The Right to Defend Pro Se in Criminal Proceedings
THE RIGHT TO DEFEND
PRO SE IN CRIMINAL PROCEEDINGS

I. INTRODUCTION

The right to counsel is a modern-day reality in the prosecution of serious crimes.¹ Nevertheless, a small but visible minority² of criminal defendants asks to conduct its own defense. Whatever motivates a criminal defendant to seek to act pro se,³ the issue of voluntary self-

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1. In Argersinger v. Hamlin, 407 U.S. 25 (1972), the Supreme Court held that the right to counsel extends to all cases in which the defendant faces possible incarceration. See note 100 infra.

2. Although precise data on the number of pro se defendants is not available, it appears that very few criminal defendants choose to represent themselves. See 1 L. Silverstein, Defense of the Poor in Criminal Cases in American State Courts: A Field Study and Report 89 (1965).

A Minnesota survey revealed that attempted waiver of counsel by indigents was rare. Most estimates were that less than three percent of the defendants attempted to defend pro se, and this figure was reduced after the trial judge fully explained to the defendants the importance of defense counsel. See Kamisar & Choper, The Right to Counsel in Minnesota: Some Field Findings and Legal Policy Observations, 48 Minn. L. Rev. 1, 36-37 (1963).

Much higher percentages of waiver of counsel requests, however, have been reported from some federal district courts. See Note, The Representation of Indigent Criminal Defendants in the Federal District Courts, 76 Harv. L. Rev. 579, 584 (1963).

3. Pro se means "for himself." Another term, in propria persona, meaning "in one's own proper person," is often used interchangeably with pro se.

Different reasons have been offered to explain why a defendant would want to defend pro se. One reason recently suggested is that of political motivation. See note 4 infra. Several other reasons have been suggested. The defendant may believe that he can do a better job than counsel. See, e.g., Burstein v. United States, 178 F.2d 665 (9th Cir. 1950). Sometimes the defendant may want to plead guilty to "get it over with." See W. BeaneY, The Right to Counsel in American Courts 204 (1955) [hereinafter cited as BeaneY]. See also Moore v. Michigan, 355 U.S. 155 (1957); note 100 infra. The defendant also may believe that by defending pro se he will, if convicted, receive a lighter sentence, "a hope which has often been planted by the district attorney to save the time and the expense of trial." BeaneY 204. Other defendants may have a blind faith in their own innocence and in the infallibility of the judicial system. See Laub, The Problem of the Unrepresented, Misrepresented and Rebellious Defendant in Criminal Court, 2 Duquesne U.L. Rev. 245, 255 (1964). A defendant may regard a pro se defense as a means to invoke the jury's or the court's sympathy. See, e.g., Commonwealth v. Helwig, 184 Pa. Super. 370, 378, 134 A.2d 694, 698 (1957). For a general discussion of the tactical advantages of a pro se defense, see Comment, Self-Representation in Criminal Trials: The Dilemma of the Pro Se Defendant, 59 Calif. L. Rev. 1479, 1504-07 (1971) [hereinafter cited as Self-Representation]. Finally, it has even been suggested
representation in criminal trials has been presented often to American courts.⁴

The right⁵ of a criminal defendant to defend pro se at trial has strong historical antecedents in nations with common law systems.⁶ The right has been described as "absolute and primary,"⁷ "basic and fundamental,"⁸ and "inherent."⁹ Writers and courts disagree, however, whether the right is protected by the United States Constitution.¹⁰

In the federal courts, a criminal defendant has an express statutory right to defend pro se.¹¹ While the existence of a statutory right does


4. In recent years the issue has arisen frequently in so-called "political" trials, prime examples of which are the prosecutions of Angela Davis and Bobby Seale. See Seale v. Hoffman, 306 F. Supp. 330 (N.D. Ill. 1969), rev'd on other grounds, 461 F.2d 345 (7th Cir. 1972); People v. Davis, No. 3744 (Cal. Super. Ct., Marin County, June 4, 1972), cited in Self-Representation 1480 n.6, in which a co-defendant requested to defend pro se; defendant Davis was allowed to participate as co-counsel, see note 53 infra. See also United States v. Dougherty, 473 F.2d 1113 (D.C. Cir. 1972) (appeal by seven of the so-called "D.C. Nine"). For a discussion of the pro se right as colored by political considerations, see Self-Representation 1502-04.

5. Some courts have used the term "pro se right" without holding that the "right" is founded on any constitutional or statutory provision. See, e.g., People v. Sharp, 7 Cal. 3d 448, 461, 499 P.2d 489, 497, 103 Cal. Rptr. 233, 241 (1972). Since many courts have adopted this terminology, it will be used in this Note with the understanding that the term "pro se right" does not assume that the legal ability to defend pro se necessarily has a constitutional or statutory basis.

6. In thirteenth-century England, for example, the judicial procedure "required of a litigant that he should appear before the court in his own person and conduct his own cause in his own words." 1 F. POLLOCK & F. MAITLAND, THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH COMMON LAW 211 (2d ed. 1899).

In the United States, the Judiciary Act of 1789, ch. 20, § 35, 1 Stat. 92, provided "that in all the courts of the United States, the parties may plead and conduct their own causes personally . . . ." Thus the court in United States v. Davis, 260 F. Supp. 1009, 1018 (E.D. Tenn.), aff'd, 365 F.2d 251 (6th Cir. 1966), noted that the pro se right has "long been recognized."


11. "In all courts of the United States the parties may plead and conduct their own causes personally or by counsel . . . ." 28 U.S.C. § 1654 (1970). See also
not render moot any inquiry into the constitutional status of the pro se right. It often allows a federal court to avoid a final resolution of the constitutional question.

The constitutions of thirty-six states appear to guarantee the right of criminal defendants to proceed pro se. In the recent case of People v. Sharp, however, the California Supreme Court construed the language of the California constitution to deny what previously had been interpreted as a constitutional right of self-representation.

FED. R. CRIM. P. 44(a) (emphasis added):

Every defendant who is unable to obtain counsel shall be entitled to have counsel assigned to represent him at every stage of the proceedings from his initial appearance before the commissioner or the court through appeal, unless he waives such appointment.

Prior to a 1966 amendment, the rule was more explicit:

If the defendant appears in court without counsel, the court shall advise him of his right to counsel and assign counsel unless he elects to proceed without counsel.


12. At least one writer believes that a constitutional, as opposed to a statutory, pro se right is of more value to a defendant. Garcia, Defense Pro Se, 23 U. MIAMI L. REV. 551, 554 (1969). The purely statutory pro se right is so burdened with limitations that it has been suggested that the right can be effective only if grounded in the federal constitution. See Self-Representation 1483.

13. See, e.g., United States v. Dougherty, 473 F.2d 1113, 1123 (D.C. Cir. 1972): "In sum, whether or not the right of pro se representation has a constitutional foundation it is patently a statutory right . . . ."

14. Some states allow the accused the right to be heard, or to defend, in person and by counsel: ARIZ. CONST. art. 2, § 24; ARK. CONST. art. 2, § 10; COLO. CONST. art. 2, § 16; CONN. CONST. art. 1, § 8; DEL. CONST. art. 1, § 7; IDAHO CONST. art. 1, § 13; ILL. CONST. art. 1, § 8; IND. CONST. art. 1, § 13; KY. CONST. § 11; IA. CONST. art. 1, § 18(a); MONT. CONST. art. 3, § 16; NEV. CONST. art. 1, § 8; N.H. CONST. pt. 1, art. 15; N.M. CONST. art. 2, § 14; N.Y. CONST. art. 1, § 6; N.D. CONST. art. 1, § 13; OHIO CONST. art. 1, § 10; OKLA. CONST. art. 2, § 20; OR. CONST. art. 1, § 11; PA. CONST. art. 1, § 9; S.D. CONST. art. 6, § 7; TENN. CONST. art. 1, § 9; UT. CONST. art. 1, § 12; VT. CONST. ch. 1, art. 10; WASH. CONST. art. 1, § 22; WIS. Const. art. 1, § 7; see LA. CONST. art. 1, § 9. Others grant the right to defend in person or by counsel: KAN. CONST. BILL OF RIGHTS § 10; MASS. CONST. pt. 1, art. 12; NEB. CONST. art. 1, § 11. Still other state constitutions provide that the accused has the right to defend either by himself, by counsel, or both: ALA. CONST. art. 1, § 6; FLA. CONST. art. 1, § 16; ME. CONST. art. 1, § 6; MISS. CONST. art. 3, § 26; S.C. CONST. art. 1, § 18; TEX. CONST. art. 1, § 10.

15. 7 Cal. 3d 448, 499 P.2d 489, 103 Cal. Rptr. 233 (1972).

16. CAL. CONST. art. 1, § 13 (1879), granting a criminal defendant "the right . . . to appear and defend, in person and with counsel," previously had been read as conferring upon an accused a constitutional right to defend pro se. See, e.g., People v. Carter, 66 Cal. 2d 666, 427 P.2d 214, 58 Cal. Rptr. 614 (1967); People v. Mattson, 51 Cal. 2d 777, 336 P.2d 937 (1959); People v. Jackson, 186 Cal. App. 2d 307, 8 Cal. Rptr. 849 (1960). In People v. Sharp, 7 Cal. 3d 448, 499 P.2d 489, 103 Cal.
A resolution of the federal constitutional status of the *pro se* right is, therefore, of interest not only to the fourteen states without constitutional *pro se* provisions, but to the above mentioned states\(^8\) as well, since a federal constitutional *pro se* right may be applicable to state prosecutions.\(^18\)

The United States Supreme Court has never ruled directly on the constitutionality of the *pro se* right. It has noted, however, that at a minimum, due process does not prohibit the *pro se* defense.\(^19\) The Court suggested in *Adams v. United States ex rel. McCann*\(^20\) that "correlative" to the sixth amendment right to counsel is the *right* to proceed without counsel.\(^21\) That suggestion, however, has never been

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\(^{17}\) Section 13 was amended on June 6, 1972, effective June 7, 1972. The new constitutional language, which grants a defendant merely the right "to be personally present with counsel," cannot logically be construed as conferring any constitutional *pro se* right. *People v. Sharp*, 7 Cal. 3d 448, 463, 499 P.2d 489, 498-99, 103 Cal. Rptr. 233, 242-43 (1972). The amended constitutional provision was not applicable to the *Sharp* decision, since the "proceedings . . . were all had before the [amendment's] effective date . . . ." *Id.* at 464, 499 P.2d at 499, 103 Cal. Rptr. at 243.

For a discussion of nonlegal or extralegal factors that may underlie the *Sharp* decision as well as the constitutional amendment, see notes 147-50 infra and accompanying text. For a discussion of the *Sharp* decision itself, see *Death Knell*, supra note 10; notes 124-35 infra and accompanying text.

\(^{18}\) *See* note 14 supra and accompanying text.

\(^{19}\) *See*, e.g., *Carter v. Illinois*, 329 U.S. 173, 174 (1946):

Neither the historic conception of Due Process nor the vitality it derives from progressive standards of justice denies a person the right to defend himself or to confess guilt. *Accord*, *Moore v. Michigan*, 355 U.S. 155, 161 (1957). In *United States v. Davis*, 260 F. Supp. 1009, 1019 (E.D. Tenn.), aff'd, 365 F.2d 251 (6th Cir. 1966) (emphasis original) the court stated:

All that has really been said by the Supreme Court is that the Sixth Amendment does not prohibit the right of self-representation. *Davis* did not, however, pass on the constitutionality of the *pro se* right, and held only that the right, whatever its basis, is qualified.

\(^{20}\) \(317\) U.S. 269 (1942).

\(^{21}\) The Court stated:

The right to assistance of counsel and the correlative *right* to dispense with a lawyer's help are not legal formalisms. They rest on considerations that go to the substance of an accused's position before the law. . . . [T]he
the basis for a holding by the Court.\textsuperscript{22} Moreover, a statement made in a subsequent Supreme Court decision may have weakened the Court's earlier "correlative right" language: "The ability to waive a constitutional right does not ordinarily carry with it the right to insist upon the opposite of that right."\textsuperscript{23}

The federal courts of appeals are split on the \textit{pro se} question. Some, relying on the language found in \textit{Adams},\textsuperscript{24} have held that an accused's right to defend \textit{pro se} is of constitutional stature.\textsuperscript{25} Others have decided

\begin{quote}
Constitution does not force a lawyer upon a defendant. He may waive his Constitutional right to assistance of counsel if he knows what he is doing and his choice is made with eyes open. \textit{Id.} at 279 (emphasis added). Reference to this "correlative right" was made in subsequent cases as well. \textit{See} Moore v. Michigan, 355 U.S. 155, 161 (1957); Carter v. Illinois, 329 U.S. 173, 174 (1946).


23. Singer v. United States, 380 U.S. 24, 34-35 (1965). The Singer rationale has been viewed as one of the major obstacles to recognition of a constitutional \textit{pro se} right. \textit{See} Self-Representation 1488.

24. See note 21 supra.

25. The Second Circuit is the most unequivocal in its assertion of a constitutional \textit{pro se} right. Its current position was foreshadowed in United States \textit{v.} Private Brands, Inc., 250 F.2d 554, 557 (2d Cir. 1957), \textit{cert. denied}, 335 U.S. 957 (1958), which found it to be "well settled as a general principle that an accused has the constitutional right to dispense with a lawyer's help and conduct his own defense . . . ." (emphasis added). Then, in the leading case of United States \textit{v.} Plattner, 330 F.2d 271 (2d Cir. 1964), the court found the \textit{pro se} right to be implicit in the "bundle of rights" provided by the fifth amendment due process and sixth amendment right-to-counsel guarantees.

The right to counsel and the right to defend \textit{pro se} in criminal cases form a single, inseparable bundle of rights, two faces [sic] of the same coin. Thus we find the choice between the two sometimes discussed in terms of a waiver of the right to counsel, and sometimes in terms of an election to have a lawyer or to defend \textit{pro se}. Viewed in this light the problem is simplicity itself.

\textit{Id.} at 276. The Second Circuit affirmed its \textit{Plattner} position shortly thereafter, declaring that "the [\textit{pro se}] right derives, not from legislative enactments or judicial rules, but from the Federal Constitution." United States \textit{ex rel.} Maldonado \textit{v.} Denno, 348 F.2d 12, 15 (2d Cir. 1965), \textit{cert. denied}, 384 U.S. 1007 (1966).

The Fifth Circuit has found the \textit{pro se} right to be constitutionally protected on

that the right is purely statutory. In United States v. Dougherty, however, the Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, previously convinced of the right's solely statutory basis, seemed inclined to reconsider the question.

Viewed from both the federal and state level, then, it is apparent that the criminal defendant's pro se right receives varying degrees of respect according to the tribunal in which it is asserted. United States v. Dougherty and People v. Sharp considered along with a two grounds: as "correlative" to the sixth amendment right to counsel, Juelich v. United States, 342 F.2d 29 (5th Cir. 1965), and as implicit in the fifth amendment's due process clause, MacKenna v. Ellis, 263 F.2d 35 (5th Cir.), cert. denied, 360 U.S. 935 (1959).

For other circuits' recognition of a constitutional basis for the pro se right, see Lowe v. United States, 418 F.2d 100, 103 (7th Cir. 1970); United States v. Sternman, 415 F.2d 1165, 1169 (6th Cir. 1969); Arnold v. United States, 414 F.2d 1056, 1058 (9th Cir. 1969).

In Brown v. United States, 264 F.2d 363, 365 (D.C. Cir.), cert. denied, 360 U.S. 911 (1959), the court stated: "The truth is that the right is statutory in character, and does not rise to the dignity of one conferred and guaranteed by the Constitution." Accord, Van Nattan v. United States, 357 F.2d 161 (10th Cir. 1966); Butler v. United States, 317 F.2d 249 (8th Cir.), cert. denied, 375 U.S. 838 (1963).

The Supreme Court arguably implied that the pro se right is solely statutory in Price v. Johnston, 334 U.S. 266, 285-86 (1948).

See note 26 supra and accompanying text.

In Dougherty the court insisted that its decision in Brown v. United States, 264 F.2d 363 (D.C. Cir.), cert. denied, 360 U.S. 911 (1959), left the constitutional question unresolved. While the Brown court's comments regarding the constitutionality of the pro se right technically may be dicta, the court used emphatic language to suggest that the pro se right is purely statutory. See note 26 supra. The Brown decision has been cited for the proposition that no federal constitutional pro se right exists. See, e.g., Comment, The Right to Defend Pro Se, 3 Texas Tech. U.L. Rev. 89, 90 n.9 (1971). Since Brown was decided before many of the other circuits held in favor of a constitutional pro se right, note 25 supra, it is possible that Dougherty is a partial reflection of the cogency of the arguments advanced in those later cases. The Dougherty court acknowledged the "constitutional aura" of the right, but found simply that the Dougherty case could be resolved by reference to the "patently statutory" pro se right. United States v. Dougherty, 473 F.2d 1113, 1123 (D.C. Cir. 1972). The court concluded that the statutory pro se right must be recognized if asserted timely and accompanied by a valid waiver of counsel, noting that a mere fear by the trial judge of potential disruptive behavior by a pro se defendant is insufficient ground for denying the right. Because the court reversed the defendants' convictions on the ground that their statutory pro se right had been violated, the court's discussion of the constitutional basis for the right is, of course, dictum.

See 473 F.2d 1113 (D.C. Cir. 1972).

See note 26 supra and accompanying text. For a detailed discussion of the Sharp case, see notes 124-35 infra and accompanying text.

recent California constitutional amendment,\textsuperscript{32} emphasize the continuing disagreement regarding the constitutional basis for granting a \textit{pro se} request.

\textbf{II. Historical Analysis}

Self-representation by a criminal defendant was the commonplace mode of defense during the Colonial Period, and was a right often conferred specifically.\textsuperscript{33} This apparently firm historical footing for a \textit{pro se} right\textsuperscript{34} suggests that the absence of explicit reference to self-representation in the federal constitution requires explanation. One author states that the right is so engrained in our history that it simply has been taken for granted.\textsuperscript{35}

Another possible explanation notes that the Judiciary Act of 1789,\textsuperscript{36} granting the statutory \textit{pro se} right, was signed one day before the sixth amendment was proposed. The explanation suggests that had the sixth amendment guarantee of the right to counsel been intended to alter the generally recognized \textit{pro se} right, some discussion of the matter would have occurred on the floor of Congress.\textsuperscript{37} None

\begin{quote}
32. \textit{See} note 16 supra.
33. For example, see the following passages, quoted in \textit{People v. Sharp}, 7 Cal. 3d 448, 454, 499 P.2d 489, 492, 103 Cal. Rptr. 233, 235 (1972): Chapter XXIII of the Concessions and Agreements of West New Jersey (1677), stating that "all persons have free liberty to plead his own cause, if he please;" the Pennsylvania Frame of Government in 1682, providing "That, in all courts all persons of all persuasions may... personally plead their own cause themselves; or, if unable, by their friend;" the Georgia Constitution of 1777, which referred to the "inherent privilege of every freeman, the liberty to plead his own cause."
34. Arguably, what the provisions in note 33 supra sought to guarantee was simply a right to defend and not a right to defend \textit{pro se}. Thus the \textit{Sharp} court noted:

\begin{quote}
There can be no denial that... a person accused of wrong-doing was and is entitled to defend against such charges... Although the right to defend is fundamental, our concern is with the manner in which that fundamental right is to be exercised.
\end{quote}
7 Cal. 3d at 453, 499 P.2d at 491-92, 103 Cal. Rptr. at 235-36.

Nevertheless, the cited colonial provisions seem so clearly to confer a \textit{right} to defend \textit{pro se} that it is difficult to understand how the \textit{Sharp} court was able to "discern... only vague notions of a fundamental right of self-representation" from an examination of them. \textit{Id.} at 454, 499 P.2d at 492, 103 Cal. Rptr. at 236. At a minimum, the provisions easily could be viewed as reflecting the importance the colonists attached to the right. Hence, the \textit{Sharp} court's somewhat cursory rejection of the historical significance of these passages is, at the very least, questionable.
35. \textit{Beaney} 209.
37. \textit{Beaney} 28.
Thus the Second Circuit Court of Appeals in *United States v. Plattner* reasoned that in passing the sixth amendment, Congress merely acknowledged its awareness of the layman's lack of legal expertise; hence, to aid the criminal defendant, the right to counsel was supplied, an action "surely not intended to limit in any way the absolute and primary right to conduct one's own defense *in propria persona.*"

While the *Plattner* court's historical interpretation is plausible, it can be argued instead that the different treatment accorded the right to counsel and the right of self-representation, the former being placed in the Constitution and the latter being left in statutory form, was deliberate and hence expressive of an intent *not* to make self-representation a constitutional right.

In contrast to the absence of any reference to a *pro se* right in the federal constitution, the constitutions of many states appear to grant that right to criminal defendants. An analysis of one of these constitutional provisions, the Tennessee provision permitting a defendant "to be heard by himself," was presented in 1871 by the Tennessee

38. *Id.*
40. 330 F.2d at 274. This statement apparently seems illogical to one commentator, who states:

After all, to defend *pro se* is, for whatever reason, *not* to defend through counsel. These procedures are related only in that they are antagonistic to each other in the usual situation . . . . Thus, if the right to counsel is indeed "one of the safeguards . . . deemed necessary to insure fundamental human rights of life and liberty" . . . it is difficult to conceive how the right to defend *pro se*, necessarily *not* "one of the safeguards" could, by virtue of this opposite relationship alone, be a constitutional right . . . .

41. *Self-Representation* 1487.
42. *See note 14 supra.*
Supreme Court in *Wilson v. State*. At that time a criminal defendant had no right to be sworn as a witness in Tennessee, as a result of which he often had no means by which to offer his explanation of the facts underlying the charges against him. The *Wilson* court therefore reasoned that the Tennessee constitutional provision permitting a defendant to be heard in person was intended only to guarantee that a defendant would have some mode of communication by which he could "explain the case made against him, in his own way." One author suggests that if this were the objective of the early state constitutions, then the rationale behind the self-representation provisions no longer obtains, since a defendant is now entitled to be a witness.

In the final analysis, it must be realized that the right to counsel received relatively little attention from the early colonial governments. Thus, although the question of self-representation was con-

44. 50 Tenn. 232 (1871).
45. The purpose of this rule apparently was to protect the defendant from cross-examination, which was believed to violate his privilege against self-incrimination. See Grano 1193-94.
46. 50 Tenn. at 242 (emphasis added). The court recognized that in some cases only the accused himself was qualified to explain the circumstances of the alleged offense. In commenting upon the Tennessee constitutional provision, the court stated:

That provision was founded upon a profound knowledge of human nature, and a close and careful observation of human transactions. An innocent person is sometimes entangled in a web of suspicion by a curious combination of facts, which no one else can explain but himself. These facts unexplained may point unerringly to the prisoner as the guilty person. The skill or eloquence of his counsel can not reconcile the facts proven with the hypothesis of innocence. He alone may be possessed of the clue. He alone may be able by a simple explanation of circumstances which now seem inexplicable otherwise than upon the assumption of guilt, or by putting this and that fact together, to remove every shadow of suspicion from himself.

*Id.* at 241. It is by no means clear, however, that the court was convinced that the constitutional clause permitting the defendant to be heard in person was intended to confer upon him any right to conduct his entire defense.

47. Grano 1194.

Hence, it convincingly can be contended that permitting an accused to testify satisfies the concerns expressed by the early Americans who wrote the state constitutions.

*Id.* The potential difficulty with this argument is that this historical analysis seeks simply to ascertain whether a constitutional *pro se* right did exist, not whether it would be created were the constitutions to be rewritten today.

48. Beaney 22-24, 27. Beaney offers the following explanation for this lack of attention:

The logical inference to be drawn is that the states were satisfied with their existing criminal procedure and assumed that most criminal prosecutions
sidered, there is no evidence that any attention was given to the issue of waiver of counsel as a prerequisite to a pro se defense. Since it is this issue that confronts modern legal scholars, any historical analysis of the pro se right may be viewed at best as inconclusive.

III. Asserting the Pro Se Right

Judicial treatment of a criminal defendant's request to proceed pro se at trial differs according to the time at which the request is made. Therefore, whether a court will grant the request may depend on whether the trial already has commenced.

A. Asserting the Pro Se Right Prior to Trial

A defendant who wishes to proceed pro se must unequivocally

would continue to be undertaken by state governments. Hence other rights seemed of greater importance and more worthy of demand.

Id. at 23.

49. See note 33 supra and accompanying text.

50. Grano 1194.

51. Whatever the status of the pro se right, it is agreed that a defendant, in order to claim the right, must effect a valid waiver of his constitutional right to counsel. See notes 55-64 infra and accompanying text.

52. At least two authors hold this opinion. See Grano 1192-93; Self-Representation 1487.

Nor is an examination of the English common law very helpful. An accused was allowed to defend himself in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. Beaney 8-12; J. Grant, Our Common Law Constitution 5-9 (1960). At that time, however, the right to counsel had not yet been recognized. Thus, while the practice of proceeding pro se may well have been tantamount to a right, the courts never spoke of a right to defend pro se. See Grano 1190-92.

53. The rights to proceed pro se and to be represented by counsel "cannot be exercised at the same time." United States v. Mitchell, 137 F.2d 1006, 1010 (2d Cir. 1943). Consequently, the defendant is put to an election to appear either pro se or by counsel. Duke v. United States, 255 F.2d 721, 725 (9th Cir. 1958); Shelton v. United States, 205 F.2d 806, 813 (5th Cir.), petition for cert. dismissed, 346 U.S. 892 (1953), motion to vacate denied, 349 U.S. 943 (1955); Foster v. State, 148 Tex. Crim. 372, 187 S.W.2d 575 (1945); 48 N.C.L. Rev. 678, 684 (1970).

The belief is that it would be unfair to allow a defendant to gain the advantages of a hybrid of the two rights. Despite the traditional view that it would be "undesirable" to allow a defendant to participate as co-counsel, Brasier v. Jeary, 256 F.2d 474, 478 (8th Cir.), cert. denied, 358 U.S. 867 (1958), one author regards participation as co-counsel as an ideal means of reconciling the two rights:

No conflict exists between the fundamental values of fairness to the individual and reliability of the guilt-determining process in cases where the defendant wants to participate actively in the conduct of his defense but also desires the assistance of counsel.

Self-Representation 1482. Angela Davis expanded on this belief in arguing her cause
assert his pro se right. If he does so before the trial begins, the pro se right often is characterized as "unqualified." The "unqualified" right is not, however, totally without restrictions. Since the pro se right must be construed to give full effect to the sixth amendment right to counsel, the pro se right, even if asserted before the trial begins, is curtailed to the extent that a defendant must effect a valid waiver of counsel before he will be allowed to proceed pro se:

The constitutional right of an accused to be represented by counsel invokes, of itself, the protection of a trial court, in which the accused—whose life or liberty is at stake—is without counsel. This protecting duty imposes the serious and weighty responsibility upon the trial judge of determining whether there is an intelligent and competent waiver by the accused.

Transcript of pretrial proceedings at 39-40, People v. Davis, No. 3744 (Cal. Super. Ct., Marin County, June 4, 1972), cited in Self-Representation 1506. The court granted Davis the rare privilege of appearing as co-counsel, although it emphasized that its decision did not rest on any right to so appear. Self-Representation 1480.


55. The term "unqualified" is used in the sense that, assuming the defendant effects a valid waiver of counsel, the court must grant the defendant's pro se request. See, e.g., United States v. Bentvena, 319 F.2d 916, 938 (2d Cir.), cert. denied, 375 U.S. 940 (1963); Butler v. United States, 317 F.2d 249 (8th Cir.), cert. denied, 375 U.S. 838 (1963); United States v. Dennis, 183 F.2d 201 (2d Cir. 1950), aff'd on other grounds, 341 U.S. 494 (1951). This is in contrast to the "qualified" pro se right discussed in notes 79-85 infra and accompanying text.

56. Recent emphasis on the right to counsel may weaken the argument that the pro se right is protected by the federal constitution. See notes 99-103 infra and accompanying text.

57. "Waiver" has been defined as "an intentional relinquishment or abandonment of a known right or privilege." Johnson v. Zerbst, 304 U.S. 458, 464 (1938). The ease of establishing a valid waiver varies with the particular right involved. For example, the right to counsel cannot be waived without notice of its existence, while the right to cross-examine a witness is waived simply by not exercising it. See generally Grano 1208.

Since the courts must indulge in "every reasonable presumption" against the waiver of constitutional rights, a trial judge must "investigate as long and as thoroughly as the circumstances of the case before him demand" in order to determine whether a defendant has effected a valid waiver of counsel.

The Supreme Court views a defendant's waiver of counsel as valid "if he knows what he is doing and his choice is made with eyes open." The defendant need not, however, prove that he can meet the dangers of the case successfully, and the fact that a pro se defense turns


It is the solemn duty of a federal judge before whom a defendant appears without counsel to make a thorough inquiry and to take all steps necessary to insure the fullest protection of this constitutional right [to counsel] at every stage of the proceedings.

Id. at 722.

61. The court in United States v. Plattner, 330 F.2d 271, 276 (2d Cir. 1964), which held the pro se right to be constitutionally grounded, see note 25 supra, similarly restricted the right by requiring that a trial judge "conduct some sort of inquiry bearing upon the defendant's capacity to make an intelligent choice."

In United States v. Harrison, 451 F.2d 1013 (2d Cir. 1971), the trial judge had failed to conduct the requisite inquiry. Since there consequently was no evidence showing a knowing and intelligent waiver of counsel, the court reversed the pro se defendant's conviction.

62. Adams v. United States ex rel. McCann, 317 U.S. 269, 279 (1942). The Plattner court expressly adopted this test. United States v. Plattner, 330 F.2d 271, 276 (2d Cir. 1964). Thus, in United States v. Spencer, 439 F.2d 1047, 1050 (2d Cir. 1971), the court held the defendant's waiver of counsel valid, noting the trial judge's conclusion that the defendant's "eyes are wide open and he knows what he is doing."

In Lowe v. United States, 418 F.2d 100 (7th Cir. 1969), cert. denied, 397 U.S. 1048 (1970), the trial court repeatedly advised the petitioner of his right to counsel and explained to him the seriousness of the charge and the potential twenty-five year sentence. Petitioner, who had received most of his eleven years of schooling in a reformatory, consistently responded that he realized what a lawyer could do for him but nevertheless wanted to waive counsel and enter a guilty plea. The court, adopting the Plattner view of a constitutional pro se right, held the waiver of counsel to be valid.


If the defendant wants to venture into the unknown, he must be allowed to do so, if he is aware of the dangers that lurk therein. He need not demonstrate that he can meet them.
out to be ineffective is irrelevant to the issue of whether an intelligent waiver of counsel was made.64

While the cases have established that a valid waiver of counsel requires that the defendant have at least an intelligent appreciation of the consequences of his pro se choice,65 what constitutes an intelligent appreciation is far from clear.66 Therefore, the development of uniform and objective guidelines to aid in this determination is desirable.

64. See, e.g., United States v. Duty, 447 F.2d 449 (2d Cir. 1971); Hodge v. United States, 414 F.2d 1040 (9th Cir. 1969).

In two circuit court cases which found a constitutional pro se right, the courts did not articulate any “intelligent appreciation” requirement. It appears clear, however, that the condition was met in each case. See United States ex rel. Maldonado v. Denno, 348 F.2d 12 (2d Cir. 1965), cert. denied, 384 U.S. 1007 (1966); MacKenna v. Ellis, 263 F.2d 35 (5th Cir.), cert. denied, 360 U.S. 935 (1959).

See also Placencia v. State, 268 N.E.2d 613 (Ind. 1971), in which the court accepted as effective the defendant's waiver of counsel, “that decision appearing to have been knowingly, voluntarily and intelligently made.” Id. at 614 (emphasis added).

66. The test appears to be substantially subjective. See, e.g., Johnson v. Zerbst, 304 U.S. 458, 464 (1938), stating that what constitutes an intelligent waiver “must depend, in each case, upon the particular facts and circumstances surrounding that case, including the background, experience, and conduct of the accused.”


It is no excuse that the individual is willing to forego certain basic rights, unless we are certain that he has a full and intelligent comprehension of what he is doing.

Thus one author misunderstands the pro se right and wrongly assumes that any waiver of counsel, competent or not, is acceptable. Grano 1200-01.

Whatever definition of “intelligent appreciation” is used, a defendant's mental competence bears heavily on his ability to comprehend the consequences of a pro se choice. Various reasons have been found for concluding that a defendant is incompetent to waive counsel. See, e.g., Sanders v. United States, 373 U.S. 1 (1963) (defendant mentally incompetent because of narcotics administered in jail); McNeal v. Culver, 365 U.S. 109 (1961) (mentally ill defendant); Williams v. Huff, 146 F.2d 867 (D.C. Cir. 1945) (minor defendant presumed to lack capacity); United States ex rel. Simon v. Maroney, 228 F. Supp. 800 (W.D. Pa. 1964) (defendant possessed low I.Q.); United States v. Vargas, 124 F. Supp. 195 (D.P.R. 1954) (defendant had little education and was unable to speak English). See also Self-Representation 1490-91 (suggesting that the question of competence ultimately reduces to a determination whether a fundamentally unfair trial will result because of the defendant's apparent level of mental abilities).

A defendant's lack of an intelligent appreciation of the consequences of his pro
In von Moltke v. Gillies\textsuperscript{67} Justice Black formulated a strict waiver of counsel standard for guilty plea situations\textsuperscript{68} that would ensure a defendant's appreciation of the consequences of his choice.\textsuperscript{69} Although the von Moltke standard has not been widely accepted,\textsuperscript{70} the importance of attaining reliable guilt-determination\textsuperscript{71} should favor the adoption of a stringent waiver of counsel standard.\textsuperscript{72} Thus, whether a defendant's failure to appreciate the consequences of a \textit{pro se} choice results from mental incompetence\textsuperscript{73} or from the existence of an intricate and complex case,\textsuperscript{74} a strict waiver of counsel standard similar to the von Moltke proposal would afford a uniform and objective method by which to evaluate the defendant's understanding of the possible conse-

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\textsuperscript{67} See note 68 supra.

\textsuperscript{68} See notes 96-98 \textit{infra} and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{69} The California waiver of counsel standard, note 135 \textit{infra}, is similar in many respects to the von Moltke formulation.

\textsuperscript{70} See note 66 supra.

\textsuperscript{71} Id.
quences of a *pro se* defense.75 Furthermore, a defendant who meets the standard will have an intelligent awareness of what he must combat, an awareness which presumably will reflect his ability to conduct an adequate defense.76 Arguably, only such a “fully competent” defendant,77 though he may well be a rare individual,78 should be allowed to proceed *pro se*.

B. *Asserting the Pro Se Right After Trial Has Commenced*

Additional qualifications attach to a *pro se* request when the defendant seeks to dismiss counsel and continue *pro se* after the trial has begun.79 In this situation the ultimate disposition of the defendant’s request rests in the sound discretion of the trial court, which must balance the defendant’s legitimate interests in proceeding *pro se* against the possibility that a *pro se* defense would disrupt the trial proceedings80 and hence frustrate the public interest81 in achieving an

75. In these situations, defendants would have to be represented by counsel. See notes 122-23 infra and accompanying text.

76. Even if the *pro se* defense turns out to be totally inadequate, it has been argued that the resulting conviction must be upheld in order to protect the *pro se* right from abuse by *pro se* defendants seeking reversal on the ground that they presented inadequate defenses, and that only where a “travesty of justice” has occurred should due process compel a reversal. Note, *The Right of an Accused to Proceed Without Counsel*, 49 MINN. L. REV. 1133, 1147 (1965).

77. One author has recommended classifying defendants in three categories of competence: submarginal, marginal, and fully competent. Within this framework, only the fully competent defendant would be permitted to waive counsel and proceed *pro se*. Id. at 1145.

78. Id. *The Sharp* court acknowledged that in “rare instances” a denial of the *pro se* right “may truly offend the concept of ordered liberty.” 7 Cal. 3d at 460, 499 P.2d at 497, 103 Cal. Rptr. at 241.

79. One case states that the right to proceed *pro se* may be “waived” by the acceptance of counsel. United States v. Conder, 423 F.2d 904 (6th Cir. 1970). Whether this was the actual basis of the court’s holding is open to question, however, for the court’s notation that the trial judge was justified in concluding that the defendant’s *pro se* participation “would only serve to confuse an already complicated trial,” id. at 908, suggests that the lower court’s denial of the defendant’s *pro se* request was based on traditional factors. See *Self-Representation* 1491-92; notes 80-83 infra and accompanying text.

80. See, e.g., United States v. Private Brands, Inc., 250 F.2d 554, 557 (2d Cir. 1957), *cert. denied*, 335 U.S. 957 (1958): “[A]n accused’s right to represent himself is not so absolute that it must be recognized when to do so would disrupt the court’s business.” *See also* United States ex rel. Maldonado v. Denno, 348 F.2d 12 (2d Cir. 1965), *cert. denied*, 384 U.S. 1007 (1966); Juelich v. United States, 342 F.2d 29 (5th Cir. 1965); United States v. Bentvena, 319 F.2d 916 (2d Cir.), *cert. denied*, 375 U.S. 940 (1963); Butler v. United States, 317 F.2d 249 (8th Cir.), *cert. denied*,
accurate determination of guilt or innocence. Consequently, courts have refused pro se requests made during trial when the case appeared too complicated\textsuperscript{82} or when the trial simply would have become too confused.\textsuperscript{83}

While maintaining order in trial proceedings arguably may not justify the distinction between a trial court’s lack of discretion in ruling on a pro se request made before the trial begins and the court’s recognized discretion in considering a request made after the commencement of trial,\textsuperscript{84} the courts nevertheless have affirmed this distinction.\textsuperscript{85}

### IV. THE PRO SE DEFENDANT AT TRIAL

A defendant who is allowed to proceed pro se can expect little, if any, special treatment from the court. While one state court has held that a trial judge must “actively direct” the trial by preventing the

\begin{itemize}
\item In United States v. Plattner, 330 F.2d 271 (2d Cir. 1964), which held the pro se right to be constitutionally protected, see note 25 \textit{supra}, the court noted:
\begin{quote}
We do not reach the case where a defendant in the midst of a criminal trial seeks to dismiss his lawyer and for the balance of the trial manage and conduct his own defense pro se.
\end{quote}
\textit{Id.} at 277.
\item 81. Brown v. United States, 264 F.2d 363, 369 (D.C. Cir.), \textit{cert. denied}, 360 U.S. 911 (1959) (concurring opinion): “It is axiomatic that more than the rights of an accused are involved in a criminal case.” \textit{See} notes 96-98 \textit{infra} and accompanying text.
\item At least two authors argue that the confusion and delay caused by a pro se defense will result regardless of when the right is asserted. \textit{See} Grano 1179-84; \textit{Note}, \textit{The Right of an Accused to Proceed Without Counsel}, 49 \textit{Minn. L. Rev.} 1133, 1138 (1965).
\item 85. To at least one author, the continued recognition of this “absolute-discretionary” dichotomy detracts from the constitutional pro se argument:
\begin{quote}
The dichotomy imparts to the right to defend pro se an evanescent quality not entirely consistent with the actual and alleged constitutional underpinnings of the right, nor with notions of individual autonomy.
\end{quote}
\end{itemize}
introduction of totally irrelevant evidence "so as to protect the ultimate purpose of the trial," a court generally has no obligation to allow the pro se defendant to proceed any differently than would his attorney. The defendant does not "acquire the right to have the court act as his counsel." Nor is the court required to explain potential defenses or give legal advice to him. In short, the pro se defendant "assumes for all purposes connected with his case, and must be prepared to be treated as having, the qualifications and responsibilities concomitant with the role he has undertaken."

A defendant may forfeit his pro se right by engaging in disruptive conduct during the trial. Even if the pro se right is recognized by the federal constitution, the right clearly would "not extend so far as to permit subversion of the core concept of a trial." Hence, dilatory or destructive behavior will terminate exercise of the right.

V. THE CONSTITUTIONAL DISPUTE

A. The Arguments

The federal constitution does not confer any express pro se right. That the Supreme Court has never held the right to be implicit in the Constitution can be attributed in large part to due process considerations. One of the basic objectives of a criminal prosecution is to ensure the reliability of the guilt-determining process, reducing to

88. Burstein v. United States, 178 F.2d 665, 670 (9th Cir. 1949).
89. Michener v. United States, 181 F.2d 911, 918 (8th Cir. 1950).
90. State v. Miller, 292 S.W. 440 (Mo. 1927).
94. Cf. note 41 supra and accompanying text.
95. This fact apparently influenced the California Supreme Court's decision in Sharp, which denied the existence of any federal constitutional pro se right:
In almost 200 years of constitutional interpretation and construction the Supreme Court has not on any occasion held that the right of self-representation in a criminal trial is constitutionally compelled.
7 Cal. 3d at 457, 499 P.2d at 494, 103 Cal. Rptr. at 238.
a minimum the possibility that any innocent individual will be punished:

It is not of crucial importance whether the individual tried is in fact guilty or innocent, but it is of crucial concern that the integrity of the process of ascertaining guilt or innocence never be impaired. If in this effort to insure that none but those guilty be convicted, many guilty go free, the price is not too great in the long view of democratic government. If there is any consideration basic to all civilized procedures it is this . . . .

Since professional representation at trial presumably minimizes the possibility of convicting an innocent defendant, the trend has been to find an increasing number of situations in which the availability of counsel is a requisite of constitutional due process. This expansion

97. Thus Kadish states: "This consideration [of reliable guilt-determination] gives meaning to the great bulk of procedures that have become part of the due process of law . . . ." Id.
98. Id.

The right to be heard would be, in many cases, of little avail if it did not comprehend the right to be heard by counsel. Even the intelligent and educated layman has small and sometimes no skill in the science of law. If charged with crime, he is incapable, generally, of determining for himself whether the indictment is good or bad. He is unfamiliar with the rules of evidence. Left without the aid of counsel he may be put on trial without a proper charge, and convicted upon incompetent evidence, or evidence irrelevant to the issue or otherwise inadmissible. He lacks both the skill and knowledge adequately to prepare his defense, even though he have a perfect one. He requires the guiding hand of counsel at every step of the proceedings against him. Without it, though he be not guilty, he faces the danger of conviction because he does not know how to establish his innocence.

The Sharp court obviously agreed: "Ideally this opportunity [to best defend against the charges] is to be realized through the availability of competent counsel . . . ." 7 Cal. 3d at 461, 499 P.2d at 497, 103 Cal. Rptr. at 241. See also Grano 1195; Self-Representation 1481.

Thus, the California appellate court in People v. Marcus, 133 Cal. App. 2d 579, 284 P.2d 848 (1955), reasoned that the denial of the defendant's pro se request did not result in a miscarriage of justice since the defendant was far more "ably" represented by counsel than he would have been had he defended himself.

100. The development of the right to counsel as a constitutionally recognized right began with Powell v. Alabama, 287 U.S. 45, 71 (1932), in which the Court held:

All that it is necessary now to decide, as we do decide, is that in a capital case, where the defendant is unable to employ counsel, and is incapable adequately of making his own defense because of ignorance, feeble mindedness, illiteracy or the like, it is the duty of the court, whether requested or not, to assign counsel as a necessary requisite of due process of law . . . .

See also Moore v. Michigan, 355 U.S. 155, 158-59 (1957) (unrepresented defendant's conviction for murder reversed after Court learned that his voluntary guilty plea
of the right to counsel arguably detracts from the persuasiveness of any argument favoring a constitutional pro se right. Since the grant of a pro se request is contingent upon a defendant's ability to effect a valid waiver of counsel, the pro se right may be viewed as subservient and secondary to the right to counsel.

It nevertheless can be argued that the recent expansion of the right to counsel does not necessarily dictate for due process purposes a corresponding diminution of the pro se right, especially when one considers the elements of human dignity and autonomy which influenced the Second Circuit's decision in *United States v. Plattner*. The Plattner court reasoned that the recent emphasis on the right to counsel does not detract from the pro se right but, instead, merely represents the "more enlightened views" of a "later generation."

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101. See *People v. Sharp*, 7 Cal. 3d 448, 461, 499 P.2d 489, 497, 103 Cal. Rptr. 233, 241 (1972):

[Since the right to competent counsel now has generally become available and the quality of counsel's performance is subject to checks and supervision, there do not exist the same fundamental reasons for enlarging the areas of self-representation.]

102. See notes 57-66 supra and accompanying text.

103. Thus, to the *Sharp* court at least, the necessity of waiver weakens the cogency of the constitutional pro se argument. 7 Cal. 3d at 453, 455, 499 P.2d at 491, 493, 103 Cal. Rptr. at 235, 237.


106. 330 F.2d at 274, citing *Gideon v. Wainwright*, 372 U.S. 335 (1963). The court continued:

Indeed, and strangely enough, there would probably have been no denial of
Furthermore, the requirement that a valid waiver of counsel must be effected before a *pro se* request will be granted arguably is simply an inevitable consequence of the fact that the rights to defend *pro se* and by counsel both protect a single, fundamental goal—the defendant's right to effectively present his cause. Thus the *Plattner* court referred to a "single, inseparable bundle of rights, two faces [sic] of the same coin" in which the *pro se* right is complementary rather than subservient to the right to counsel.

In the final analysis, the constitutional *pro se* argument may hinge upon the existence within the concept of due process of a "subtle and elusive" value that ensures respect for human dignity and autonomy. "[R]espect for individual autonomy requires that [a defendant] be allowed to go to jail under his own banner if he so desires . . . ."

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Plattner's right to act *pro se* had the court not been so accustomed in these recent years to assign Legal Aid counsel or other lawyers to defend those indigent defendants who had no means to pay counsel of their own choosing.

Id.

107. See note 40 *supra* and accompanying text.

108. 330 F.2d at 276.

109. Kadish 347. See also id. at 357-58.

110. [Underscoring this value] is the notion of man's dignity, which is denigrated equally by procedures that fail to respect his intrinsic privacy or that entail the imposition of shocking brutality upon him. The ideal of man's individuality, which, after all, is what infuses meaning into the concept of freedom, is an emotional and personal as well as an intellectual affair . . . . Where society's sanctioned procedures exhibit a disdain for the value of the human personality, that ideal is not likely to flourish.

Id. at 347. See also MacKenna v. Ellis, 263 F.2d 35, 41 (5th Cir.), cert. denied, 360 U.S. 935 (1959); United States ex rel. Maldonado v. Denno, 239 F. Supp. 851, 855 (S.D.N.Y.); *aff’d*, 348 F.2d 12 (2d Cir. 1965), cert. denied, 348 U.S. 1007 (1966); Capetta v. State, 204 So. 2d 913, 916 (Fla. App. 1967); Browne v. State, 24 Wis. 2d 491, 511, 129 N.W.2d 175, 184 (1964):

[D]ue process also requires that throughout the criminal process the state must treat a defendant as a person possessing human dignity . . . and, in most instances, a defendant would be denied this treatment if counsel were imposed upon him against his wishes.

The Supreme Court may have been alluding to this notion when it stated in Adams v. United States ex rel. McCann, 317 U.S. 269, 279 (1942), that "the Constitution does not force a lawyer upon a defendant." See also Laub, *The Problem of the Unrepresented,Misrepresented and Rebellious Defendant in Criminal Court*, 2 Dukesne L. Rev. 245, 256 (1964): "[D]efending a charge of crime is so personal and serious a matter that society has no legal or moral right to invade the cloister of the defendant's considered discretion."

Although the values of reliable guilt-determination and respect for a defendant's dignity and autonomy may at times conflict, that due process may encompass both values is neither illogical nor surprising. If both are encompassed by due process, the pro se right arguably assumes the same constitutional stature as its right-to-counsel counterpart.114

The Supreme Court has acknowledged that a defendant's individual dignity in exercising his "free choice [as] a self-determining individual" must be respected. Thus, although "an accused must have the means of presenting his best defense," his right to forego counsel and defend pro se "rest[s] on considerations that go to the substance of an accused's position before the law." Consequently, counsel cannot

284, 288 (1966).

The Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit stated in United States v. Dougherty, 473 F.2d 1113, 1128 (D.C. Cir. 1972):

Even if the defendant will likely lose the case anyway, he has the right—as he suffers whatever consequences there may be—to the knowledge that it was the claim that he put forward that was considered and rejected, and to the knowledge that in our free society, devoted to the ideal of individual worth, he was not deprived of his free will to make his own choice, in his hour of trial, to handle his own case.

112. See notes 138-41 infra and accompanying text.

113. Kadish 346-47.

114. If the pro se right is not accepted as implicit in the fifth amendment due process requirement, then constitutional pro se advocates must rely on the argument that the ability to waive the sixth amendment right to counsel implies a constitutional right of self-representation. The Supreme Court, however, apparently met this argument directly in Singer v. United States, 380 U.S. 24, 34-35 (1965). See note 23 supra and accompanying text.


116. Thus the Court has stated:

To deny an accused a choice of procedure in circumstances in which he, though a layman, is as capable as any lawyer of making an intelligent choice, is to impair the worth of great Constitutional safeguards by treating them as empty verbalisms.

Id. at 280.

117. Id. at 279 (emphasis added). The Sharp court recognized that state constitutional provisions relating to representation at trial are designed for the "purpose of affording to an accused the opportunity to best defend against the charges . . . ."

7 Cal. 3d at 460, 499 P.2d at 497, 103 Cal. Rptr. at 241 (emphasis added, original emphasis deleted).


[The right to waive counsel and defend pro se] is designed to safeguard the dignity and autonomy of those whose circumstances or activities have thrust them involuntarily into the criminal process. An accused has a fundamental right to confront his accusers and his "country," to present himself and his position to the jury not merely as a witness or through a "mouthpiece," but as a man on trial who elects to plead his own cause. He is not obliged to seek
be "forced" upon a competent defendant when it is not desired, since to do so would "imprison" the defendant in his rights. When

what counsel would record as a victory but what he sees as tantamount to condemnation or doubt rather than vindication.

119. Carter v. Illinois, 329 U.S. 173, 174-75 (1946), in noting that the opportunity to meet an accusation contemplates the right to counsel, added the following caveat:

This does not, however, mean that the accused may not make his own defense . . . . Under appropriate circumstances the Constitution requires that counsel be tendered; it does not require that under all circumstances counsel be forced upon a defendant.

The Sharp court attempted to avoid this language, insisting that since counsel cannot be compelled "under all circumstances," it obviously could be required in some circumstances. 7 Cal. 3d at 456, 499 P.2d at 494, 103 Cal. Rptr. at 238 (original emphasis). Assuming the Sharp court was not referring to cases in which the accused cannot effect a valid waiver of counsel, its literal interpretation of the Carter language is misleading. Taken in context, Carter simply seems to express the view that the right to counsel is not to be misunderstood as eliminating the possibility of a competent criminal defendant presenting his own defense. The Court was not suggesting, as the Sharp court implies, that even in the case of a competent pro se defendant there are circumstances in which counsel may be forced upon the defendant.

120. The discussion here assumes that the defendant is competent to proceed pro se. When he is not competent to defend himself, the defendant must be represented by counsel. The distinction to be made is that while counsel cannot be "forced" upon an unwilling defendant merely because the right to counsel exists, it can be "forced" if the circumstances indicate that only through the assistance of counsel will a fair trial be afforded. See note 122 infra and accompanying text.

121. See Adams v. United States ex rel. McCann, 317 U.S. 269, 279-80 (1942):

The procedural safeguards of the Bill of Rights are not to be treated as mechanical rigidities. What were contrived as protections for the accused should not be turned into fetters . . . .

[To deny [the accused] in the exercise of his free choice of the right to dispense with some of these safeguards . . . is to imprison a man in his privileges and call it the Constitution.

Contrary to this philosophy, however, one author advocates a system of mandatory representation. Apparently concerned more with the number of post-trial appeals than with the recognition of individual rights, the author's proposed system of "universal representation" would render any right to defend pro se "non-existent." Grano 1264. Another author recommends automatic provision of counsel at the beginning of every criminal case but would allow the defendant subsequently to assert his pro se right if he so desired. Note, The Right of an Accused to Proceed Without Counsel, 49 MINN. L. REV. 1133, 1150-51 (1965). See also ABA PROJECT ON MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE, STANDARDS RELATING TO PROVIDING DEFENSE SERVICES § 7.3 (Approved Draft, 1968):

No waiver of counsel should be accepted unless it is in writing and of record. If a person who has not seen a lawyer indicates his intention to waive the assistance of counsel, a lawyer should be provided to consult with him. No waiver should be accepted unless he has at least once conferred with a lawyer. If a waiver is accepted, the offer should be renewed at each subsequent stage of the proceedings at which the defendant appears without counsel.
the defendant cannot establish his competence to proceed *pro se*, however, counsel can justifiably be "forced" upon him, since allowing a defendant to proceed without an adequate awareness of the consequences of his *pro se* choice could cause serious harm to the defendant, to those who share an interest in his freedom, and to the integrity of the judicial system as a truth-determining process. Moreover, allowing an incompetent defendant to proceed without counsel arguably would violate constitutional due process guarantees.

B. People v. Sharp

In *People v. Sharp* the California Supreme Court was faced with the contentions that the *pro se* right was of constitutional dimensions, that the trial court's refusal to permit the defendant to proceed *pro se*


Even when a defendant is not seeking to proceed *pro se*, counsel may be "forced" upon him when it is clear that he is using the right to counsel merely to interfere with and subvert the orderly administration of justice. See, e.g., United States v. Abbamonte, 348 F.2d 700 (2d Cir. 1965), cert. denied, 382 U.S. 982 (1966), in which the court, after the defendant had dismissed counsel twice before trial, finally insisted on the appointment of a third lawyer to prevent further delay. The court noted that it could have ordered the defendant to proceed *pro se* on the basis of United States v. Arlen, 252 F.2d 491 (2d Cir. 1958), although one might question whether ordering a defendant to proceed *pro se* would result in a denial of due process of law. United States v. Abbamonte, supra, at 703. See text accompanying note 128 infra. In Releford v. United States, 309 F.2d 706, 708 (9th Cir. 1962), the court refused to play a "cat and mouse" game with the defendant: "The constitutional guarantee of the right . . . [to] counsel is not thus to be turned into a weapon whereby a defendant can prevent his case from ever being brought to trial."


124. 7 Cal. 3d 448, 499 P.2d 489, 103 Cal. Rptr. 233 (1972).

125. On the day of the trial the public defender assigned to represent the defendant informed the trial court of the defendant's desire to proceed *pro se*. The court made an inquiry which disclosed that the forty-eight year-old defendant had an eleventh-grade education. The defendant claimed to have some "knowledge of the law," and stated that he had already prepared briefs and planned his defense. The California Supreme Court viewed these contentions as "little more than bare claims . . . . In short, defendant's showing consisted, in the main, of a self-serving opinion that he could adequately represent himself." Id. at 452 n.2, 499 P.2d at 491 n.2, 103
was therefore erroneous, and that the error was prejudicial to the defendant. The court concluded that its survey and analysis of several colonial constitutions lent no historical support to the argument that the pro se right is protected by the federal constitution, and noted that the Supreme Court has yet to find the pro se right implicit in the Constitution. The court then held that the California constitution could not logically be read to confer any pro se right, and rejected the view that the California due process clause compelled its recognition.

The Sharp court's due process discussion is clothed in terms of "fairness," a term which may be used in either an objective or subjective sense. Thus, the due process goal of reliable guilt-determination presumes an objective fairness in the sense that what a trial seeks to discover is the truth, while the interest in protecting individual autonomy represents a subjective standard of fairness that favors a proceeding that is fair in the defendant's eyes. Although the Sharp court apparently acknowledged the potential force of subjective considerations, it rejected the theory that the subjective standard of fairness is protected by due process. The court's decision thus clearly accords priority to the goal of achieving reliable guilt-determination through legal representation.

Cal. Rptr. at 235 n.2. When the defendant asked the trial court to appoint advisory counsel, stating that an attorney could be "positively" helpful to him, the court denied the defendant's pro se request.

126. See notes 33-34 supra and accompanying text.
127. 7 Cal. 3d at 457, 499 P.2d at 494, 103 Cal. Rptr. at 238. See note 95 supra and accompanying text.
128. See note 16 supra and accompanying text.
129. 7 Cal. 3d at 460, 499 P.2d at 496-97, 103 Cal. Rptr. at 240-41.
130. The court stated: "It is clear that the assurance of a fair trial is constitutionally founded in due process." Id. at 459, 499 P.2d at 496, 103 Cal. Rptr. at 240. The Supreme Court also has referred to the concept of "fairness." See, e.g., Adams v. United States ex rel. McCann, 317 U.S. 269, 279 (1942): "The public conscience must be satisfied that fairness dominates the administration of justice."
131. See note 78 supra. One author who favors the abolition of self-representation, see note 121 supra, nevertheless concludes: "If the accused is to lose his freedom—or his life—perhaps it should be by the process that seems fairest to him." Grano 1195-96.
132. The court stated:
An unfair trial cannot result . . . merely because an accused, who is of a mind to represent himself, is denied that right. The fairness of a trial is not to be predicated on any purported right of an accused to proceedings which are planned, directed or conducted by him . . . .
7 Cal. 3d at 460, 499 P.2d at 496, 103 Cal. Rptr. at 240.
The *Sharp* court emphasized that its holding was limited only to a rejection of the *constitutional pro se* argument, noting that its decision did “not purport to hold . . . that an accused is not entitled to represent himself in a proper case, but only that such a right is not a constitutionally protected one.” The court summarized the implications of this holding:

[In reviewing . . . a court's [denial of] a motion to defend pro se, we will not regard the error, if any, as one of constitutional dimensions. This conclusion will relieve, in large part, the dilemma faced by a trial court when called upon to pass on a motion for the claimed constitutional right of self-representation under circumstances where, to grant it, might well infringe upon the accused’s constitutional right to be represented by counsel.]

Thus the *Sharp* decision leaves the *pro se* right procedurally intact.

**C. Pro Se and the Right to Counsel as Coexisting Rights**

The *Sharp* decision attempts to reduce the question of the constitutional status of the *pro se* right to a determination whether due process guarantees objective or subjective fairness. To state the question in either-or terms, however, ignores the possibility that due process may recognize both the values of reliable guilt-determination (objective

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133. *Id.* at 461, 499 P.2d at 497, 103 Cal. Rptr. at 241.
134. *Id.* at 461-62, 499 P.2d at 498, 103 Cal. Rptr. at 242 (footnote omitted).
135. We have heretofore set forth standards by which a trial court may determine the competency of an accused who wishes to represent himself as a condition for granting such a motion . . . and we do not now depart therefrom.

*Id.* at 461, 499 P.2d at 497-98, 103 Cal. Rptr. at 241-42.

The California waiver of counsel standards are set forth in People v. Floyd, 1 Cal. 3d 694, 703, 464 P.2d 64, 68, 83 Cal. Rptr. 608, 612 (1970). Pursuant thereto, a defendant’s waiver will be effective only if he has an intelligent conception of the consequences of his choice and understands the nature of the offense, the available pleas and defenses, and the possible punishments. Cf. notes 65-78 *supra* and accompanying text.

136. Stating the question in either-or terms may be an erroneous formulation of the problem. Does the Constitution guarantee only the *opportunity* to an objectively fair trial, or an objectively fair trial itself? When phrased in this manner, it is arguable that what is guaranteed is the objectively fair trial itself. See Grano 1202-03. Yet the question may be put another way: May counsel be forced upon a defendant to ensure objectivity, or must the defendant's subjective choice of procedure be respected? When thus reduced to terms of *imposition* as opposed to *choice*, the objective standard loses much of its appeal. The sixth amendment “tenders” counsel, Carter v. Illinois, 329 U.S. 173, 175 (1946); it does not impose it. See notes 115-21 *supra* and accompanying text.
fairness) and respect for individual choice (subjective fairness), values which may conflict in any given case.

The vast majority of criminal defendants desire counsel, and in these cases there obviously is no conflict at all. Similarly, no conflict will exist when a pro se defense does not preclude an accurate determination of guilt or innocence. In some situations, however, a pro se defense will jeopardize the attainment of a reliable guilt-determination. In these cases, the values of reliable guilt-determination and the defendant's individual dignity in electing to proceed pro se clearly would clash. Resolution of this conflict will require a balancing of the two competing values, but such a balancing undoubtedly will be difficult.

One author suggests that what is called for is not a resolution but rather an accommodation of the conflicting values. In the process of accommodation, the stringency of the waiver of counsel standard employed will determine whether the two values can be reconciled or whether the defendant's pro se request must be denied. Consequently, attention must be directed towards articulating a waiver of counsel

137. See note 2 supra.

138. Thus, an innocent pro se defendant could be convicted simply because he did not realize the intricacies of his case and hence lacked the skill and knowledge by which to prove his innocence.

139. "The difficulty here does not come from ignorance, but from the absence of any standard, for values are incommensurable." L. Hand, The Spirit of Liberty 161 (1952). The same thought had been expressed earlier:

Thinkers have complained with justice of the lack of any formula whereby preference can be determined when values are conflicting. There is no common denominator to which it is possible to reduce them.

B. Cardozo, The Paradoxes of Legal Science 56-57 (1928).

140. Kadish 348-49; cf. C. Hughes, The Supreme Court of the United States 165-66 (1928):

[The protection both of rights of the individual and of those of society rests not so often on formulas, as to which there may be agreement, but on a correct appreciation of social conditions and a true appraisal of the actual effect of conduct.

141. Since a defendant must effect a valid waiver of his right to counsel before he can proceed pro se, society can attempt to assure itself of a minimally acceptable probability of achieving reliable guilt-determination by predicting what factors will indicate a defendant's ability to conduct an adequate defense and then setting its waiver of counsel requirements accordingly. When a defendant cannot effect a valid waiver of counsel, the accommodation process will have determined that in that particular case the defendant must accept counsel, and the objective of reliable guilt-determination will not have been compromised. Yet for those defendants who effect a valid waiver of counsel, the waiver standards will have successfully accommodated both values to the case at hand.
standard as a means of ascertaining the point at which the pro se right may be exercised.

VI. PROCEDURAL RAMIFICATIONS OF PRO SE

A. Trial Procedure and Constitutional Pro Se

Implementing a constitutional pro se right arguably may involve some alteration in present trial procedures. A court may be required to notify the defendant of his constitutional right to defend himself,\textsuperscript{142} whereas no notice requirement attaches to the statutory pro se right.\textsuperscript{143} Furthermore, while the wrongful denial of a statutory pro se right results in reversal only if prejudice is shown,\textsuperscript{144} an erroneous denial of a constitutional pro se right may well require automatic reversal.\textsuperscript{145}

\textsuperscript{142} If the Constitution does confer a pro se right, then acceptance of counsel necessarily implies that the pro se right is being "waived." Consequently, an intelligent waiver of the pro se right implies at a minimum that a defendant must be cognizant of the right. 48 N.C.L. Rev. 678, 681 (1970).

Thus, the court in United States v. Plattner, 330 F.2d 271, 276 (2d Cir. 1964), held that in all cases the court must explain to each defendant that he has the choice between a pro se defense and the assistance of counsel, that a lawyer will be provided if the defendant cannot afford to retain his own counsel, that although the court strongly advises the retention of counsel, the defendant nevertheless may seek to proceed pro se, and that the defendant will be given reasonable time to make his choice. \textit{See also} Brown v. United States, 264 F.2d 363, 370 (D.C. Cir.), \textit{cert. denied}, 360 U.S. 911 (1959) (Bazelon, J., dissenting) (arguing that the Supreme Court's decision in Adams v. United States \textit{ex rel} McCann, 317 U.S. 269 (1942), requires the trial judge to inform each defendant of his constitutional right to defend pro se).

\textsuperscript{143} \textit{See}, \textit{e.g.}, Brown v. United States, 264 F.2d 363 (D.C. Cir.), \textit{cert. denied}, 360 U.S. 911 (1959).

\textsuperscript{144} \textit{See}, \textit{e.g.}, Butler v. United States, 317 F.2d 249 (8th Cir.), \textit{cert. denied}, 375 U.S. 838 (1963); Brown v. United States, 264 F.2d 363 (D.C. Cir.), \textit{cert. denied}, 360 U.S. 911 (1959); Cantor v. United States, 217 F.2d 536 (2d Cir. 1954).

\textsuperscript{145} \textit{See}, \textit{e.g.}, United States \textit{ex rel} Maldonado v. Denno, 348 F.2d 12 (2d Cir. 1965), \textit{cert. denied}, 384 U.S. 1007 (1966); United States v. Plattner, 330 F.2d 271 (2d Cir. 1964); United States v. Davis, 260 F. Supp. 1009 (E.D. Tenn.), aff'd, 365 F.2d 251 (6th Cir. 1966).

While the Supreme Court indicated in Chapman v. California, 386 U.S. 18 (1967), that a denial of a constitutional right need result in reversal only if prejudice is shown, it would seem that where the right denied is the right to defend pro se, it would be impossible to ascertain the degree of prejudice sustained. \textit{See} 48 N.C.L. Rev. 678, 680 (1970); Comment, \textit{The Right to Defend Pro Se}, 3 Tex. Tech. U.L. Rev. 89, 93 n.19 (1971); \textit{cf.} Hamilton v. Alabama, 368 U.S. 52, 55 (1961), in which the Court, reversing a conviction in a capital case in which the defendant was without counsel at arraignment, contrary to his right to counsel under Alabama law, remarked that "the degree of prejudice can never be known."
B. Procedural Efficiency and Pro Se

Although a trial judge theoretically owes little, if any, special duty to a pro se defendant, there can be little doubt that pro se proceedings adversely affect the efficient operation of today's overburdened criminal trial courts. Thus the delay and confusion inherent in pro se proceedings may have influenced current judicial and legislative attitudes regarding the right. For example, the California legislature clearly expressed the factors which motivated its proposed constitutional amendment precluding any possible basis for a constitutional pro se right:

[P]ersons representing themselves cause unnecessary delays in the trials of charges against them; . . . trials are extended by such persons representing themselves; and . . . orderly trial procedures are disrupted. Self-representation places a heavy burden upon the administration of criminal justice without any advantages accruing to those persons who desire to represent themselves.

The problem of procedural inefficiency is serious, and there is dispute concerning the priority to be accorded the problem. Yet

The possibility of automatic reversal has been criticized on the ground that if no harm is shown but a new trial nevertheless is awarded, a defendant is benefited with a windfall. The possibility of automatic reversal, however, can be viewed more as a safeguard than a danger, for it should force the trial courts to perform their duties diligently. Since a defendant must unequivocally assert his desire to proceed pro se, see note 54 supra and accompanying text, the court will be put on notice to conduct a thorough investigation of the defendant's ability to effect a competent waiver of counsel. See, e.g., Burstein v. United States, 178 F.2d 665 (9th Cir. 1949), in which the defendant clearly asserted his desire to proceed pro se, which the trial court finally, albeit reluctantly, granted. On appeal, the Ninth Circuit ruled that the trial court had properly heeded the defendant's pro se request, that the defendant had effectively waived counsel, and that he therefore would not be heard to complain that his right to counsel had been denied. Thus, if the trial court abides by the proper judicial procedure, the necessity to resort to automatic reversal should not arise on any large scale.

146. See notes 86-91 supra and accompanying text.
147. See, e.g., United States v. Dougherty, 473 F.2d 1113, 1124 (D.C. Cir. 1972):
   Given the general likelihood that pro se defendants have only rudimentary acquaintanceship with the rules of evidence and courtroom protocol, a measure of unorthodoxy, confusion and delay is likely, perhaps inevitable, in pro se cases.

See generally Self-Representation 1509-12.
150. Chief Justice Burger, for instance, has stated:

the time-consuming nature of a trial that meets due process standards results from a conscious choice of adherence to rules that are fair over expediency in the determination of guilt or innocence;\textsuperscript{161} hence, it would not seem justifiable to avoid potential procedural inefficiencies in trial proceedings by denying legitimate substantive rights.\textsuperscript{162} Thus, allowing considerations of procedural efficiency to affect any decision bearing upon the constitutional status of the \textit{pro se} right arguably is prohibited by the federal constitution. Indeed, the due process clause itself may well represent a recognition of and response to man’s vulnerability to the appeal of speed and efficiency:

\[\text{[T]he Constitution recognizes higher values than speed and efficiency. Indeed, one might fairly say of the Bill of Rights in general, and the Due Process Clause in particular, that they were designed to protect the fragile values of a vulnerable citizenry from the overbearing concern for efficiency and efficacy that may characterize praiseworthy government officials no less, and perhaps more, than mediocre ones.}\textsuperscript{153}\]

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item The challenges to our system of justice are colossal \textit{[sic]} and immediate and we must assign priorities. I would begin by giving priority to methods and machinery, to procedure and techniques, to management and administration of judicial resources.
\item \textbf{Matthews, Burger's Court: Process Before Substance of Justice}, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Nov. 5, 1972, § B, at 3, col. 3. Judge Bazelon of the District of Columbia Circuit, however, acknowledged that “efficiency is nice, but it's really beside the point.” \textit{Id.} He continued:
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\item The judicial process is at its core a fundamentally inefficient process.
\item This does not mean we should not do everything we can to achieve reform and speed the process of justice. We simply should not make efficiency our top priority.
\end{itemize}
\item \textit{Id.} Thus it is interesting to note that in Brown v. United States, 264 F.2d 363 (D.C. Cir.), \textit{cert. denied}, 360 U.S. 911 (1959), \textit{see note 26 supra}, then Judge Burger concurred with the majority, which believed the \textit{pro se} right to be merely statutory, while Judge Bazelon dissented, insisting on the right's constitutional stature.
\item \textit{151. Cf. text accompanying note 153 infra.}
\item \textit{152. The court in United States v. Dougherty, 473 F.2d 1113, 1124-25 (D.C. Cir. 1972), recognizing the problems to be resolved, \textit{see note 147 supra} and accompanying text, suggested that many, if not all, of them can be eased by providing amicus counsel for the \textit{pro se} defendant:}
\item The energy and time toll on the trial judge, as fairness calls him to articulate ground rules and reasons that need not be explained to an experienced trial counsel, can be relieved, at least in part, by appointment of an amicus curiae to assist the defendant.
\item \textit{153. Stanley v. Illinois, 405 U.S. 645, 656 (1972).}
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