth Amendment.46 Consequently, Florida courts now are limited when dealing with search and seizure issues by a 1983 amendment to the state constitution that commands adherence to the United States Supreme Court doctrine in the Fourth Amendment area. The amendment, proposed by the Legislature and approved by voters in 1982, has been explained by some as a reaction to a court that was too activist in its interpretation of the


45. See generally Ten-Year Retrospective, supra note 2, at 702 (discussing interpretation of the state constitution’s Declaration of Rights); Cooper, supra note 29 (citing several examples of Florida Supreme Court’s interpretation of state constitutional provisions in a manner different from federal constitutional provisions).

One example of the Florida Supreme Court’s reliance on the Florida Constitution can be found in State v. Neil, 457 So. 2d 481 (Fla. 1984), which held that the right to trial by an impartial jury requires retrial if the prosecutor exercises peremptory challenges to remove a prospective juror solely on account of race. The Neil decision predates Batson v. Kentucky, 476 U.S. 79 (1986), which held that a prosecutor cannot use peremptory strikes in a racially discriminatory manner. Neil, therefore, is a good example of a state court relying on its own constitution to reach a conclusion that is later also reached by the United States Supreme Court under the federal Constitution. Proponents of New Federalism argue that state court experimentation—the “laboratories of democracy” function—is one of the key advantages of judicial reliance on state constitutions. Abrahamson, supra note 18, at 29 (“New federalism serves as a reminder to state courts that they should experiment with new approaches that, if successful, may later be applied nationwide by the United States Supreme Court.”).

46. FLA. CONST. art. I, § 12.

47. For a summary of the cases construing article I, § 12, see Ten-Year Retrospective, supra note 2, at 773-75. The most controversial case was State v. Sarmiento, 397 So. 2d 643 (Fla. 1981), in which the court held that the warrantless interception of a conversation in the defendant’s home by an undercover detective wearing a “body bug” violated the state constitutional provision. Article I, § 12 is worded considerably differently from the Fourth Amendment. For example, the text includes the exclusionary rule (“[a]rticles or information obtained in violation of this right shall not be admissible in evidence”), which under the Fourth Amendment is found only in case law.
state constitution's search and seizure provision. Others have argued that the amendment is ill-conceived and should be repealed because it is contrary to state court independence. The strength of the 1983 amendment is demonstrated by a study of state court reliance on state constitutions in the criminal justice area between the late 1960s and 1989. The study found that Florida was the fourth most active court in the country before the 1983 amendment became effective. An analysis of decisions following the effective date of the amendment placed Florida as one of the least active courts.

The Florida Supreme Court's recent opinions in Traylor v. State and Department of Law Enforcement v. Real Property best illustrate the court's current thinking about New Federalism. Both decisions have drawn the attention of commentators who predict that the opinions will serve as precedents for increased reliance on the state constitution.

Traylor preserves the protections afforded by Miranda v. Arizona and its progeny under the Florida Constitution, which means that any further retreat by the United States Supreme Court on the self-incrimination and right-to-counsel issues covered by those opinions will not apply in Florida. In Traylor's majority opinion, a lengthy

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48. See Cooper, supra note 29, at 277 & n.220 (stating that the amendment served as a classic illustration of participatory democracy in action).
50. Latzer, supra note 28, at 192-93.
51. Latzer, supra note 28, at 192-93.
52. Latzer, supra note 28, at 192-93.
53. 596 So. 2d 957 (Fla. 1992).
54. 588 So. 2d 957 (Fla. 1991).
55. Pendleton, supra note 7. Writing about the Traylor decision, Pendleton noted: "By calling for the Florida Constitution, rather than the U.S. Constitution, to prevail on these questions, the Florida Supreme Court set itself up as the final arbiter. . . . Whether that is good or bad depends on one's point of view, but there is no denying it is an important development." See also 1991 Survey, supra note 2, at 191. ("Real Property is a fountainhead of state constitutional decision making. The decision illustrates the court's willingness to dispose of far-reaching constitutional questions entirely on the strength of the Florida Constitution"). Both Traylor and Real Property are discussed in Part I, supra.
57. The Traylor court stated:

Based on the foregoing analysis of our Florida law and the experience under Miranda and its progeny, we held that to ensure the voluntariness of confessions, the Self-Incrimination Clause of Article I, Section 9, Florida Constitution, requires that prior to custodial interrogation in Florida suspects must be told that they have a right to remain silent, that anything they say will be used against them in court, that they have a right to a lawyer's help, and that if they cannot pay for a lawyer one will be appointed to help them.

596 So. 2d at 965-66 (footnotes omitted). Traylor also established standards under article 1, § 16
discussion\(^\text{58}\) of federalism and the *Florida Constitution*’s Declaration of Rights reads like a “how to” guide for relying on the state constitution. Further, Justice Kogan’s separate opinion in *Traylor* clearly indicates that he wishes both lawyers and judges would look to the *Florida Constitution* more frequently.\(^\text{59}\)

The *Real Property* opinion relies exclusively on article I of the *Florida Constitution* and describes state substantive due process as a broad concept that protects all individual rights from unwarranted governmental encroachment.\(^\text{60}\) The *Real Property* decision, therefore, could be relevant to a variety of claims based on the Declaration of Rights.

*Tillman v. State*\(^\text{61}\) is much shorter and less explicit in its meaning than either *Traylor* or *Real Property*, but it may indicate that the court intends to shift its focus in at least some types of death penalty cases from the Eighth Amendment to article I, section 17. *Tillman* represents the first time the court has indicated that the “cruel or unusual punishment” provision in article I, section 17 is different from the Eighth Amendment “cruel and unusual punishment” provision and could be subject to different interpretation. The court’s intimation of this difference is relegated to a two-sentence footnote that focuses on the use of “or” rather than “and” in the phrase “cruel or unusual punishment.”\(^\text{62}\) The sole citation used to support a different interpretation of the word “or” is to *Cherry Lake Farms, Inc. v. Love*,\(^\text{63}\) a 1937 opinion discussing how the word “or” should be interpreted when construing a statute. The *Cherry Lake* case, cited without elaboration, states that “or” generally is construed in the disjunctive unless the intent of the Legislature requires that it be construed in the conjunctive.\(^\text{64}\)

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\(^\text{58}\) (counsel clause) of the state constitution regarding a person’s ability to choose a manner of representation against criminal charges. *Id.* at 966-68. The court found that the right to counsel must apply at each crucial stage of the prosecution, defined as “any stage that may significantly affect the outcome of the proceedings.” *Id.* at 968. The court also held that the right of indigent defendants to assistance of court-appointed counsel is protected by the *Florida Constitution*’s equal protection clause (article I, § 2). *Id.* at 969-70.

\(^\text{59}\) *Id.* at 982 (Kogan, J., concurring in part and dissenting in part).

\(^\text{60}\) 591 So. 2d 957, 960 (Fla. 1991).

\(^\text{61}\) 591 So. 2d 167 (Fla. 1991). *Tillman* is discussed in Part I, supra.

\(^\text{62}\) *Id.* at 169 n.2 (“The Florida Constitution prohibits ‘cruel or unusual punishment.’ . . . The use of the word ‘or’ indicates that alternatives were intended.”) (emphasis added).

\(^\text{63}\) 176 So. 486 (Fla. 1937).

\(^\text{64}\) *Id.* at 488 (“Employed between two terms which describe different subjects of a power, the word ‘or’ usually implies a discretion when it occurs in a directory provision, and a choice between two alternatives when it occurs in a permissive provision.”).
The Tillman case involved a man convicted of first-degree murder in the stabbing death of a woman. As the result of a plea agreement, the facts of the murder available for review by the Florida Supreme Court stated only that the woman was discovered shortly after she was stabbed fifty-nine times, that she later bled to death in the hospital, and that Tillman was on parole for burglary at the time of the murder. Because of the scant record available for review, the court could not determine whether the murder was more like the multiple stabbing murders in which defendants had received the death penalty or more like those murders in which death was not considered a proportionate penalty. The point of focusing on cruel or unusual punishment in Tillman was to find that it is "unusual" to impose death based on facts similar to those in cases where death was not considered proper.

III. Other States' Death Penalty Jurisprudence

A. Per Se Challenges

Just two state supreme courts, California and Massachusetts, have declared the death penalty invalid on state constitutional grounds. Both decisions were quickly reversed by the voters through constitutional amendments. In People v. Anderson, the California Supreme Court relied on the California Constitution's "cruel or unusual" punishment clause, using the disjunctive "or" to distinguish the state clause from the Eighth Amendment provision. The court found that the death penalty was both cruel and unusual. Because Anderson...
son was decided while Furman v. Georgia was pending before the United States Supreme Court, the California case was quickly overshadowed when the Court invalidated virtually all death sentences in the country. In District Attorney v. Watson, the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts found that the death penalty was unconstitutionally cruel under the state constitution's prohibition against cruel or unusual punishments, but Massachusetts voters quickly disposed of that decision with a constitutional amendment.

Individual justices in several states, including Indiana, Tennessee, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming have argued that the death penalty is per se violative of state constitutional provisions, but their opinions have not prevailed. Numerous state courts, including Florida in Raulerson v. State, have rejected per se challenges to the death penalty on state constitutional grounds.
Given the reaction to the California and Massachusetts decisions by voters, some state judges probably recognize that a per se declaration that the death penalty violates the state constitution is politically impossible, even though such a decision is legally supportable. The 1986 retention election in California rejecting Supreme Court Chief Justice Rose Bird and two of her colleagues—partly because of their voting records in death penalty cases—no doubt bolsters such a belief.

A more serious concern about per se challenges to the death penalty relates to the integrity of the court rather than the political fortunes of individual justices. What does it say about a state court's credibility when it declares that the death penalty no longer comports with modern standards of decency and the electorate responds by promptly declaring the court to be wrong? One state court judge, Justice Shirley S. Abrahamson of the Wisconsin Supreme Court, insists that elected state judges will resist public opinion, if necessary, in constitutional interpretation. "Judges are not to rule on the basis of the passions of the times. Judges must interpret the law exercising integrity, intellect, and wisdom—even in the face of community hostility," Abrahamson wrote in 1985. In an ideal society, Justice Abrahamson is correct. Justice Brennan, however, probably is more accurate when he notes: "It cannot be denied that state court judges are often more immediately 'subject to majoritarian pressures than federal courts, and are correspondingly less independent than their federal counterparts.'"

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supra note 22, at 1321-22 n.151. The Florida decision makes the authors' point: Raulerson includes no discussion of article I, § 17 or any other Florida constitutional provision (the death penalty was challenged on federal constitutional grounds as well as on grounds that it violated article I, §§ 2 (basic rights), 9 (due process), and 17 (excessive punishments)). Raulerson, 358 So. 2d at 828-29.

84. Acker & Walsh, supra note 22, at 1330 n.145 (Before the election, the California Supreme Court had vacated death sentences in all but three of the 56 capital cases it had decided.).

85. "Evolving standards of decency" are relevant in all decisions concerning imposition of the death penalty. The U.S. Supreme Court has repeatedly cited a statement from Trop v. Dulles, 356 U.S. 86, 101 (1958) that the Eighth Amendment "must draw its meaning from the evolving standards of decency that mark the progress of a maturing society." In Penry v. Lynaugh, 492 U.S. 302, 330-35 (1989), for example, the Court noted the relevancy of evolving standards of decency, but suggested that the two state statutes prohibiting the execution of the mentally retarded did not provide sufficient evidence that decency had evolved enough to justify finding such executions unconstitutional.

86. Linde, supra note 27, at 192.
87. Abrahamson, supra note 21, at 1155.
88. Abrahamson, supra note 21, at 1155.
The Florida Supreme Court is unlikely to declare the death penalty unconstitutional per se based on article I, section 17. Even if a majority of the court was inclined to do so, which is unlikely, such a decision would necessarily involve overruling *Raulerson v. State*, a case holding that capital punishment is not per se violative of either the Eighth Amendment or article I, section 17. Additionally, the court already has experienced one constitutional amendment designed to limit its ability to interpret the state constitution; a decision as controversial as declaring the death penalty unconstitutional would likely spark another. The court could, however, use the state constitution's cruel or unusual punishment clause to develop its own approach to a variety of capital punishment issues, including the execution of the mentally retarded and juveniles. Several such “as applied” challenges to the death penalty in other states are discussed in the following subsection. Areas of the law this author considers particularly appropriate for death penalty jurisprudence based on the *Florida Constitution* are discussed in Part IV.

**B. “As Applied” Challenges**

A variety of “as applied” challenges to the death penalty may be viable because of general dissatisfaction with the United States Supreme Court’s death penalty jurisprudence. A specific point of frustration is the tension between the requirement for consistency in sentencing schemes and the requirement of individualized sentencing. Even if state courts find the logic of United States Supreme
Court decisions generally persuasive, they may depart from that logic and base a decision on state constitutional grounds if the evidence in an "as applied" challenge is sufficiently persuasive. Additionally, state courts that generally adhere to Eighth Amendment capital punishment doctrine may choose to rely on their state constitutions when certain issues arise.

For example, in *State v. Smith*, a plurality of the Louisiana Supreme Court held that the open courts provision of the *Louisiana Constitution* requires review of all possible errors in a death penalty case, even if the errors are not properly raised by the defendant. The United States Supreme Court, in the context of federal habeas corpus review, has taken a much more stringent view of procedural errors. The Louisiana Supreme Court reasoned:

In a case involving capital punishment anything less than this court's careful consideration of the entire record for possible prejudicial error would not afford "an adequate remedy by due process of law and justice." Further, this court's refusal to consider such an error, simply because appellant's lawyer did not properly raise it, as more able counsel might have, would either defer the problem, adding to the burgeoning delays of postconviction proceedings in state and federal courts, or create the risk of allowing appellant to be executed without a judicial determination of whether the error had prejudicially affected the procedural fairness or accuracy of factfinding in his case.

The Georgia Supreme Court in 1989 relied on its state constitution in *Fleming v. Zant* to find that execution of the mentally retarded constitutes cruel and unusual punishment. The court, relying primarily on a prospective legislative enactment that was passed after the *Fleming* defendant's trial, found a state consensus against execution.

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97. An array of possible "as applied" challenges is discussed in Acker & Walsh, *supra* note 22, at 1337-45. Among the suggested issues state courts may want to explore are the procedures that ought to be required for administration of the death penalty to avoid arbitrariness and regulation of prosecutorial decision making in capital cases.
98. 554 So. 2d 676 (La. 1989).
99. Wainwright v. Sykes, 433 U.S. 72 (1977) (petitioners seeking federal habeas relief on constitutional claims defaulted in state court must show reason why the claim was not raised and that failure to raise the claim resulted in prejudice). See also Murray v. Carrier, 477 U.S. 478 (1986) (existence of cause for a procedural default must turn on whether the prisoner can show that an objective factor external to the defense harmed counsel's efforts to comply with the state procedural rule).
100. 554 So. 2d at 678 (quoting La. Const. art. I, § 22) (citation omitted).
of the mentally retarded.\textsuperscript{102} The Fleming case was decided just a few months after Penry v. Lynaugh,\textsuperscript{103} a United States Supreme Court case holding that the Eighth Amendment does not prohibit execution of the mentally retarded. Noting that the Penry Court discussed evolving standards of decency, the Georgia Supreme Court stated in Fleming that the standards of the citizens of Georgia, not those of the rest of the country, should be considered in deciding the case.\textsuperscript{104} The majority opinion in Fleming was sharply criticized in a dissent arguing that the Georgia Legislature intended its prohibition against execution of the mentally retarded to be prospective only.\textsuperscript{105} The Fleming dissent also charged that the legislation was passed "in an emotional response to the execution of a mildly retarded defendant" and that the court, by relying on the state constitution, had prohibited the Legislature from amending the statute at a calmer moment.\textsuperscript{106}

State courts also can use proportionality grounds to limit the range of offenses or the class of offenders that may be subject to capital punishment.\textsuperscript{107} Under the federal Constitution, proportionality principles prohibit imposing the death penalty for certain offenses, such as rape,\textsuperscript{108} kidnapping,\textsuperscript{109} and felony murder in some situations.\textsuperscript{110} Additionally, the Supreme Court has held that the death penalty generally may not be imposed on fifteen-year-olds,\textsuperscript{111} although the Eighth Amendment does not prohibit execution of sixteen- or seventeen-year-olds.\textsuperscript{112}

In Tillman v. State,\textsuperscript{113} the Florida Supreme Court stated that Florida's proportionality requirement is mandated, at least in part, by article I, section 17. The court therefore could use the cruel or unusual punishment clause's proportionality requirement—perhaps in conjunction with the Florida Constitution's due process clause,\textsuperscript{114} also

\begin{enumerate}
\item\textsuperscript{102} Id. at 342.
\item\textsuperscript{103} 492 U.S. 302 (1989).
\item\textsuperscript{104} 386 S.E.2d at 341-42. The court wrote: "Federal constitutional standards represent the minimum, not the maximum, protection that this state must afford its citizens. Thus, although the rest of the nation might not agree, under the Georgia Constitution, the execution of the mentally retarded constitutes cruel and unusual punishment." Id. at 342 (citation omitted).
\item\textsuperscript{105} Id. at 343 (Smith, J., dissenting).
\item\textsuperscript{106} Id. at 345.
\item\textsuperscript{107} See Acker & Walsh, supra note 22, at 1354-56.
\item\textsuperscript{108} Coker v. Georgia, 433 U.S. 584 (1977).
\item\textsuperscript{109} Eberhart v. Georgia, 433 U.S. 917 (1977).
\item\textsuperscript{111} Thompson v. Oklahoma, 487 U.S. 815 (1988).
\item\textsuperscript{112} Stanford v. Kentucky, 492 U.S. 361 (1989).
\item\textsuperscript{113} 591 So. 2d 167 (Fla. 1991).
\item\textsuperscript{114} See Department of Law Enforcement v. Real Property, 588 So. 2d 957 (Fla. 1991) (discussing the Florida Constitution's due process requirements). Real Property is discussed in Parts I and IIB, supra.
identified in Tillman as a source for proportionality—to find that execution of certain classes of defendants violates proportionality principles.

IV. HISTORY OF ARTICLE I, SECTION 17 AND ITS USE IN DEATH CASES

A. The Language of Section 17

The Florida Constitution's prohibition against cruel "or" unusual punishment has been part of every Florida Constitution since 1838.115 Minutes of the first constitutional convention in 1838 and 1839 do not indicate why the framers chose those particular words, nor does a written account of the convention discuss the phrase.116 The phrase has changed in subsequent constitutions only in that "punishment" is singular in the constitutions of 1885, 1861, and 1868, and it is plural in the constitutions of 1838 and 1865.117

Drafters of the first Florida Constitution used the constitutions of other southern frontier states, particularly Alabama, as models.118 While there is no evidence that the framers discussed what they meant by the prohibition against cruel or unusual punishment, it is unlikely that they intended to prohibit the death penalty. Florida's territorial government at the time had passed statutes providing the death penalty for certain crimes.119 Among the crimes punishable by death was the concealing on shipboard and carrying away of a slave owned by a Floridian.120

By the time of the 1968 revision to the Florida Constitution of 1885, some drafters of the revision thought that standards of decency had evolved sufficiently to outlaw the death penalty in the state constitution. Tallahassee lawyer Joseph C. Jacobs, a member of the Constitu-

115. FLA. CONST. art. I, § 12 (1838); FLA. CONST. art. I, § 12 (1861); FLA. CONST. art. I, § 12 (1865); FLA. CONST. Declaration of Rights, § 6 (1858); FLA. CONST. Declaration of Rights, § 8 (1885). The current constitution is a revision of the 1885 constitution and was approved by voters in 1968. The cruel or unusual punishment clause was placed in article I, § 17 at the time of that revision.

116. CHARLTON W. TEBEAU, A HISTORY OF FLORIDA 126-31 (1971) (discussing the convention that met from December 3, 1838, until January 4, 1839). Minutes of the constitutional convention are on file at the Florida Department of State, Division of Archives, Tallahassee, Florida.

117. See generally FLA. STAT. Volume III, Helpful and Useful Matters (1941) (all of Florida's constitutions printed in full).

118. TEBEAU, supra note 116, at 126. The author notes that "[c]onstitution making was actually a rather simple process." The framers did not depart significantly from the constitutions of other southern states except on the issue of banking. Id. Florida was admitted to the Union in 1845.

119. TEBEAU, supra note 116, at 129.

120. TEBEAU, supra note 116, at 129.
tion Revision Commission, proposed an amendment at a commission meeting in 1966 to include in the constitution a prohibition against the death penalty. Jacobs, in arguing for his amendment, cited a poll showing that most citizens opposed capital punishment and stated his belief that future generations would view the commission’s vote against his amendment as ridiculous. He stated:

Well, now, I’m not going to strip to the waist, and I’m not going to thrash my breast, and I’m not going to talk about what the legislature ought to do by statute. I’m simply going to say that I, and I think a bunch of people in this room, do not believe that capital punishment has any place in our society at this time. And this is one opportunity that I have to say so, and I am saying so, and will say so at every opportunity that I have. Now, to say that this has no place in the declaration of basic rights that are guaranteed to all people in Florida, and to say that they have got the right to trial by jury, got the right to religious freedom, they have the right to habeas corpus, they have protection against excessive fines, they have protection against cruel and unhuman punishment, et cetera, they have the right of bail, due process, equal protection and so forth, and to say at the same time the State of Florida can legally take a life, is absolutely foreign to what I think the constitution today should state.

Jacobs’ proposed amendment failed.

The Florida Supreme Court assumed in Tillman v. State that the use of the disjunctive in the phrase cruel or unusual punishment was intentional. Given the lack of information regarding the mindset of the drafters of the Florida Constitution, Florida courts probably cannot point to specific reasons why “cruel or unusual” was chosen. Clearly, the drafters had several different phrases from which to choose. The Alabama Constitution, which drafters of the Florida Constitution reportedly relied on most heavily, prohibited “cruel punishments.” Some model constitutions that the drafters may have looked to prohibited cruel or unusual punishments, some prohibited

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122. Id.
123. Id.
124. Id.
125. 591 So. 2d 167 (Fla. 1991). Tillman is discussed in Parts I and IIB, supra.
126. See Cherry Lake Farms, Inc. v. Love, 176 So. 486 (Fla. 1937) (use of the word “or” indicates a choice between two alternatives).
127. TE BC, supra note 116, at 126.
128. ALA. CONST. art. I, § 16 (1819).
cruel and unusual punishments, and still others had provisions requiring that punishment be proportioned to the offense.\(^\text{129}\) Florida courts should assume that the drafters intentionally selected the particular phrase "cruel or unusual" from several possible models and that they intended the word "or" to be given its ordinary, disjunctive meaning.\(^\text{130}\)

### B. The Application of Section 17

With the recent exception of *Tillman*,\(^\text{131}\) the Florida Supreme Court has given little indication that article I, section 17 should be interpreted independently from the Eighth Amendment.\(^\text{132}\) Few cases have addressed the nature of Florida's constitutional protection against cruel or unusual punishment and, except for *Tillman*, none has suggested that the section creates protections in capital punishment cases that may be different from those derived from federal constitutional law. As noted earlier, the Florida Supreme Court held in *Raulerson v. State*\(^\text{133}\) that capital punishment is not per se violative of either the Eighth Amendment or article I, section 17; the court, however, did not separately discuss the state constitutional provision in that opinion.

In *LeCroy v. State*,\(^\text{134}\) Justice Barkett argued in dissent that imposing the death penalty on someone who was a juvenile at the time of the crime violates both the Eighth Amendment and article I, section 17.\(^\text{135}\) She asserted her belief that capital punishment is "totally inappropriate when applied to persons who, because of their youth, have not fully developed the ability to judge or consider the consequences of their behavior. This conclusion particularly is strong in light of the legal disabilities imposed upon minors because of their lack of mature judgment."\(^\text{136}\) Justice Barkett also stated her belief that most reasonable people would agree that the death penalty should not be imposed on children below a certain age.\(^\text{137}\) She suggested that the line should

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\(^\text{130}\) See *id.* at 886 (California Supreme Court refused to presume that framers of the *California Constitution* chose the disjunctive form haphazardly).

\(^\text{131}\) *591 So. 2d 167 (Fla. 1991).*

\(^\text{132}\) *1991 Survey, supra note 2, at 218-29; Ten-Year Retrospective, supra note 2, at 803.*

\(^\text{133}\) *358 So. 2d 826 (Fla.), *cert. denied*, 439 U.S. 959 (1978).*

\(^\text{134}\) *533 So. 2d 750 (Fla. 1988), *cert. denied*, 492 U.S. 925 (1989).*

\(^\text{135}\) *Id.* at 758-60 (Barkett, J., dissenting).

\(^\text{136}\) *Id.* at 758.

\(^\text{137}\) *Id.* at 759.
be drawn at the age of majority. Justice Barkett did not discuss the requirements of article I, section 17 as separate from those of the Eighth Amendment.

The majority in LeCroy held that there is no constitutional bar to imposing the death penalty on a defendant who was seventeen at the time of the crime, but emphasized that it did not consider the case to be a definitive resolution of whether there is a minimum age below which the death penalty may not be imposed.\(^{138}\) Instead, the decision was limited to the facts of that case, which involved a seventeen-year-old youth who was convicted in the shooting death of a husband and wife while they were on a camping trip in Palm Beach County.\(^{139}\)

The Florida Supreme Court has not determined whether execution of the mentally retarded is cruel or unusual punishment.\(^{140}\) Three dissenting judges in Woods v. State, however, indicated their belief that imposing the death penalty in such situations violates article I, section 17.\(^{141}\) In Woods, Justices Shaw and Barkett dissented from a decision upholding the death penalty in a case involving an eighteen-year-old man with a mental age of twelve and an IQ of between sixty and sixty-nine.\(^{142}\) The majority did not address the constitutional issue of executing the mentally retarded because it had not been raised on direct appeal.\(^{143}\) In Woods, which was decided before Penry,\(^{144}\) Justice Barkett noted her belief that imposing the death penalty on a mentally retarded person constitutes cruel and unusual punishment under both the Eighth Amendment and article I, section 17.\(^{145}\) Neither her dissent nor Justice Shaw's discussed the requirements of article I, section 17 or distinguished them in any way from those of the Eighth Amendment.

The issues of executing juveniles and the mentally retarded are particularly appropriate for exploration using article I, section 17. Because the court has not decided whether execution of the mentally retarded constitutes cruel or unusual punishment and because the court has left open the question of whether there is a minimum age below which the death penalty should not be imposed, the justices are

\(^{138}\) 533 So. 2d at 758.

\(^{139}\) Id.


\(^{141}\) Woods v. State, 531 So. 2d 79, 83-84 (Fla. 1989) (Shaw, J., dissenting) & (Barkett, J., dissenting). Justice Kogan joined both dissents.

\(^{142}\) Id.

\(^{143}\) 531 So. 2d at 82.


\(^{145}\) 531 So. 2d at 84 (Barkett, J., dissenting).
not constrained by precedent. Additionally, both issues present opportunities to discuss the meaning of "cruel" and the meaning of "unusual" in the Florida Constitution.

In Tillman,\textsuperscript{146} the court began to explore the meaning of "unusual" in the context of proportionality review. That discussion logically could continue with an analysis of whether execution of juveniles and of mentally retarded persons is proportional. In other words, the court could consider—using article I, section 17—whether execution of juveniles and the mentally retarded is a proper punishment given the "unusual" characteristics of the defendants. The dissents of Justices Barkett and Shaw in Woods\textsuperscript{147} and Justice Barkett in LeCroy\textsuperscript{148} begin the discussions of the particular characteristics of juveniles and mentally retarded persons that should be considered in such a review.

Some guidance for defining the meaning of "cruel" in article I, section 17 can be found in Justice Brennan's concurring opinion in Furman v. Georgia.\textsuperscript{149} One of the principles that Justice Brennan found inherent in the Eighth Amendment's cruel and unusual punishments clause is that a severe punishment must not be excessive; a punishment is excessive when it is unnecessary.\textsuperscript{150} He wrote:

\begin{quote}
The infliction of a severe punishment by the State cannot comport with human dignity when it is nothing more than the pointless infliction of suffering. If there is a significantly less severe punishment adequate to achieve the purposes for which the punishment is inflicted . . . the punishment inflicted is unnecessary and therefore excessive.\textsuperscript{151}
\end{quote}

The execution of juveniles and of the mentally retarded is arguably unnecessary. The court should consider what goals are served by executing an individual with an IQ of sixty.\textsuperscript{152} Other mentally impaired individuals unlikely would be deterred by the execution from committing similar crimes. Is retribution a legitimate goal when the individual who committed the crime has the mental ability of a twelve-year-old?

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{146} Tillman v. State, 591 So. 2d 167 (Fla. 1991).
\item \textsuperscript{147} 531 So. 2d 79, 83 (Fla. 1988) (Shaw, J., dissenting) & (Barkett, J., dissenting).
\item \textsuperscript{148} LeCroy v. State, 533 So. 2d 750, 758 (Fla. 1988) (Barkett, J., dissenting), cert. denied, 492 U.S. 925 (1989).
\item \textsuperscript{149} 408 U.S. 238, 257 (1972).
\item \textsuperscript{150} \textit{Id.} at 279.
\item \textsuperscript{151} \textit{Id.} (citations omitted).
\item \textsuperscript{152} In Gregg v. Georgia, 428 U.S. 153 (1976) and numerous other cases, the Supreme Court noted that imposition of the death penalty serves two legitimate goals: deterrence and retribution.
\end{itemize}
Surely society would consider the execution of a twelve-year-old to be "cruel." The goals of deterrence and retribution could be adequately served by ensuring that the mentally retarded individual no longer has unfettered contact with society. Similarly, what goals are served by executing youths who have not yet developed the ability to grasp the consequences of their behavior? Other immature youths are unlikely to be deterred by the execution, and retribution is not likely to be justified when the person executed could not fully appreciate the consequences of his or her actions. Could not the goals of the punishment be better served by ensuring that these juveniles have no further contact with society? Juveniles and the mentally retarded, for reasons of their immaturity or their low mental development, simply do not have the same degree of culpability as do some other criminal defendants. Executing them, therefore, is cruel because it is unnecessary.

V. CONCLUSION

The Florida Supreme Court should use article I, section 17 to develop death penalty jurisprudence independent of the Eighth Amendment. The Tillman case begins the process by noting that cruel "or" unusual punishment is different from cruel "and" unusual punishment. While a textual difference is not necessary in order for the court to base decisions solely on the state constitutional provision, the difference in wording lends legitimacy to the court's independent review. The court need not declare that the state constitutional provision categorically prohibits the death penalty; such a ruling would be extremely controversial and could lead to a constitutional amendment. Instead, the court should focus on areas of death penalty law that the court has not yet fully developed, such as execution of juveniles and of the mentally retarded.

The court in Tillman found that the requirement for proportionality review is found in article I, section 17 and in article I, section 9. The court, then, could use the cruel or unusual punishment clause in conjunction with the due process provision to find that execution of the mentally retarded and of people below a certain age constitutes "unusual" punishment. Additionally, the court could rely on article I, section 17 to find that executing juveniles and the mentally retarded constitutes "cruel" punishment because the death penalty is unnecessary given the lesser culpability of defendants in those classes.

The Florida Supreme Court recently reaffirmed its commitment to the primacy of the Florida Constitution in Traylor and found in Real Property that the state constitution's due process clause protects all individual rights from governmental encroachment. Those decisions strongly indicate the court's intention to focus more frequently on the
Florida Constitution, and they should provide support for arguments based on state constitutional grounds in a variety of areas, including article I, section 17.