

Causa contractus

Herausgegeben von
GREGOR ALBERS,
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und DOROTHÉE PERROUIN-VERBE

*Max-Planck-Institut
für ausländisches und internationales
Privatrecht*

*Beiträge zum ausländischen
und internationalen Privatrecht*

Mohr Siebeck

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137

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Max-Planck-Institut für ausländisches
und internationales Privatrecht

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Causa contractus

Auf der Suche nach den Bedingungen
der Wirksamkeit des vertraglichen Willens

Alla ricerca delle condizioni di efficacia
della volontà contrattuale

À la recherche des conditions de l'efficacité
de la volonté contractuelle

Edited by

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Preface

The foundations of contract law are nowadays rarely discussed in continental Europe. However, European legal tradition provides a distinct focal point for such discussion: the notion of *causa*; a term used both to identify a contract's underlying purpose and to address the reasons for its enforcement.

The doctrine of *causa* can be traced back to medieval Roman law scholars. Informed by Aristotle's theory of causes, they focused on *causa finalis* and insisted that a contract, as a form of human action, had to be described with regard to the aims it pursues. While early modern natural lawyers took a narrower view on the will of the parties and focused on a contract's content, *causa* persisted. With the help of Domat and Pothier, it made its way into the Code Napoléon: under article 1108, a valid contract required *une cause licite dans l'obligation*. From the French archetype, *causa* spread into all the codes modelled thereafter. In the 20th century, Emilio Betti defined *causa* as the economic and social function of a contract (*funzione economico-sociale del negozio*). This understanding facilitated the integration of the notion in Italy's 1942 Codice civile, as it made it possible to evaluate private conduct by its social utility. Ever since the national codifications entered into force, jurisprudence has not ceased to develop new interpretations of *causa*. The notion's continuing appeal is attested by the fact that in 2017 *causa* was implemented as a necessary element of contract in the Principles of Latin American Contract Law.

For the last two hundred years, the notion of *causa* of contract has faced increasingly strong headwinds. The French provisions provoked a major debate in 19th century German jurisprudence, a debate which ultimately resulted in their rejection and a strong commitment not to accept any prerequisite for the creation of legal effects other than the agreement of capable parties. However, it is hard not to look for reasons: Although German law explicitly permits a contract to be detached from its cause (*abstraktes Versprechen*), the obligation created by such a contract can be the object of a restitutionary claim based on the doctrine of unjust enrichment. The test applied to determine whether an enrichment is unjust asks – of all things – whether or not it is based on a sufficient cause (*Rechtsgrund*). However, the apparent refusal to adopt *causa contractus* in Germany has contributed to its lack of success in projects for a common European law of contracts. An even more decisive factor for that failure might have been that *causa* is alien to the English common law (at least if one fails to recognise it in the element of *consideration*, which, in itself, has been the object of strong criticism for about

the same period of time *causa* has been under fire). Swayed by a perceived international trend against *causa* and weary of the endless debate on its meaning, France herself, when reforming her law of obligations in 2016, decided to dispense with the word *cause* in the new code. Whether the notion has perished with the word is a matter of debate. Not all countries are affected by these developments, though. In Italian case law, the concept is widely used to facilitate the application of different doctrines that require a precise scrutiny of the actual contractual purpose (*causa concreta*).

Against the background of these developments, it is remarkable that common law scholars in North America – notorious for their scepticism towards legal doctrine – have shown a growing interest in the theoretical foundations of contract law. They seek to align the results of their philosophical reasoning about contract with existing contract law doctrine. The apparent need for contract theory raises the question whether European jurists, to open their door into that realm, should not rather hold on to the key provided by the tradition of *causa*.

To revive the discourse of the *ius commune*, this book proposes to combine legal history and comparative law. Its first part portrays the development of the notions of *causa*, *cause*, *Voraussetzung*, *Geschäftsgrundlage* and consideration. Across time and space, these notions have served two purposes: to determine the legal validity of a contractual agreement and to allow for an adaption or cancellation of its legal effects due to a supervening change of circumstances. The second part of the book examines how these two issues are addressed by different legal systems, even if not all those systems frame the answers in terms of *causa*. Individual reports cover ancient Roman law and the French, German, Italian and English legal systems. We hope that the integration of both a doctrinal and a functional approach will allow for a clear view on the doctrinal and political question at hand: Do we still need *causa* in European private law? The future of *cause* is explored in the third and last part of the book. For a summary of the different sections, we invite the reader to consult the English-language introductory chapters. A further explanation of the book's outline (as well as an attempt at justification) is given in the very first chapter.

This book grew out of a series of three conferences held at *Villa Vigoni* (Mezzago) between 2016 and 2018.¹ As *Trilaterale Forschungskonferenzen*, they were funded by the joint efforts of *Villa Vigoni*, the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* and the *Maison des Sciences de l'Homme*. We are very grateful for this unique opportunity for encounter and exchange. Personally, we are greatly indebted to Professor Emanuelle Chevreau, Professor Tommaso dalla Massara and Professor Martin Schermaier, who did not hesitate a moment to push forward a project

¹ For a report on the first meeting (November 28 - December 2, 2016) see Martina D'Onofrio, ZRG RA 134 (2017) 709-711 (in German); Marta Beghini, QLSD 2017, 482-484 (in Italian). On the second meeting (September 18-21, 2017) see D'Onofrio, ZEuP 2018, 478-420 (in German) and Index 46 (2018) 817-821 (in Italian). On the third meeting (September 19-22, 2018) see Marie Rögels, ZEuP 2019, 416-419 (in German).

conceived by younger scholars, to carry the weight of responsibility for the conferences and to enrich them with substantial contributions.

This publication has been made possible by the Max Planck Institute for Comparative and International Private Law (MPI) in Hamburg. We are grateful to Professor Reinhard Zimmermann for supporting the project over the years and for the trust he and the other editors have placed in us when accepting the volume for this series.

Many hands – and minds – have contributed to the editing of the book. The main part of the work has been done by the editorial office of the MPI under the direction of Dr Christian Eckl. Our thanks go to Janina Jentz for her diligence and patience and to Anja Rosenthal for the careful layout.

Several assistants at the MPI and at the Institute for Roman Law and Comparative Legal History in Bonn have helped with various tasks, especially proof-reading the articles and redacting the indexes. Special thanks go to Jolanda Müller (Bonn) and Michael Friedman (MPI) for drafting translations and reviewing texts written in English.

Nearly all contributions to the book were finished by the beginning of 2020. In the meantime, a pandemic has entered and still continues to dominate our lives. Although it is scarcely mentioned in the book, readers might find that the pandemic sheds a light of topicality on some of the arguments brought forward on the following pages: Reflecting on the relationship between a contract, its circumstances and the purposes of the parties, contract law scholarship might be able to provide guidance also for cases that some might consider unprecedented.

Gregor Albers, Francesco Paolo Patti, Dorothée Perrouin-Verbe
Bonn, Milan, Paris
7 February 2022

Contents

Preface.....	V
Abbreviations.....	XIII

Gregor Albers

Why Cause of Contract again, and how?	1
---	---

I. History of a Notion

Gregor Albers

History of a Notion	19
---------------------------	----

Tommaso dalla Massara

Die <i>causa</i> des Vertrages im Denken des Aristo: zu den Ursprüngen einer Idee	37
--	----

Arnaud Paturet

La cause contractuelle aux confins de l'anthropologie et du droit.....	67
--	----

Martin Schermaier

Die Rolle der <i>causa</i> bei der Überwindung des Typenzwangs durch die mittelalterlichen Juristen	97
--	----

Klaus Kowalski

Die <i>causa</i> des Vertrages im Naturrecht der frühen Neuzeit	153
---	-----

Andrea Maria Garofalo

Itinerari della causa dal Code civil del 1804 al Codice civile del 1942.....	201
--	-----

Francesca Bartolini

La causa del contratto dal Codice civile del 1942 ai giorni nostri.....	247
---	-----

<i>Gregor Albers</i> Die <i>causa</i> vom <i>Code civil</i> zum BGB. Zuwendungen tragen statt Verpflichtungen begründen	263
---	-----

<i>Birke Häcker</i> <i>Causa</i> und <i>consideration</i> . Ein historischer Dialog	323
--	-----

II. Conclusion of Contract

<i>Dorothee Perrouin-Verbe</i> <i>Causa</i> and the Requirements of Valid Contracts.....	373
---	-----

<i>Elena Giannozzi</i> Le caractère contraignant des contrats en droit romain classique.....	385
---	-----

<i>Samuel Fulli-Lemaire</i> Le rôle passé de la cause au stade de la formation du contrat.....	407
---	-----

<i>Ralf Treibmann</i> Voraussetzungen der Wirksamkeit von Verträgen nach deutschem Recht ...	425
---	-----

<i>Andrea Maria Garofalo/Francesco Paolo Patti</i> La causa tra fisiologia e patologia del contratto.....	455
--	-----

<i>Kristin Boosfeld</i> Äquivalente der <i>causa</i> beim Vertragsschluss. Ein Blick ins englische Recht	499
--	-----

III. Unexpected Circumstances

<i>Francesco Paolo Patti</i> <i>Causa</i> and Unexpected Circumstances.....	517
--	-----

<i>Manuel Grasso</i> <i>Obligaciones contractae</i> e sopravvenienze nel diritto romano	531
--	-----

<i>Dorothee Perrouin-Verbe</i> L'évènement imprévu et le bouleversement de l'équilibre contractuel en droit français	553
--	-----

<i>Gregor Albers</i>	
Der Einfluss unerwarteter Ereignisse auf den Vertrag nach deutschem Recht	573
<i>Francesco Paolo Patti</i>	
Sopravvenienze e causa concreta nel diritto italiano	637
<i>Francesco Mezzanotte</i>	
Lo scopo contrattuale nella <i>doctrine of frustration</i>	675

IV. Future of *causa*

<i>Gregor Albers/Francesco Paolo Patti/Dorothée Perrouin-Verbe</i>	
The Future of <i>causa</i>	705
<i>Thomas Genicon</i>	
L'avenir de la cause en droit français des contrats.....	715
<i>Elena Bargelli</i>	
Il futuro della causa nel diritto italiano.....	733
<i>Horst Ehmann</i>	
Zu den Arten der Rechtsgründe von Leistungen und Leistungsversprechen. Von der <i>causa</i> -Lehre zur Zwecklehre	755
<i>Simon Whittaker</i>	
“Contractual Purpose” in English Contract Law.....	871
Index of Sources	893
About the Authors.....	927

Abbreviations

a.	articulus/articoli
a. a. O.	am angegebenen Ort
AC	Law Reports, Appeal Cases
Acc. Naz. Linc.	Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei
AcP	Archiv für die civilistische Praxis
AD/Appellate Div. Rep.	Appellate Division Reports (South Africa, 1919–1946)
Ad. & El.	Adolphus & Ellis' Queen's Bench Reports
AG	Amtsgericht
AJAH	American Journal of Ancient History
al.	alinéa
Aleyn	Aleyn's Reports, King's Bench
All ER	All England Law Reports
All ER (Comm)	All England Law Reports (Commercial Cases)
Am. J. Comp. L.	American Journal of Comparative Law
Am. J. Int. L.	American Journal of International Law
Anm.	Anmerkung
Ann. Fac. giur. Un. Mac.	Annali della Facoltà giuridica dell'Università di Macerata
ANRW	Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt
APD	Archives de philosophie du droit
App.	Corte d'appello
App. Cas.	Law Reports, Appeal Cases (2 nd Series)
Arch. civ.	Archivio civile
Arch. locazioni	Archivio delle locazioni, del condominio e dell'immobiliare
Arch. giur. circol. e sinistri	Archivio giuridico della circolazione e dei sinistri stradali
arg.	argumentum
art./Art.	articulus/article/Artikel/articolo
artt.	articles/articoli
Ass. plén.	Assemblée plénière de la Cour de cassation
AUPA	Annali del Seminario giuridico della Università di Palermo
Aufl.	Auflage
av.	avant
B & C	Barnewall & Cresswell's King's Bench Reports
B. & S.	Best & Smith's Queen's Bench Reports
Banca, borsa tit. cred.	Banca, borsa e titoli di credito
BeckOK	Beck'scher Online-Kommentar
Belg. Jud.	Belgique Judiciaire
BGB	Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch (aktuelle Fassung)
BGB 1900	Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch in der zum 1.1.1900 in Kraft getretenen Fassung

BGB 2002	Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch in der ab dem 1.1.2002 geltenden Neufassung
BGBI.	Bundesgesetzblatt
BGH	Bundesgerichtshof
BGHZ	Entscheidungen des Bundesgerichtshofs in Zivilsachen
Bibl. juriscons. publ.	Bibliothèque du jurisconsulte et du publiciste
BIDR	Bullettino dell'Istituto di diritto romano «Vittorio Scialoja»
BMJ	Bundesministerium der Justiz
BRD	Bundesrepublik Deutschland
BR-Drs.	Bundesratsdrucksache
Brown Parl. Cas.	J. Brown's Cases in Parliament
BT-Drs.	Bundestagsdrucksache
Bull. civ.	Bulletin civil de la Cour de cassation
Burr.	Burrow's King's Bench Reports tempore Mansfield
BVerfG	Bundesverfassungsgericht
BVerfGE	Entscheidungen des Bundesverfassungsgerichts
BVerwG	Bundesverwaltungsgericht
bw.	beziehungsweise
C.	Causa/Codex
c.	canon/canones
c. c.	Codice civile
C. I. L.	Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum
C. L. C.	Commercial Law Cases
CA	Court of Appeal
Cambridge L.J.	Cambridge Law Journal
Camp.	Campbell's Nisi Prius Cases
cap.	caput/capita
Cape Supreme Court Rep.	Cape Supreme Court Reports (South Africa, 1880–1910)
Cass.	Cour de cassation/Corte di Cassazione
CCC	Contrats concurrence consommation
CESL	Common European Sales Law
Cf.	confer
Cfr.	confronta
Ch	Law Reports, Chancery Division (3 rd Series)
ch.	chapter
Civ. (1 ^{ère} , 2 ^{ème} , 3 ^{ème})	Chambre civile de la Cour de cassation (première, deuxième, troisième)
CLR	Commonwealth Law Reports (Australia)
Co. Rep.	Coke's King's Bench Reports
Col. L. Rev.	Columbia Law Review
Com.	Chambre commerciale de la Cour de cassation
Contratti	i Contratti. Bimestrale di dottrina, giurisprudenza e pratiche contrattuali
Contratto e impr.	Contratto e impresa
Contratto e impr. Europa	Contratto e impresa Europa
Corriere giur.	Il Corriere giuridico. Mensile di giurisprudenza civile, legislazione e opinioni
Cowp.	Cowper's King's Bench Reports
cpv.	capoverso

D	Recueil Dalloz
D.	Digesta
d. h.	das heißt
Danno e resp.	Danno e responsabilità
DCFR	Draft Common Frame of Reference
DDR	Deutsche Demokratische Republik
Defrénois	Répertoire Defrénois
dens.	denselben
ders.	derselbe
DH	Recueil hebdomadaire de jurisprudence Dalloz (avant 1941)
DHA	Dialogues d'Histoire Ancienne
dies.	dieselbe
Dig. disc. priv., Sez. civ.	Digesto (discipline privatistiche) sezione civile
Dir.	sous la direction de
Dir. comm. internaz.	Diritto del commercio internazionale
Dir. giur.	Diritto e giurisprudenza
Dir. giust.	Diritto e giustizia
Dir. mar.	Il diritto marittimo
dir. priv.	diritto privato
dir. rom.	diritto romano
dir. vig.	diritto vigente
disp.	disputatio/disputationes
DJT	Deutscher Juristentag
DJZ	Deutsche Juristenzeitung
DÖV	Die Öffentliche Verwaltung. Zeitschrift für Öffentliches Recht und Verwaltungswissenschaften
DP	Recueil périodique et critique mensuel Dalloz (avant 1941)
Dr. et patr.	Droit et patrimoine
dub.	dubitatio/dubitationes
E I	Entwurf eines bürgerlichen Gesetzbuches für das Deutsche Reich. Erste Lesung. Ausgearbeitet durch die von dem Bundesrathe berufene Kommission
E II	Entwurf eines bürgerlichen Gesetzbuches für das Deutsche Reich. Zweite Lesung. Nach den Beschlüssen der Redaktionskommission
E. B. & E	Ellis, Blackburn & Ellis' Queen's Bench Reports
E. G. L. R.	Estates Gazette Law Reports
E. R./Eng. Rep.	English Reports
East	East's Term Reports, King's Bench
ED	Enciclopedia del Diritto
Éd./ed.	Édition /edition
ERCL	European Review of Contract Law
ERPL	European Review of Private Law
Europa dir. priv.	Europa e diritto privato
EWCA Civ	England & Wales Court of Appeal (Civil Division)
EWHC	England & Wales High Court
Exch	Exchequer Reports

f.	folgende/following
Fam. dir.	Famiglia e diritto
ff.	folgende/following
Fn.	Fußnote
fol.	folium/fovia
Foord's Rep.	Foord's Reports
Foro amm. TAR	Il Foro amministrativo – T.A.R.
Foro it.	Il Foro italiano
FS	Festschrift
Gaz. Pal.	Gazette du Palais
GG	Grundgesetz
Giur. comm.	Giurisprudenza commerciale
Giur. it.	Giurisprudenza italiana
Giust. civ.	Giustizia civile
gl.	glossa
Gruchot	Beiträge zur Erläuterung des deutschen Rechts/Gruchots Beiträge
GS	Gedächtnisschrift
h. M.	herrschende Meinung
H. & N.	Hurlstone & Norman's Exchequer Reports
Harv. L. Rev.	Harvard Law Review
HCA	High Court of Australia
Hg.	Herausgeber
hgg./hrsg.	herausgegeben
HKK	Historisch-Kristischer Kommentar zum BGB, hrsg. von Mathias Schmoeckel/Joachim Rückert/Reinhard Zimmermann
HL	House of Lords
HLC./HL Cas	Clark & Finnelly's House of Lords Reports New Series
i. e.	id est
ibid	ibidem
id.	idem
Index	Index. Quaderni Camerti di studi romanistici
Inst.	Institutiones
Israel L. Rev.	Israel Law Review
J	Justice
J. C.	Jésus-Christ
JCP	Semaine juridique (édition générale)
JCP E	Semaine juridique (édition entreprise)
JR	Juristische Rundschau
JZ	Juristenzeitung
KB	Law Reports, King's Bench Division
KE	Kommissionsentwurf

Law & Hist. Rev.	Law and History Review
Law Quart. Rev.	Law Quarterly Review
Law Rev.	Law Review
Ld. Raym.	Lord Raymond's King's Bench and Common Pleas Reports
Leon.	Leonard's Reports
LG	Landgericht
lib.	liber/liberi
LJ/LLJ	Lord/Lady Justice/Justices
Lloyd's Rep.	Lloyd's Law Reports
LPA	Les Petites Affiches
LR CP	Law Reports, Common Pleas (1 st Series)
LR Ex	Law Reports, Exchequer Cases
LR QB	Law Reports, Queen's Bench (1 st Series)
LT	Law Times Reports
m. w. N.	mit weiteren Nachweisen
MEFRA	Mélanges de l'École française de Rome
Mod. L. Rev.	Modern Law Review
Motive	Motive zu dem Entwurfe eines Bürgerlichen Gesetzbuches für das Deutsche Reich
Mugdan	Die gesammten Materialien zum Bürgerlichen Gesetzbuch für das Deutsche Reich
n°/n.	numéro/numero
N. E.	North Eastern Reporter
N. W.	North Western Reporter
Nr.	Nummer
num.	numerus/numeri
NJW	Neue Juristische Wochenschrift
NJW-FER	NJW-Entscheidungsdienst Familien- und Erbrecht
NJW-RR	Neue Juristische Wochenschrift Rechtsprechungs-Report
Nov. dig. it.	Novissimo Digesto Italiano
NSWLR	New South Wales Law Reports (Australia)
nt.	nota
Nuova giur. civ. comm.	Nuova giurisprudenza civile commentata
Nuova riv. dir. comm.	Nuova rivista di diritto commerciale, diritto dell'economia, diritto sociale
NZLR	New Zealand Law Reports
OGH	Oberster Gerichtshof
OHGZ	Entscheidungen des Obersten Gerichtshofes für die Britische Zone in Zivilsachen
OIR	Orbis iuris Romani – Journal of Ancient Law Studies
OLG	Oberlandesgericht
op. cit.	opere citato
OR	Obligationenrecht
ord.	ordinanza

p.	pagina/page
para./paras.	paragraph, paragraphes
PC	Privy Council
PECL	Principles of European Contract Law
Plow.	Plowden's Commentaries or Reports
pp.	paginae/pages/pagine/pages
Protokolle	Protokolle der Kommission für die zweite Lesung des Entwurfs des Bürgerlichen Gesetzbuchs
PUAM	Presses universitaires d'Aix-Marseille
PUF	Presses universitaires de France
QB	Law Reports, Queen's Bench Division (3 rd Series)
QBD	Queen's Bench Division
QLSD	Quaderni Lupiensi di Storia e Diritto
qu.	quaestio/quaestiones
Quaderni Fiorentini	Quaderni Fiorentini per la storia del pensiero giuridico moderno
Queen's Bench Rep.	Queen's Bench Reports (1841–1852)
Rass.dir.civ.	Rassegna di diritto civile
RDC	Revue des contrats
REA	Revue des études anciennes
Real. Ist. lomb. Scienz. lett. Rend.	Reale Istituto Lombardo di Scienze e Lettere. Rendiconti
REL	Revue des Études Latines
Rép. civ.	Encyclopédie Dalloz, Répertoire de droit civil
Rep. Foro it.	Repertorio del Foro italiano
resp.	responsio/responsiones
Resp.civ.priv.	Responsabilità civile e previdenza
Rev.int.dr.comp.	Revue internationale de droit comparé
RG	Reichsgericht
RGBl.	Reichsgesetzblatt
RGZ	Entscheidungen des Reichsgerichts in Zivilsachen
RH	Revue Historique
RIDA	Revue internationale des droits de l'Antiquité
Riv.crit.dir.priv	Rivista critica del diritto privato
Riv.dir.banc.	Rivista di diritto bancario
Riv.dir.civ.	Rivista di diritto civile
Riv.dir.comm.	Rivista del diritto commerciale e del diritto generale delle obbligazioni
Riv.not.	Rivista del notariato
Riv.trim.dir.proc.civ.	Rivista trimestrale di diritto e procedura civile
Rn.	Randnummer
Rom. Amer.	Roma e America. Diritto romano comune. Rivista di diritto dell'integrazione e unificazione del diritto in Europa e in America Latina
Roma Tre L. Rev.	Roma Tre Law Review
RTD civ.	Revue trimestrielle de droit civil
Rz.	Randziffer

s.	suiivante/e seguente
S.	Seite
s. v.	sub voce
SA Law Rep., Appellate Div.	South Africa Law Reports, Appellate Division
Sächs. Archiv	Sächsisches Archiv für bürgerliches Recht und Prozeß/ Sächsisches Archiv für deutsches bürgerliches Recht
Salk	Salkeld's King's Bench Reports
ScheckG	Scheckgesetz
SDHI	Studia et documenta historiae et iuris
sez.	Sezione
sez. un.	Sezioni unite
Sp.	Spalte
spéc.	spécialement
ss.	e seguenti
Str.	Strange's King's Bench Reports
StVG	Straßenverkehrsgesetz
t. u. f.	Decreto Legislativo del 24 febbraio 1998, n. 58
Tem. em.	Temi emiliana
Term Rep.	Term Reports (Durnford & East), King's Bench
Th. L. L.	Thesaurus Linguae Latinae
TLR	Times Law Reports
tom.	tomus/tomi
TR	Tijdschrift voor rechtsgeschiedenis – Revue d'histoire du droit
tr./Trad.	translation/traduction
Transvaal Supreme Court Rep.	Transvaal Supreme Court Reports (South Africa, 1904-1909)
Trib.	Tribunale
u. a.	unter anderem
UKHL	United Kingdom House of Lords
UKPC	United Kingdom Privy Council
UKSC	United Kingdom Supreme Court
Univ. Queensland Law Journal	University of Queensland Law Journal (Australia)
v	versus
v.	voir/vedi
v. not.	voir notamment
vgl.	vergleiche
Vita not.	Vita notarile
vol.	volume
VwVfG	Verwaltungsverfahrensgesetz
W. Jones	W. Jones' King's Bench and Common Pleas Reports
WG	Wechselgesetz
WLR	Weekly Law Reports
WM	Wertpapier-Mitteilungen. Zeitschrift für Wirtschafts- und Bankrecht

Yale L. J.	Yale Law Journal
Z.	Zeile
ZEuP	Zeitschrift für Europäisches Privatrecht
ZGB DDR	Zivilgesetzbuch der DDR
Ziff.	Ziffer
ZRG GA	Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte, Germanistische Abteilung
ZRG RA	Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte, Romanistische Abteilung

Why Cause of Contract again, and how?

Gregor Albers

“The fundamental things apply
as time goes by.”

From the movie *Casablanca* (1942)

I. Resilience of a notion.....	1
II. Why? Fundamental problems.....	4
III. How? The chosen approach.....	12
IV. A prospect.....	15

I. Resilience of a notion

One might wonder whether we still need to talk about it. The reform of the French law of obligations, the *ordonnance* from 10 February 2016, has deleted *cause* as a requirement for the creation of a valid contract from the Code civil.¹

From 1804 until then, the Code’s venerable article 1108 had listed the necessary elements of a valid contract (*convention*). Besides consent and capacity of the party incurring an obligation, it required not only that this obligation had a determined object, but also that it was based on a legitimate cause.² For all contracts concluded since 1 October 2016, the new article 1128 n. 3 of the Code asks for no more than a legitimate and specified content.³

To many, this abolition of *cause* has appeared to be merely the last step of a continuous and rather necessary process.⁴ In 1992, the Dutch had expelled the

¹ Ordonnance n° 2016-131 du 10 février 2016 portant réforme du droit des contrats, du régime général et de la preuve des obligations, JORF n°0035 du 11 février 2016, texte n. 26.

² Art. 1108 Code civil 1804: “Quatre conditions sont essentielles pour la validité d’une convention: Le consentement de la partie qui s’oblige; Sa capacité de contracter; Un objet certain qui forme la matière de l’engagement; Une cause licite dans l’obligation”.

³ Art. 1128 Code civil 2016: “Sont nécessaires à la validité d’un contrat: 1° Le consentement des parties; 2° Leur capacité de contracter; 3° Un contenu licite et certain”.

⁴ For criticism of *causa* from a historical and comparative point of view, see *Ernest G. Lorenzen*, *Causa and Consideration in the Law of Contracts*, Yale L.J. 28 (1919) 621–646; *John P. Dawson*, *Gifts and Promises. Continental and American Law Compared* (New Haven/London 1980) 114–116; *Konrad Zweigert/Hein Kötz*, *An Introduction to Comparative Law* (tr. Tony

oorzak from their new civil code.⁵ In 1994, the *UNIDROIT Principles* had proclaimed: “A contract is concluded, modified or terminated by the mere agreement of the parties, without any further requirement”.⁶ Not only had that been upheld by the *Principles of European Contract law*⁷ in 1998 and later by the *Draft Common Frame of Reference*,⁸ where it might be argued that German lawyers had the upper hand, even the working group led by *Giuseppe Gandolfi*, which had published the first part of its *Avant-projet* of a *Code Europeen des contrats* in 2001, had turned away from *causa* as a necessary element of contract.⁹

This tendency has supported the claim of the French reformers that abolishing *cause* would align the Code with foreign legal systems, thus furthering one of the main aims of the reform: to increase the international attraction of France as a place to “do business”.¹⁰ We have now come to a point where *causa* has been reduced to a mere footnote in the Oxford Handbook on Comparative Law.¹¹

Weir, 3rd ed., Oxford/New York 1998) 381; Reinhard Zimmermann, *The Law of Obligations. Roman Foundations of the Civilian Tradition* (Cape Town/Wetton/Johannesburg 1990) 553.

⁵ Art. 1356 Burgerlijk Wetboek 1838 followed art. 1108 Code civil 1804 and required a “geoorloofde oorzaak” as a fourth condition for a valid obligation. The *Nieuw Burgerlijk Wetboek* 1992 manages without summing up the conditions of a contract. Instead, art. 3:40 declares void any legal act that in its content (“inhoud”) or aim contravenes good morals, public order or mandatory statutes. See *Hans Ankum*, *La causa del contratto nello sviluppo del diritto olandese fino al nuovo codice civile del 1992*, in: Letizia Vacca (ed.), *Causa e contratto nella prospettiva storico-comparatistica* (Turin 1997) and extensively *Yorick M. Ruland*, *Die Causa der Obligation. Rechtshistorische und rechtsvergleichende Perspektive nach Einführung des Nieuw Burgerlijk Wetboek in den Niederlanden* (Cologne/Berlin/Munich 2004), in particular 13, 138 ff.

⁶ Art. 3.2 UNIDROIT Principles of International Commercial Contracts (International Institute for the Unification of Private Law, Rome 1994).

⁷ See art. 2:101 (1): “A contract is concluded if: (a) the parties intend to be legally bound, and (b) they reach a sufficient agreement without any further requirement”; Ole Lando/Hugh Beale (eds.), *Principles of European Contract Law, Parts I and II, Combined and Revised* (The Hague 2000).

⁸ See art. II-4:101: “A contract is concluded, without any further requirement, if the parties: (a) intend to enter into a binding legal relationship or bring about some other legal effect; and (b) reach a sufficient agreement”; Christian von Bar/Eric Clive/Hans Schulte Nölke et al. (eds.), *Principles, Definitions and Model Rules of European Private Law. Draft Common Frame of Reference (DCFR). Interim Outline Edition* (Munich 2008).

⁹ See art. 5 n. 3 (“Les éléments essentiels du contrat sont: a) l’accord des parties; b) le contenu.”); on “Autonomie contractuelle” cf. art. 2 n. 1: *Code Europeen des Contrats. Avant-projet* (Milan 2001). From the commentary by *Giuseppe Gandolfi* cf. in particular 125 ff., 142 ff.

¹⁰ See Rapport au Président de la République relatif à l’ordonnance n° 2016-131 du 10 février 2016 portant réforme du droit des contrats, du régime général et de la preuve des obligations, JORF n°0035 du 11 février 2016, texte n. 25. For the reference to the “Doing business” reports of the World Bank, cf. on page 2 under “Genèse de la réforme”.

¹¹ *Hein Kötz*, *Comparative Contract Law*, in: *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Law*, ed. by Mathias Reimann/Reinhard Zimmermann (2nd ed., Oxford 2019) 902–932, 909 n. 24: “French law used to follow a rule [...]”. More generous is *Gregor Christandl*, in: *Commentaries on European Contract Laws*, ed. by Nils Jansen/Reinhard Zimmermann (Oxford 2018) Art. 2:101 (1) n. 19 (245–247).

But the rebuttal of *causa* is not universal. To the contrary, the notion still prospers in many legal orders. Those countries which once embraced *cause* together with Napoleon's Code do not seem to be inclined to follow the French example again, this time abolishing it.¹² As recent as 2017, the Principles of Latin American Contract Law upheld explicitly that: "Consent, subject-matter, cause, and in certain cases, formalities, are the elements required to form a contract".¹³

Even where, in the attempt to depart with *causa*, one succeeds to erase it from a code, it is doubtful whether that makes the doctrine disappear. One example is well known in Germany: An obligation can be countered with the objection that it unjustly enriches the creditor. Studying the reason for this objection (usually described as its lack of cause), *Bernhard Windscheid* had identified it with the non-fulfilment of a presupposition (*Voraussetzung*) of the promisor. When the commission in charge of drafting the Civil Code refused to enshrine that theory, he made a prophecy: Thrown out of the door, it would come back in through the window.¹⁴ Some thirty years later, he was proven right by the general recognition of the doctrine of basis of contract (*Geschäftsgrundlage*).¹⁵ A similar metaphor has now been used by a French politician to mollify concerns about the removal of *cause*: "If *cause* has left towards the garden, it has re-entered from the courtyard".¹⁶

¹² In Italy, few wish to change article 1325 or 1343 of the Codice civile of 1942; see *Elena Bargelli*, *Il futuro della causa nel diritto italiano*, in this volume, 733–754. On Quebec, California, Louisiana and South Africa see *Birke Häcker*, *Causa und consideration. Ein historischer Dialog*, in this volume, 323–369 (348–353). For Belgium, see art. 5.27 of the proposed law of obligations (n°55-1806/1).

¹³ The English translation of the article has been taken from Rodrigo Momberg/Stefan Vogenauer (eds.), *The Future of Contract Law in Latin America: The Principles of Latin American Contract Law* (Oxford 2017). In the original version, art. 9 reads: "Elementos del contrato. Son elementos para la formación del contrato, el consentimiento, el objeto, la causa y en ciertos casos, la solemnidad"; Iñigo de la Maza/Carlos Pizarro/Álvaro Vidal (coord. and eds.), *Los principios Latinoamericanos de derecho de los contratos* (Madrid 2017). The argument in favour of the inclusion of *causa* is presented in that volume by *de la Maza/Vidal*, *El Contenido: Una primera aproximación*, 27–75, 33 ff.; an English version is presented by *Iñigo de la Maza*, *The Notion of Contract and its Essential Elements in the Principles of Latin American Contract Law*, in: Momberg/Vogenauer, loc. cit. 163–177, 174 f.

¹⁴ *Bernhard Windscheid*: "Zur Thüre hinausgeworfen, kommt sie zum Fenster wieder herein"; *Die Voraussetzung*, AcP 78 (1892) 161–202, 197 = *Gesammelte Reden und Abhandlungen*, ed. by Paul Oertmann (Leipzig 1904) 375–409, 406.

¹⁵ On the *Voraussetzungslehre*, see my contributions on *causa* in 19th century Germany (*Gregor Albers*, *Die causa vom Code Civil zum BGB. Zuwendungen tragen statt Verpflichtungen begründen*, in this volume, 263–321, 293 f. note 157) and on unexpected circumstances under German law (*Gregor Albers*, *Der Einfluss unerwarteter Ereignisse auf den Vertrag nach deutschem Recht*, in this volume, 573–635, 575–582) as well as the article by *Horst Ehmann*, *Zu den Arten der Rechtsgründe von Leistungen und Leistungsversprechen. Von der causa-Lehre zur Zwecklehre*, in this volume, 755–869, 762–764, 769–772.

¹⁶ *François Pillet*: "si la cause est sortie côté jardin, elle est rentrée côté cour !", cited by *Thomas Genicon*, *L'avenir de la cause en droit français des contrats*, in this volume, 715–731, 717.

The idea that *cause* may persist has been nourished by the reformers themselves. Modernization, not revolution had been the proclaimed aim of 2016's *ordonnance*. The wording of the code should once again specifically express the rules which the courts actually followed, making the law more transparent and judgments more predictable. At the same time, reformers claimed that the courts would still be able to obtain the practical results once grounded on *cause*.¹⁷ That's why, in an attempt to appease, the *rapport* describes the relinquishment of *cause* as being merely formal, dubbing it "abandon formel de la notion de la cause".¹⁸ Such a formal abolition seems to be mostly symbolic in nature; and it is rather unclear how a practice deemed unpredictable is supposed to become more predictable while at the same time remaining unchanged.¹⁹ Does that mean that the reform is no more than an attempt to deceive the eye, a means to preserve the *status quo*?²⁰ From a practical point of view, it seems rather probable that the policies associated with the notion of *cause* are even strengthened by the formal abolition of that notion: What used to be an open principle whose invocation was debated in individual cases has been replaced by a set of articles distilled from that caselaw (but sometimes based on a single court decision). As those articles establish abstract rules, judges can be expected to apply them rather broadly, extending them to cases they would have decided differently had they only regarded the old principle and the case law.²¹ In order to provide a coherent explanation of the new articles and the decisions deduced from their wording, jurisprudence might want to stick with the notion of *cause*, enriching its meaning to cover the new fields of application.

II. Why? Fundamental problems

The resilience of *causa* bears witness of its connection with fundamental problems of contract law. On the eve of the reform in France, *cause* was mostly viewed as a stumbling block for a liberal approach to contract law, a restriction of the parties' autonomy, a tool for public control and regulation of private agreements. In 2012, *Denis Mazeaud* had described the controversy as follows: "From a per-

¹⁷ See the *rapport* (n. 10) under "Objectifs de la réforme" on page 3 and under chapter II, section II ("La validité du contrat") on page 8.

¹⁸ See the *rapport* (n. 10) under "Objectifs de la réforme" on page 3, second paragraph.

¹⁹ For an analysis of the reform as a means of communication Gaël Chantepie/Nicolas Dissaux, *Le nouveau discours contractuel. Rapport introductif*, *Revue des Contrats* 2016, 572–580, in particular 576 f. They perceive a fundamental conflict between modernization and legal certainty: "à bien réfléchir, les deux objectifs sont résolument contradictoires" (575).

²⁰ One is reminded of Tancredi's motto: "If we wish everything to stay as it is, it is necessary that everything changes" ("Se vogliamo che tutto rimanga come è, bisogna che tutto cambi"). See also Chantepie/Dissaux (n. 19): "Les éléments du discours changent, sans en affecter le contenu. Il fallait ainsi que tout change, pour que rien ne change" (577).

²¹ For an extensive discussion, see the article by *Thomas Genicon*, *L'avenir* (n. 16).

spective of legal politics [...] the adepts of contractual liberalism face the others, bearers of the grand French tradition or partisans of a more moral vision of contract law”.²² This interpretation is supported by the parallel case of the Netherlands, where the abolition of *oorzak* has been driven by liberal intentions.²³

This way of looking at *causa* seems quite natural to a German lawyer who has been taught that all agreements intended to be legally binding should be effective as contracts, if they are not nullified by some specific rule. Conformity with law and morality, for example, is not considered an essential element of contract in German law, although illegality and to an extent also immorality are reasons for a contract’s invalidity.²⁴ What seems to be only a matter of perspective might actually account for a *laissez-faire*-attitude of German jurists and courts.²⁵ The new art. 1128 n. 3 accommodates the German position insofar as, in lieu of the *cause licite*, it requires no more than *un contenu licite e certain*, a legitimate and determinable content. Whereas *cause* invited interpreters to search for an external justification of contract, the reference to its content isolates the contract, urging it to stand alone and speak for itself. At the same time, the rules on illegality give a prime example how policies connected to *cause* have survived its elimination: Prior to the reform, the courts had held that a contract is ineffective if only one party pursued an illegal aim, even if the other party knew nothing about it.²⁶

²² Denis Mazeaud, Avant-propos, to: Henri Capitant, De la Cause des Obligations (Contrats, Engagements unilatéraux, Legs), Réimpression de l’édition de 1927 (Paris 2012) i-iv, ii: “Dans une perspective de politique juridique, d’une part, s’opposent les adeptes du libéralisme contractuel et les autres, tenants de la grande tradition française ou partisane d’une vision plus morale du droit des contrats. Les premiers considèrent que la protection des intérêts privés des contractants est suffisamment assurée [...] De même, dans la perspective de la protection de l’intérêt général contre les contrats contraires à l’ordre public et aux bonnes mœurs, la cause est superflue [...] Les autres considèrent qu’il est nécessaire d’assurer la protection des contractants contre les déséquilibres structurels qui peuvent affecter les contrats qu’ils ont conclus [...] De même grâce à sa souplesse, la cause demeure l’instrument le plus performant pour lutter contre les contrats par la conclusion desquels les contractants poursuivaient un but immoral ou illicite”.

²³ See Eduard Maurits Meijers, Ontwerp voor een Nieuw Burgerlijk Wetboek, Toelichting, Derde Gedeelte (Boek 6), (’s-Gravenhage 1961) 749 ff., 752; on which see Ruland (n. 5) 107. A liberal spirit is also present in Gandolfi (n. 9) 128 ff. – It seems that divergent motives have come together in the French reform; see Dominique Fenouillet, Les valeurs morales, RDC 2016, 589–599 (“la liberté”: 591 ff., “la vertu”: 593 ff.); Frédéric Rouvière, Les valeurs économiques de la réforme du droit des contrats, RDC 2016, 600–607.

²⁴ Cf. §§ 134, 138 BGB.

²⁵ Although the practical results do not always reflect that attitude; see the article by Ralf Treibmann on the requirements of valid contracts in German law, Voraussetzungen der Wirksamkeit von Verträgen nach deutschem Recht, in this volume, 425–453, 448.

²⁶ Cass. civ. 1^{re} 7.10.1998, n° 96-14.359; see Samuel Fulli-Lemaire, Le rôle passé de la cause au stade de la formation du contrat, in this volume, 407–424, 423 f. At first glance, this rule sounds strange to a German lawyer. It was already upheld by Georges Ripert, La règle morale dans les obligations civiles (Paris 1925) 57 ff., 66, against Capitant, De la cause (n. 22) n°4, 22 ff. Ripert does not hide his drift: “Pour briser les conventions immorales, il a fallu créer le moyen technique nécessaire qui les atteindrait toutes” (57). The scandalized German lawyer

The rule is now enshrined in art. 1162 Code civil.²⁷

If the removal of *cause* from the Code were indeed a victory of liberal contract theory, this victory would not fit into one of the grand narratives of modern history of private law, a tendency which in Germany is described as materialisation (*Materialisierung*) and which was first observed by *Max Weber*.²⁸ In “Faktizität und Geltung” (1992), *Jürgen Habermas* marks this development as follows: The 19th century’s “bourgeois formal law” (*bürgerliches Formalrecht*) assumes that every person possesses the same amount of freedom. It tries to guarantee freedom and equality simply by not interfering with human interactions. But the market has failed manifoldly. The new welfare state model (*sozialstaatliches Modell*) considers private actors as being determined by their unequal social positions. In this model, the private law’s task is to intervene by regulation to establish free-

might be reassured when told that the immoral party would not have been allowed to rely on that ineffectiveness.

²⁷ Art. 1162 Code Civil 2016: “Le contrat ne peut déroger à l’ordre public ni par ses stipulations, ni par son but, que ce dernier ait été connu ou non par toutes les parties”. Cf. also the rapport (n. 10): “Par ailleurs est reprise la solution jurisprudentielle selon laquelle le contrat est nul lorsque l’une des parties poursuit un but illicite, même si l’autre partie n’avait pas connaissance de ce but” (under subsection 3: “Le contenu du contrat”, p. 11).

²⁸ On “tendencies favourable to the dilution of legal formalism” (“Tendenzen, welche eine Auflösung des Rechtsformalismus begünstigen”) see *Max Weber*, *Rechtssoziologie*, § 8, in: Werner Gephart/Siegfried Hermes (eds.), *Max Weber-Gesamtausgabe*, Bd. I/22-3 (Tübingen 2010) 620–632, in particular 623: “Nun aber entstehen mit dem Erwachen moderner Klassenprobleme materiale Anforderungen an das Recht von seiten eines Teils der Rechtsinteressenten (namentlich der Arbeiterschaft) einerseits, der Rechtsideologen andererseits, welche sich gerade gegen diese Alleingeltung solcher nur geschäftssittlicher Maßstäbe richten und ein soziales Recht auf der Grundlage pathetischer sittlicher Postulate (‘Gerechtigkeit’, ‘Menschenwürde’) verlangen. Dies aber stellt den Formalismus des Rechts grundsätzlich in Frage. Denn die Anwendung von Begriffen wie ‘Ausbeutung der Notlage’ (im Wuchergesetz) oder die Versuche, Verträge wegen Unverhältnismäßigkeit des Entgeltes als gegen die guten Sitten verstoßend und daher nichtig zu behandeln, stehen grundsätzlich auf dem Boden von, rechtlich betrachtet, antiformalen Normen, die nicht juristischen oder konventionellen oder traditionellen, sondern rein ethischen Charakter haben, materiale Gerechtigkeit statt formaler Legalität beanspruchen”. The following English translation unfortunately substitutes “material” with “social”: “New demands for a ‘social law’ to be based upon such emotionally colored ethical postulates as ‘justice’ or ‘human dignity’, and directed against the very dominance of a mere business morality, have arisen with the emergence of the modern class problem. They are advocated not only by labor and other interested groups but also by legal ideologists. By these demands legal formalism itself has been challenged. Such a concept as economic duress, or the attempt to treat as immoral, and thus as invalid, a contract because of a gross disproportion between promise and consideration, are derived from norms which, from the legal standpoint, are entirely amorphous and which are neither juristic nor conventional nor traditional in character but ethical and which claim as their legitimation substantive justice rather than formal legality.” It is taken from Guenther Roth/Claus Wittich (eds.), *Economy and Society. An outline of interpretive sociology* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 1968) 886. – On the difference between formal freedom of contract and a material increase or decrease of liberty cf. also § 2 (425–428 and 453–455, in the translation: 729–731).

dom in the first place.²⁹ Novel contract law denies certain contractual agreements their legal validity or modifies their content.³⁰ In order to test the validity of a contract, it is no longer enough to formally verify whether or not there is an agreement; the test has to be expanded to examine that agreement's material content against the background of the parties' individual situation.

In Germany, the trend towards materialisation has characterised private law from the first draft of the BGB up until today. To this materialisation, we owe the legislative protection of employees and tenants. It explains why the law protects relatives who offer themselves as guarantors despite having no personal assets.³¹ Materialisation's newer manifestations include the minimum wage³² and the so-called "rent brake" (*Mietpreisbremse*), which prohibits rental prices higher than ten per cent above the average rent in areas with a strained residential situation.³³ Materialisation is particularly present in the law passed by the European Union. The Commission's tendency to devise contract law as *ius cogens*³⁴ could even induce the idea that, by default, it distrusted all contracts concluded by consumers.

Materialisation describes private law as increasingly becoming the subject of political design. Once material justice has been placed alongside formal justice of exchange, private law quickly becomes an instrument for achieving distributive justice and promoting other objectives of the state or political interests.

If one drives materialisation to the extreme, the fact that the parties have consented on their contractual terms is no more than an indication that the contract

²⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms. Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, translated by William Rehg (Cambridge, MA 1998) 392–409. Habermas does see the problem of "welfare-state paternalism": "But with such overwhelming provisions, the welfare state obviously runs the risk of impairing individual autonomy, precisely the autonomy it is supposed to promote by providing the factual preconditions for the equal opportunity to exercise negative freedoms" (407). He reassures the reader by pointing out the "political autonomy" enjoyed by citizens of a democracy: "These persons are autonomous, however, only insofar as they can at the same time understand themselves as authors of the law to which they are subject as addressees" (408). For the German original, see Jürgen Habermas, *Faktizität und Geltung. Beiträge zur Diskurstheorie des Rechts und des demokratischen Rechtsstaats* (5th ed., Frankfurt am Main 2014) 477–493, in particular 490 ff.

³⁰ On *Materialisierung des Vertragsrechts* more recently Claus-Wilhelm Canaris, *Wandlungen des Schuldvertragsrechts – Tendenzen zu seiner "Materialisierung"*, AcP 200 (2000) 273–364; Marietta Auer, *Materialisierung, Flexibilisierung, Richterfreiheit. Generalklauseln im Spiegel der Antinomien des Privatrechtsdenkens* (Tübingen 2005) 22 ff.; Günter Hager, *Strukturen des Privatrechts in Europa. Eine rechtsvergleichende Studie* (Tübingen 2012) 13 ff.; Stefan Arnold, *Vertrag und Verteilung* (Tübingen 2014) 226–261.

³¹ On these cases, see Treibmann, *Voraussetzungen* (n. 25) 450 f.

³² Gesetz zur Regelung eines allgemeinen Mindestlohns vom 11.8.2014, BGBl. I 1348.

³³ Gesetz zur Dämpfung des Mietanstiegs auf angespannten Wohnungsmärkten und zur Stärkung des Bestellerprinzips bei der Wohnungsvermittlung vom 21.4.2015, BGBl. I 610.

³⁴ See the criticism by Gerhard Wagner, *Zwingendes Vertragsrecht*, in: Horst Eidenmüller/ Florian Faust/ Hans Christoph Grigoleit/ Nils Jansen/ Gerhard Wagner/ Reinhard Zimmermann (eds.), *Revision des Verbraucher-acquis* (Tübingen 2011) 1–52.

contains provisions which are societally desirable and should thus be enforced. The consequent execution of this idea originates from *Walter Schmidt-Rimpler* and dates not without reason from 1941; it was commissioned by the national socialist Academy for German Law (*Akademie für Deutsches Recht*).³⁵ At the same time, *causa* was put into service for the materialisation of contract law in Italy. When the *Ministro Guardasigilli* presented the draft for a new Codice civile in 1942, its explanatory memorandum construed *causa* as a contract's "economic-social function" (*funzione economico-sociale*). It argued that the parties' private autonomy should only be preserved if their contract's purpose was worthy of social acceptance. Thus, *causa* was considered a control mechanism essential for a fascist code.³⁶

Even though the standards against which contracts are evaluated may have changed, the trend of materialisation remains. Nowadays, materialisation is driven primarily by economic analysis of law, which reduces the legal order as a whole, and thus all subjective rights, to factors of aggregated utility.

Due to this overall trend, it is rather unlikely that the retreat of *cause* should really turn out to be a triumph of private autonomy and liberalism. And indeed, the opposition of *causa* and individual autonomy can be contested. When *causa* is defined as the aim pursued by the parties to an agreement, having regard for *causa* means no more than respecting their intentions. A German doctrine of *causa* built on this position presents itself as a stronghold of autonomy against

³⁵ *Walter Schmidt-Rimpler*, Grundfragen einer Erneuerung des Privatrechts, AcP 147 (1941) 130–197. The author deprived contract law of its old basis, but essentially, without change, rebuilt it on new grounds. Thus, he defended it in terms of content against other National Socialist reform efforts. Schmidt-Rimpler's theses also received attention after the war; he repeated them in *Festschrift Ludwig Raiser* (Tübingen 1974) 3–26.

³⁶ *Relazione alla Maestà del Re Imperatore del Ministro Guardasigilli (Grandi) presentata all'udienza del 16 marzo 1942-XX per l'approvazione del testo del "Codice Civile"*, n. 613: "Non ostante gli equivoci e le critiche a cui il requisito della causa ha dato luogo, si è stimato necessario conservarlo e anzi conferirgli massima efficienza, non solo e non tanto in omaggio alla secolare tradizione del nostro diritto commune [...] quanto, e soprattutto, perchè un codice fascista, ispirato alle esigenze della solidarietà, non può ignorare la nozione della causa senza trascurare quello che deve essere il contenuto socialmente utile del contratto. Bisogna infatti tener fermo [...] che la causa richiesta dal diritto non è lo scopo soggettivo, qualunque esso sia, perseguito dal contraente nel caso concreto [...] ma è la funzione economico-sociale che il diritto riconosce rilevante ai suoi fini e che sola giustifica la tutela dell'autonomia privata. Funzione pertanto che deve essere non soltanto conforme ai precetti di legge, all'ordine pubblico e al buon costume, ma anche [...] rispondente alla necessità che il fine intrinseco del contratto sia socialmente apprezzabile e come tale meritevole della tutela giuridica" (in: *Codice Civile, Testo e Relazione Ministeriale*, Roma 1943-XXI, 9–284, 132). The interpretation of *causa* as "funzione economico-sociale" has been developed by *Emilio Betti*; see *Teoria generale del negozio giuridico*, Seconda ristampa della seconda edizione (Turin 1955) 51 ff., 171 ff. (first edition was 1943). See the article by *Andrea Maria Garofalo* on the progression from the French Code civil to the Italian Code from 1942 (*Itinerari della causa dal Code civil del 1804 al Codice civile del 1942*, in this volume, 201–245).

certain “objective” (*objektive*) theories, denouncing them as servants of collective interests.³⁷ *Causa* can provide the battlefield for the conflict between more liberal and more collective theories of contract law. But it doesn’t need to be all about that controversy.

Causa can actually channel most of what any contract theory does. The Canadian *Stephen Smith*, author of the only textbook on the matter, defines contract theories as “interpretations of contract law”. *Smith* demands that a comprehensive theory explain how obligations arise out of contract and why the law enforces them.³⁸

As the first modern examination of the normative foundation of contract, one usually cites³⁹ an essay by *Fuller* and *Perdue* from 1936.⁴⁰ The authors question why the damages awarded to a promisee are calculated to compensate her expectation interest. Respecting her expectations, the law confers upon the creditor an advantage which she, according to *Fuller* and *Perdue*, has not had before. It does not only compensate losses but exercises distributive justice.⁴¹ They argue that the obligation to reimburse the creditor her expectation interest can at best be justified indirectly: By sparing her from having to prove actual losses from reliance on the contract, it is nevertheless her reliance interest which is protected. Furthermore, the sanctity of contracts is encouraged by way of deterrence.⁴² By qualifying the expectation interest as overcompensation, the authors implicitly reject that the contract itself has the power to assign the future performance to the creditor’s assets.

By explaining the obligatory effect of the contract with the other party’s reliance, *Fuller* and *Perdue* establish a “reliance theory” in the sense of *Smith*. In recent decades, however, attempts have reappeared to found the effects of contract on the parties’ will: Like the medieval canon lawyers, *Charles Fried* draws upon the moral commitment of the promise and has thus, since 1981, been the most prominent advocate of a “promissory theory”.⁴³ One can trace all the way back

³⁷ See *Ehmann*, *Rechtsgründe* (n. 15) (dissenting in particular with the doctrines of *Erfüllung durch reale Leistungsbewirkung* and *objektiver Rechtsgrund*).

³⁸ *Stephen A. Smith*, *Contract Theory* (Oxford 2004) 5. – For German contract theory of today, see on the one hand, *Florian Rödl*, *Gerechtigkeit unter freien Gleichen. Eine normative Rekonstruktion von Delikt, Eigentum und Vertrag* (Baden Baden 2015) in particular 267–361 (in the spirit of *Ernest Weinrib*); on the other hand, *Bertram Lomfeld*, *Die Gründe des Vertrages. Eine Diskurstheorie der Vertragsrechte* (Tübingen 2015) (in the spirit of *Jürgen Habermas*).

³⁹ As articulated by *Peter Benson*, Introduction, in: *Peter Benson* (ed.), *The Theory of Contract Law. New Essays* (Cambridge 2001) 1–18, 1 ff. See also *Patrick S. Atiyah*, *Fuller and the Theory of Contract*, in: *Essays on Contract* (Oxford 1986) 73–92 (originally published in the *Duke Law Journal* 1983).

⁴⁰ *L. L. Fuller/William R. Perdue, Jr.*, *The Reliance Interest in Contract Damage*, *Yale L. J.* 46 (1936–1937) 52–96 and 373–420. The article has also become famous for the distinction of “reliance interests”, “expectation interests” and “restitution interests”.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴³ *Charles Fried*, *Contract as Promise. A Theory of Contractual Obligation* (Cambridge, MA 1981), and *Charles Fried*, *The Ambitions of Contract as Promise*, in: *Gregory Klass/George*

to at least *Hugo Grotius* the “transfer theories” which interpret contract as a transfer of rights; a position recently defended by *Peter Benson*.⁴⁴

Because voluntarist interpretations of contracts centre upon the individual and their intentions, they have a tendency to be of a liberal character. However, criticism of these theories is not necessarily directed against their basic political trend; above all, it does not have to be motivated by a desire for more regulation. Substituting voluntarism with a more comprehensive approach does not automatically imply abandoning the individualist point of view in favour of a collective perspective. The question is rather whether the mechanisms of contract law can really be modelled as effects of the parties’ will.

Especially *Patrick Atiyah* argues (in his 1978 essay “Contracts, Promises and the Law of Obligations”) that the will is not the appropriate criterion for the existence of a contract. He suspects that the legal mind works the opposite way: One can assume the existence of a will where one has already decided to find a contractual obligation.⁴⁵ *Atiyah* deems it arbitrary to interpret the act of boarding a bus as a promise to pay the fare. If that were right, according to *Atiyah*, one might as well say that partaking in road traffic entails a promise to adhere to the traffic rules.⁴⁶ This approach would allow all traffic accidents to be dealt with through contract law. According to *Atiyah*, it would be more reasonable to do away with contracts and construe liabilities based on reliance induced in others and on the reception of goods and services.⁴⁷ An explicit contractual promise could at most serve as evidence of those obligations.⁴⁸

Letsas/Prince Saprai (eds.), *Philosophical Foundations of Contract Law* (Oxford 2014) 17–41. This volume contains also important criticism, see *Joseph Raz*, *Is There a Reason to Keep a Promise?*, 58–77, *Liam Murphy*, *The Practice of Promise and Contract*, 151–170, and *Aditi Bagchi*, *Distributive Justice and Contract*, 193–211.

⁴⁴ *Peter Benson*, *Justice in Transactions. A Theory of Contract Law* (Cambridge MA/London 2019), on which cf. ERCL 2021, 127–283.

⁴⁵ *Patrick S. Atiyah*, *Contracts, Promises and the Law of Obligations*, in: *Essays on Contract*, Oxford 1986, 10–56, 24 (originally in *Law Quart. Rev.* 1978).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 19: “Is it meaningful or useful to claim that a person who boards a bus is promising to pay his fare? If so, would it not be just as meaningful to say that when he descends from the bus and crosses the road he promises to cross with all due care for the safety of other road users?”

⁴⁷ Apart from *Fuller and Perdue*, one can find the same focus on reliance with *Grant Gilmore*, *The death of contract*, (Columbus [Ohio] 1974) 88: “We are fast approaching the point where, to prevent unjust enrichment, any benefit received by a defendant must be paid for unless it was clearly meant as a gift; where any detriment reasonably incurred by a plaintiff in reliance on a defendant’s assurances must be recompensed. When that point is reached, there is really no longer any viable distinction between liability in contract and liability in tort.” On *Gilmore*, one should take note of the criticism by *James Gordley*, 89 *Harv.L. Rev.* (1975–1976) 452–467. – For similar arguments by contract scepticists in 19th century Germany, see my article, *Albers*, *Die causa vom Code Civil zum BGB* (n. 15) 285, 312 f. with note 263.

⁴⁸ *Atiyah*, *Contracts and Promises* (n. 45) 25.

Index of Sources

1. Roman Legal Sources

a) Justinianic

Institutiones

Inst. 3,13	121, 146 ²⁶¹
Inst. 3,13 pr.	549 ⁶⁵
Inst. 3,14	107, 146 ²⁶¹ , 146 ^{262f.} , 147 ^{265f.}
Inst. 3,14,2	149 ²⁸⁴
Inst. 3,15 ff.	121
Inst. 3,15–20	107
Inst. 3,15	126 ¹⁴⁵
Inst. 3,21	107
Inst. 3,22 ff.	107
Inst. 3,22	111 ⁷⁴

Digesta

D. 1,1,1	68
D. 1,1,4	143
D. 1,2,2,1	80
D. 1,8,6,5	73 ²⁰
D. 2,1,15	140
D. 2,14	110 f.
D. 2,14,1 pr.	538
D. 2,14,1,2	106 ⁴⁴ , 111
D. 2,14,1,3	160 ³⁶
D. 2,14,5	112 ⁷⁶
D. 2,14,6	108 ⁵³ , 111 ⁷³ , 136 ²⁰²
D. 2,14,7 pr.	131 ¹⁷⁴ , 133 ¹⁸³ , 165
D. 2,14,7,1	108 ⁵⁵
D. 2,14,7,2–4	100
D. 2,14,7,2	19 f., 37–66, 71–75, 85, 99 f., 105 f., 107, 108, 112 ⁷⁸ , 123, 153, 166, 167, 170, 184 ¹⁴² , 187 ¹⁶⁷ , 198, 266 ¹⁷ , 292 ¹⁵³ , 399–401, 765 ¹³
D. 2,14,7,3	106, 127, 133 ¹⁸⁴
D. 2,14,7,4	111 ^{71f.} , 113, 115 ⁹¹ , 117, 127, 133 ¹⁸⁵ , 142 ²³⁹ , 142 ²⁴³ , 143 ^{244f.} , 165, 166 ⁵⁶ , 167 ⁶⁵
D. 2,14,7,5	105 ⁴³ , 111 ^{70f.} , 111 ⁷⁴ , 112 ⁷⁷ , 114, 115 ^{92f.} , 126 ¹⁴⁵ , 142 ²⁴¹ , 165
D. 2,14,7,7	537
D. 3,3,42,2	143
D. 11,7,2,5	93 f.
D. 11,7,42	73 ¹⁹

D. 11,7,43	94
D. 12,1,2,5	286 ¹²⁰
D. 12,1,18	794 ⁸³
D. 12,4,1	132 ¹⁸¹
D. 12,4,5 pr.	171
D. 12,4,7,2	115 ⁹¹
D. 12,4,16	117 ¹⁰⁴ , 117 ¹⁰⁵ , 118 ¹⁰⁷
D. 12,5	190
D. 12,5,8	398
D. 12,6,52	116, 118, 166
D. 12,7,3	122 f.
D. 12,7,4	15 ⁶¹
D. 12,47,2	115 ⁹¹
D. 13,1,12,2	44 f.
D. 13,2,1	136 ²⁰⁴
D. 15,1,49,1	130 ¹⁷⁸
D. 16,1,3	127
D. 17,1,1,4	778 ⁴⁶
D. 17,1,6 pr.	778 ⁴⁶
D. 17,1,8 pr.	404
D. 17,1,14	544
D. 17,1,22,11	543 f.
D. 17,1,23–25	543 f.
D. 17,1,26 pr.	544
D. 17,1,27,2	545
D. 17,1,60,1	132, 141
D. 18,1,2,1	392
D. 18,1,15 pr.	869
D. 18,1,15,2	391
D. 18,1,16 pr.	390
D. 18,1,34,4	391
D. 18,1,36	392 f.
D. 18,1,72	536 ²¹
D. 18,5,2	536 ²¹
D. 18,5,3	536 ²²
D. 18,5,10,1	138 ²¹¹
D. 19,2,15,2	546
D. 19,2,15,4	547
D. 19,2,15,7	547 ⁵⁶
D. 19,2,25,6	548 ⁵⁸
D. 19,2,27 pr.–1	549 ⁶⁴
D. 19,2,30,1	549 ⁶⁴
D. 19,4,1	171
D. 19,4,2	403 f.
D. 19,5,5	108
D. 19,5,15	403
D. 19,5,16,1	401 f.
D. 22,3,25	127
D. 22,3,25,4	22 f. ¹⁴ , 122, 124, 126 ¹⁴¹ , 136 ¹⁹⁹ , 270 ³⁰ , 287, 292 ¹⁵³ , 294 ¹⁵⁷ , 297 ¹⁷⁵

D. 25,2,6,5	65 ⁶⁸
D. 30,71,3	541
D. 30,108,12.....	550 ⁶⁸
D. 33,10,9,1	73 ²⁰
D. 35,1,17,2.....	115
D. 35,2,61	541
D. 36,3,13	65 ⁶⁸
D. 39,2,13	122
D. 39,2,28	65 ⁶⁸
D. 39,5,2,7	101 ¹³ , 116 ¹⁰⁰ , 133 ¹⁸⁴
D. 39,5,3	27 ³⁵
D. 39,5,18,2.....	65 ⁶⁸
D. 39,5,19	130
D. 39,5,19 pr.....	131
D. 39,5,20	130 ¹⁶⁷ , 138 ²¹¹
D. 39,5,26	123
D. 39,6,1	73 ²⁰
D. 40,7,5 pr.....	65 ⁶⁸
D. 41,1,31	113
D. 41,1,31 pr.....	284 ¹⁰⁴ , 293 ¹⁵⁴
D. 41,1,36	794 ⁸³
D. 42,1,4	122
D. 43,21,3,6.....	65 ⁶⁸
D. 44,2,14,1	116 ⁹⁶ , 119 ¹¹⁴
D. 44,2,14,2.....	270 ³¹
D. 44,4,2,3	21 ¹¹ , 107, 113 ⁸⁷ , 121–127, 130 ¹⁶⁵ , 130 ¹⁶⁸ , 138, 153, 175 f., 178, 187 ¹⁶⁷ , 269 ²⁹ , 395
D. 44,4,4,16.....	22 ¹³ , 269 ²⁹
D. 44,7,1,1	107 ⁵⁰
D. 44,7,52 pr.–4; 9	107 ⁵⁰
D. 45,1,21	130, 176
D. 45,1,23	362, 873 ¹⁰
D. 45,1,33	362, 873 ¹⁰
D. 45,1,82 pr.....	389
D. 45,1,91,3.....	590 ⁷⁸
D. 45,1,91,6.....	590 ⁷⁸
D. 45,1,107.....	397 f.
D. 45,1,108.....	129 ¹⁵⁸ , 132, 141
D. 45,1,126,2.....	160 ³⁴
D. 45,1,137,4.....	538 f.
D. 46,1,48	150 ²⁹⁴
D. 46,3,38 pr.....	574 ⁴
D. 46,3,98,8.....	519, 540–542
D. 48,5,14,1	73 ²⁰
D. 48,19,16,8.....	73 ²⁰
D. 50,8,3,2	549
D. 50,12,1	23
D. 50,12,1,1.....	130, 131
D. 50,12,7	23 ¹⁷

D. 50,12,11.....	23 ¹⁶
D. 50,16,19.....	20 ⁵ , 42, 51 ²⁷ , 54, 765 ¹³
D. 50,17,185.....	437, 591, 678 ¹⁹

Codex

C. 1,18,10.....	137 ²⁰⁶ , 138 ²¹² , 138 ²¹⁶
C. 2,3.....	110 f.
C. 2,3,1.....	119, 144 ²⁴⁸
C. 2,3,10.....	111 ⁶⁹ , 113 ^{84f.} , 142 ²⁴⁰
C. 2,4,28.....	137 ²⁰⁵
C. 3,36,15.....	156 ¹¹
C. 4,6,8.....	104 ³⁹
C. 4,10,5.....	537, 542
C. 4,30,3.....	126 ¹⁴¹
C. 4,30,13.....	120 ¹¹⁹ , 124, 125 ¹³⁷ , 129, 130 ¹⁶² , 130 ¹⁶⁴ , 130 ¹⁶⁷ , 131 ^{177f.} , 132 ¹⁷⁹ , 133 ¹⁸² , 136 ¹⁹⁹ , 141, 144 ²⁴⁷ , 166
C. 4,30,14 pr.....	124 f.
C. 4,30,16.....	127 ¹⁵²
C. 4,64,3.....	121, 123 f., 126 ¹⁴⁶ , 127 f., 129 ¹⁵⁵⁻¹⁵⁷ , 138 ²¹²
C. 4,65,8.....	536, 548
C. 6,20,3.....	141
C. 6,43,2.....	141
C. 6,44,1.....	116 ¹⁰¹ , 118 ¹¹⁰ , 118 ¹¹¹
C. 7,51,3.....	122
C. 8,40,7.....	118 ¹⁰⁸

*b) Non-Justinianic**Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum (C.I.L.)*

I,198,42.....	39 ⁷
---------------	-----------------

Gaius, Institutiones

2,1-9.....	76
3,89.....	107 ⁴⁹
4,16.....	38
4,48.....	590 ⁷⁷
4,116.....	269 ²⁹ , 396 ⁶⁷ , 536 ²³

Gaius, Epitome (Liber Gai)

2,9 pr.....	107 ⁵¹
-------------	-------------------

Lex Duodecim Tabularum

1,7.....	39 ⁷
----------	-----------------

2. Ancient Non-Legal Sources

Aristides

Orationes 9–16	77 ³⁰
Orationes 29–36	77 ³⁰
Orationes 103–105	77 ³⁰

Aristotle

Analytica Posteriora, I 2,71 b,9–12	60 ⁴⁸
De Generatione Animalium, I 1,715a	102 ²⁰
Ethica Nichomachea, 2,7	162
Ethica Nichomachea, 1130 b,30–34	52
Ethica Nichomachea, 1131a,1–9	52
Ethica Nichomachea, 1132 b,31–32	53 ³³
Metaphysica, I 3,983a	60, 102 ¹⁹
Metaphysica, II 1	60 ⁴⁸
Metaphysica, V 2,1013a–b	102 ¹⁹
Physica, II 3,194b	102 ²⁰
Physica, II 7,198a	102 ²⁰

Cato

De Agricultura, 83	81 ⁴⁵
De Agricultura, 139	82 ⁴⁹
De Agricultura, 140	83 ⁵¹ , 83 ⁵³

Cicero

De Domo Sua, 134	90 ⁷³
De Haruspicum Responsis, 19	77 ²⁹
De Legibus, 2,19	90 ⁷³
De Natura Deorum, 1,117	69 ⁶
De Natura Deorum, 2,8	69 ⁶ , 77 ²⁹
De Natura Deorum, 2,72	69 ⁷
De Officiis, 1,32	196 ²⁰⁷ , 196 ²¹³
De Officiis, 1,153	74 ²²
De Oratore, 2,341	70 ¹³
De Re Publica, 6,1	92 ⁸¹

Festus

34	70 ¹³
147	91 ⁷⁷
346	91 ⁷⁸

Gellius

Noctes Atticae, 2,28,2	82 ⁴⁹
Noctes Atticae, 4,9,11	69 ⁸

Homer

Odýsseia, 17,78–83..... 73²⁰

Lactantius

Institutiones Divinae, 4,28,2..... 69⁹

Ovid

Fasti, 1,674..... 95⁸⁸

Plautus

Mercator, 821 f. 39⁷

Plinius

Epistulae, 1,22,1–3..... 64 f.⁶⁷

Historia Naturalis, 7,45..... 70¹³

Polybius

Historiái, 6,53,1–2..... 70¹³

Historiái, 6,53,3..... 71¹⁴

Quintilian

Institutio Oratoria, cap. 6 in fine..... 92⁸⁰

Scholia Veronensia

Ad Aeneidem, 10,241..... 82⁴⁷

Seneca

De Beneficiis, 4,35..... 196²¹⁴

Servius

Ad Aeneidem, 1,310..... 83⁵¹

Ad Aeneidem, 7,601..... 92⁷⁹

Ad Aeneidem, 8,349..... 69¹⁰

Tacitus

Annales, 13,54..... 266¹⁵

Germania, 24..... 266¹⁵

Titus Livius

Ab Urbe Condita, 8,9.....	86 f.
Ab Urbe Condita, 8,9,4–13.....	89 ⁷¹
Ab Urbe Condita, 8,10,4.....	88 ⁶⁷
Ab Urbe Condita, 8,10,13.....	89 ⁷¹
Ab Urbe Condita, 8,11.....	88 ⁶⁴
Ab Urbe Condita, 10,19,5–18.....	81 ⁴⁶
Ab Urbe Condita, 10,30–40.....	82 ⁴⁷
Ab Urbe Condita, 27,25,14.....	85

Varro

De Lingua Latina, 6,29–30.....	81 ⁴⁴
--------------------------------	------------------

Virgil

Ad Aeneidem, 3,409.....	90 ⁷³
Ad Aeneidem, 6,61.....	90 ⁷³
Ad Aeneidem, 7,71.....	90 ⁷³

3. *Corpus Juris Canonici**Decretum Gratiani*

C. 12, qu. 2, c. 66.....	25, 135
C. 22, qu. 2, c. 14.....	574 ³
C. 22, qu. 5, c. 12.....	135
C. 23, qu. 8, c. 14.....	103 ³¹
C. 29, qu. 1, c. 1.....	140

Decretales Gregorii IX (Liber Extra)

X. 1,35,1.....	134 ¹⁹¹ , 135 ¹⁹⁶ , 136, 137 ²⁰⁵ , 137 ²⁰⁷ , 137 ^{209f} , 138, 140, 156 ¹¹
X. 2,1,13.....	135
X. 2,22,14.....	25, 135 f., 138 ²¹⁴ , 139, 140, 141 ^{231–233}

4. *Codifications, Statutes, Restatements and Drafts**Allgemeines Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch (ABGB)*

ABGB 1811.....	268
§ 861.....	268
§ 864.....	268 ²⁵

Allgemeines Landrecht für die Preußischen Staaten (ALR)

ALR.....	267 f.
Teil I, Titel 4, § 4.....	267 ²²
Teil I, Titel 4, §§ 145–150.....	268 ²³
Teil I, Titel 4, §§ 152–162.....	268 ²⁴

Teil I, Titel 5	267 ²²
Teil I, Titel 5, §§ 1–453.....	869 ²⁴⁴
Teil I, Titel 5, §§ 2–4	794 ⁸⁶
Teil I, Titel 5, §§ 7–8	268 ²²
Teil I, Titel 11, § 1.....	794 ⁸⁶ , 797 ⁹⁵

Badisches Landrecht

Anhang Satz 198	277 f. ⁷¹
-----------------------	----------------------

Bayerischer Entwurf von 1861

Von den Rechtsgeschäften II Art. 6, Art. 21, Art. 907, Art. 908.....	302
--	-----

Betting and Gaming Act (1960)

Betting and Gaming Act (1960).....	509
------------------------------------	-----

Bundesratsdrucksachen

BR-Drs. 338/01, § 275	600 ¹³²
-----------------------------	--------------------

Bundestagsdrucksachen

BT-Drs. 6/1173, 66	622 ²³⁴
BT-Drs. 7/910, 82	622 ²³⁴
BT-Drs. 14/6040, § 275.....	600 ¹³²
BT-Drs. 14/6040, 128	600 ¹²⁹ , 601 ¹³⁴
BT-Drs. 14/6040, 129 ff.....	604 ¹⁴⁴
BT-Drs. 14/6040, 129	601 ¹³⁵ , 608 ¹⁶³
BT-Drs. 14/6040, 130	606 ¹⁵³ , 608 ¹⁶² , 610 ¹⁷⁰
BT-Drs. 14/6040, 131	604 ¹⁴³ , 606 ¹⁵³
BT-Drs. 14/6040, 132	601 ¹³⁶
BT-Drs. 14/6040, 175	623 ²³⁹ , 623 ²⁴¹ , 626 ²⁵³
BT-Drs. 14/6040, 176	621 ²³⁰ , 623 ²³⁷ , 624 ²⁴³ , 626 ²⁵² , 626 ²⁶⁰ , 631 ²⁸⁶
BT-Drs. 14/6040, 177	630 ²⁸³
BT-Drs. 14/6857, § 275.....	600 ¹³²
BT-Drs. 14/6857, Anlage 2, 12	601 ¹³⁶
BT-Drs. 14/6857, Anlage 3, 47	602 ¹³⁹
BT-Drs. 14/6857, Anlage 3, 49	601 ¹³⁶
BT-Drs. 14/7052, 183	601 ¹³⁶ , 602 ¹³⁹

Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch (BGB)

BGB 1900.....	13
§ 104.....	825
§ 119.....	379, 440 f.
§ 122.....	440
§ 125.....	311
§ 133.....	768

§ 134.....	311, 319, 332, 434 f., 780, 813
§ 138.....	311, 319, 332, 377 ²³ , 435 f., 445–448, 450 f., 780, 802, 813
§ 139.....	761, 800, 806
§ 142.....	440
§§ 145 ff.....	311, 767, 823
§ 157.....	768
§ 158.....	771, 783, 786, 790, 793, 808
§ 185.....	821, 823, 834, 836, 837–843
§ 214 BGB 2002.....	318 ²⁸⁹
§ 222 BGB 1900.....	318 ²⁸⁹
§ 242.....	444, 448 f., 450 f., 524, 603, 633, 768, 789
§§ 244–248 BGB 1900.....	311 ²⁵⁹
§§ 249–255.....	311 ²⁵⁹
§ 251.....	608
§§ 262–265.....	311 ²⁵⁹
§ 267.....	769, 799, 822–825, 834, 836, 837–843, 856–864
§ 270 BGB 1900.....	311 ²⁵⁹
§§ 275 ff.....	832
§ 275 BGB 1900.....	589 ⁷⁵ , 590 ⁸² , 591–598, 599 ¹²⁷ , 603
§ 275 BGB 2002 ..	381, 383 ⁴⁷ , 437–440, 523, 528, 600–609, 631, 759, 765, 783, 868 ²⁴² , 869
§ 276.....	589, 604
§ 279 BGB 1900.....	595, 598, 604 ¹⁴⁵
§§ 280 ff. BGB 2002.....	868 ²⁴²
§§ 280, 281 BGB 2002.....	603
§ 280 BGB 1900.....	592 ⁹² , 593 ⁹⁴
§ 280 BGB 2002.....	759, 765
§ 281 BGB 2002.....	592 ⁹¹
§ 283 BGB 1900.....	592 ⁹¹
§§ 305 ff. BGB 1900.....	782
§ 305 BGB 1900.....	311
§§ 306–309 BGB 1900.....	311
§ 306 BGB 1900.....	437 ⁴⁰ , 591 f., 869
§ 307 BGB 1900.....	592 ⁸⁹
§ 307 BGB 2002.....	383 ⁵¹ , 444 f.
§§ 310–313 BGB 1900.....	311
§ 310 BGB 2002.....	445
§ 311 BGB 2002.....	311
§ 311a BGB 2002.....	311, 437, 759, 765, 869
§ 311b BGB 2002.....	311
§ 312k.....	782
§§ 313 f. BGB 2002.....	619–632
§ 313 BGB 2002.....	105, 240 ¹²⁰ , 379, 382, 441 f., 443, 523 f., 528, 633 ²⁹⁹ , 775 ⁴⁰ , 776, 787
§§ 315–319.....	311 ²⁵⁹
§ 315.....	627 ²⁶⁵
§ 319.....	627 ²⁶⁵
§§ 320–326 BGB 2002.....	588, 759, 765, 784 f., 801, 803, 815, 832, 868 f.
§ 320.....	779
§§ 323 ff. BGB 2002.....	868 ²⁴²
§§ 323 f. BGB 2002.....	625

§ 326 BGB 1900	592 ⁹¹
§ 326 BGB 2002	381, 383 ⁴⁸ , 437 f., 783
§ 328	844 f.
§§ 346 ff.	356
§§ 362 ff.	799
§ 362	790, 820–827, 834, 836, 837–839, 841–843
§ 364	761, 799, 811, 824, 826, 836, 839, 842, 847, 856, 859, 862 f.
§ 366	823 f., 826 f., 837–839
§ 367	827
§ 389	810
§ 397	447, 761, 762, 779, 782, 784, 799, 802, 805, 806
§ 398	805
§ 407	835 f., 856, 859, 861, 863
§ 408	856, 859, 861, 863
§ 415	840
§§ 433 ff.	797
§ 433	790, 792 ⁷⁶
§§ 437 ff.	798
§ 441	789
§ 449	791, 808
§ 462 BGB 1900	626 ²⁶¹
§ 465 BGB 1900	627 ²⁶²
§ 488	760, 840
§§ 516–534.	760, 778
§ 516	431, 767, 778, 806
§ 518	316, 376 ¹⁴ , 431, 760–762, 767, 778, 784 f., 799 f., 804–806, 811, 815 f., 818 f.
§§ 525–527.	781
§ 525	787
§ 526	781, 787
§ 530	832
§ 544	625 ²⁴⁸
§ 589 BGB 1900	597 ¹²⁰
§ 598	759
§ 607 BGB 1900	314 ²⁶⁹
§ 610 BGB 1900	314 ²⁶⁹
§§ 611 ff.	760
§ 624	625 ²⁴⁸
§ 626	624
§§ 631 ff.	760
§ 633 BGB 1900	607 ¹⁵⁹
§ 635 BGB 2002	607 ¹⁵⁹
§ 640	821 ¹⁵⁵
§ 656	316
§ 657	327 ¹⁹
§ 662	760, 840
§ 670	808, 840 f.
§ 675	778 ⁴⁶ , 852
§§ 675 c ff.	852
§ 683	808, 840 f.

§ 684.....	840
§ 690.....	760
§ 705.....	784
§ 726.....	783, 784
§ 762.....	316, 378 ³⁰ , 433 f.
§ 767.....	807
§ 774.....	761, 807
§ 779.....	761 f., 779, 782–784, 799 f., 801, 803, 812, 817, 818
§§ 780–782.....	315 f., 376 ¹³
§§ 780, 781.....	429, 430, 58 ⁷ , 759 ⁴ , 761, 810–812, 817
§ 780.....	321, 757
§ 781.....	819
§§ 783 ff.....	843
§ 787.....	846 f.
§§ 812–822.....	730, 827–868
§ 812.....	292 ¹⁵² , 380, 429, 433, 435, 436, 442 f., 522 f., 575, 582, 583–588, 785, 790, 792 ⁷⁶ , 793 f., 803, 808, 811
§ 814.....	223 ⁷¹ , 318, 430 ¹⁵ , 786
§ 817.....	318, 319, 434, 435
§ 821.....	318, 429, 435 f., 443, 587 ⁶⁷
§ 851.....	836, 842 ²⁰⁷
§ 873.....	790, 791, 792 ⁷⁶
§ 892.....	835 f.
§ 925.....	783, 787, 790 f., 794, 790, 792 ⁷⁶ , 810
§ 925a.....	794 ⁸³
§§ 929–931.....	790 f.
§ 929.....	790, 792 ⁷⁶ , 810
§ 932.....	835 f., 842 ²⁰⁷ , 845
§ 935.....	845
§ 950.....	845 f.
§ 951.....	835 f., 845 f.
§ 1004.....	609
§ 1143.....	761, 807
§ 1163.....	807
§ 1167.....	807
§ 1192.....	807 ¹²⁸
§ 1225.....	761, 807
§ 1247.....	761
§ 1252.....	807
§ 1591 BGB 1900.....	799
§ 1624.....	783–786, 814, 833
§§ 2169 f.....	589 ⁷⁵
§ 2170.....	608 ¹⁶⁰
§ 2301.....	316
§ 2316.....	789
§ 2325.....	789

Burgerlijk Wetboek (1838)

art. 1356..... 2⁵

California Civil Code

sec. 1550..... 348

sec. 1605 ff. 348

Civil Code of Lower Canada

art. 984..... 348

Civil Code of Québec

art. 1385, 1410 f. 348

Civil Code of the State of Louisiana

Civil Code (1825), art. 1890..... 348 f.

Revised Civil Code (1870), art. 1896..... 348 f.

art. 1967..... 348 f.

Code civil

Code civil 1804..... 13

Code civil 2016..... 13

art. 711..... 791

art. 894..... 377¹⁹

art. 931..... 328²⁴, 414⁴³

art. 1100–1 Code civil 2016..... 412²⁷

art. 1101..... 554⁴, 670¹⁵⁵

art. 1102 Code civil 1804..... 409¹⁷

art. 1103 Code civil 2016..... 85, 518, 520, 554, 567

art. 1104 Code civil 1804..... 410¹⁸

art. 1106 Code civil 2016..... 409¹⁷

art. 1107 Code civil 2016..... 413³⁷

art. 1108 Code civil 1804..... 1, 28³⁸, 34, 161⁴³, 205, 210, 265, 281, 288, 301, 332,
348¹²⁷, 408⁵, 410¹⁸, 417⁶¹

art. 1113 Code civil 2016..... 376

art. 1123 Code civil 2016..... 377²⁰

art. 1124 Code civil 2016..... 377²⁰

art. 1128 Code civil 2016..... 1, 5, 261⁷¹, 332⁴³, 332⁴⁶, 385, 415, 718, 721, 733, 734, 735

art. 1131 Code civil 1804..... 28³⁹, 205, 209, 210, 212, 223, 288, 332, 376¹⁶, 409,
417, 419, 423, 522, 562, 733, 770 f., 791, 792

art. 1132 Code civil 1804..... 28⁴⁰, 205, 210, 212, 215³⁵, 222, 223, 273–279, 281,
287¹²⁵, 288, 319 f., 413, 416

art. 1132 Code civil 2016..... 380³⁷

art. 1133 Code civil 1804..... 205, 273, 332, 422, 423, 509³⁷

art. 1134 Code civil 1804..... 520, 554, 558, 567

art. 1135 Code civil 1804.....	558
art. 1135 Code civil 2016.....	718, 725, 726 f., 728
art. 1137 Code civil 1804.....	223
art. 1137 Code civil 2016.....	380 ³⁸
art. 1147 Code civil 2016.....	521
art. 1148 Code civil 1804.....	559
artt. 1162 ff. Code civil 2016.....	721
art. 1162 Code civil 2016.....	6, 35 ⁶⁹ , 332 ⁴³ , 332 ⁴⁶ , 385, 424, 718, 734, 872, 887 ⁸⁴
art. 1163 Code civil 2016.....	381, 416, 887 ⁸⁴
art. 1164 Code civil 2016.....	382 ⁴⁴
art. 1165 Code civil 2016.....	382 ⁴⁴
art. 1168 Code civil 2016.....	722 f., 734, 382 ⁴⁴
art. 1169 Code Civil 2016.....	332 ⁴³ , 381 f., 385, 418 ⁶² , 707, 719, 721–723, 726, 727–730, 734, 735, 744
art. 1170 Code Civil 2016.....	332 ⁴³ , 383, 420 ⁷² , 479, 719, 725 f., 734
art. 1171 Code civil 2016.....	383, 726
art. 1184 Code civil 1804.....	274, 293 ¹⁵⁷ , 719
art. 1186 Code civil 2016.....	522, 569, 719, 721, 724
art. 1195 Code civil 2016.....	521, 566 f., 669 ¹⁵³
art. 1218 Code civil 2016.....	521 ¹² , 569
artt. 1302 ff. Code civil 2016.....	735
art. 1303–1 Code civil 2016.....	729 f.
art. 1343 Code civil 2016.....	509 ³⁷
art. 1582.....	791, 792 ⁷⁶
art. 1583.....	792
art. 1589.....	792
art. 1591.....	418
art. 1601.....	869
art. 1965.....	378 ³⁰
art. 1967.....	378 ³⁰
art. 2052 Code civil 1804.....	812, 813

Code Européen des Contrats (Gandolfi)

art. 5 n. 3.....	2 ⁹
------------------	----------------

Code monétaire et financier

art. L 211–40–1.....	567 f.
----------------------	--------

Codex Juris Bavarici Judiciarii

11. Cap. § 9.....	267 ²¹
-------------------	-------------------

Codex Maximilianus Bavaricus Civilis

Teil IV, 1. Cap., § 3.....	267 ²¹
Teil IV, 1. Cap., § 5.....	267 ²¹

Codice civile (1865)

Codice civile 1865	13, 224 ⁷³ , 226
art. 1104.....	224, 252
art. 1119–1122	224

Codice civile (1942)

Codice civile 1942	13
art. 458.....	492
art. 624.....	496 ¹³⁸
artt. 768-bis ff.....	459 ¹¹
art. 769.....	470
art. 787.....	496 ¹³⁸
art. 809.....	484
art. 1174.....	646
art. 1175.....	644, 667
art. 1176.....	642, 644
art. 1218.....	642
art. 1234.....	455, 488, 489
art. 1256.....	642, 643, 646
art. 1258.....	643
art. 1321.....	742
art. 1322.....	235, 241, 252, 260 ⁶⁸ , 374 f., 387, 388, 389, 402, 455, 477 f., 709, 737, 741 f., 745, 747
art. 1325.....	3 ¹² , 234 f., 239, 252, 374, 386, 455, 480, 486, 487, 663, 671, 735
art. 1333.....	468 ⁴¹
artt. 1343–1345.....	235, 252
art. 1343.....	3 ¹² , 386, 486, 491 f., 742
art. 1344.....	257 ⁵⁴ , 386, 455, 484, 494, 495 ¹³¹
art. 1345.....	235, 240, 455, 484, 490, 496, 497
art. 1353.....	496
artt. 1362 ff.....	654
art. 1362.....	471 ⁵¹ , 471
art. 1363.....	472
art. 1366.....	471 ⁵¹ , 667
art. 1369.....	404 f.
art. 1369.....	471 ⁵¹ , 472
art. 1372.....	518, 640
art. 1373.....	643
art. 1375.....	476, 644, 667
art. 1418.....	235, 239, 257 ⁵⁴ , 386, 480, 486 f., 491, 663
art. 1419.....	477
art. 1424.....	477
art. 1450.....	655 ⁸⁶
artt. 1453 ff.....	642
artt. 1463–1466.....	638, 641–649, 754
art. 1463.....	258 ⁶⁰ , 525, 529, 671
art. 1464.....	258 ⁶⁰ , 671
artt. 1467–1469.....	638, 649–656, 669

art. 1467.....	525, 658, 659, 666 f., 670, 672
art. 1488.....	459 ¹³
art. 1876.....	455, 488
art. 1895.....	455, 488
art. 1933.....	378 ³⁰ , 465
art. 1972.....	491
art. 1988.....	239, 480
art. 2034.....	469 ⁴⁴
art. 2035.....	493
art. 2744.....	492, 494
art. 2932.....	670

Codice penale

art. 318.....	492
art. 644.....	492

Código civil

Código civil (1889).....	349 ¹³⁴
Código civil art. 1275	509 ³⁷

Código Civil de Puerto Rico

art. 1241.....	349
----------------	-----

Código Civil y Comercial argentino (2014)

Código Civil y Comercial	639 f. ⁸
art. 1011.....	670
art. 1013.....	15

Common European Sales Law (CESL)

CESL	588 f. ⁷⁴
Art. 110 Nr. 3 (a)	607 ¹⁵⁶

Consumer Rights Act (2015)

Consumer Rights Act (2015)	886 f.
----------------------------------	--------

Convention on Contracts for the International Sale of Goods (CISG)

CISG.....	708
art. 29	737

Convention relating to a Uniform Law on the Formation of Contracts for the International Sale of Goods

art. 16	607 ¹⁵⁶
art. 74	599 ¹²⁶

Costituzione della Repubblica Italiana

art. 41	260 ⁶⁸
art. 117	492

Directives

Directive 93/13/EEC [1993] O.J. L95/29	887 f.
--	--------

Draft Common Frame of Reference (DCFR)

DCRF	588 f. ⁷⁴ , 708
art. II-1:101	738
art. II-4:101	2 ⁸
art. II-7:207	753
art. III-1:110	666
art. III-3:302 (3) (a)	607 ¹⁵⁶

Dresdner Entwurf eines allgemeinen deutschen Gesetzes über Schuldverhältnisse von 1866

Art. 922–926	303
Art. 976 Satz 1	303

Entwurf eines Bürgerlichen Gesetzbuches für das Deutsche Reich von 1888

E I § 77	311 ²⁵⁶
E I § 237	594
E I § 290	579 ²⁸
E I § 360	578 ²¹
E I § 368	578 ²²
E I § 369	592 ⁹¹
E I § 667	579 ²⁸
E I § 683	315
E I § 684	317 ²⁸⁶ , 318 ²⁸⁸ , 579 ²⁸
E I § 737	830
E I § 742	578 f., 580, 582, 830
E I § 748	827, 833 f.

Entwurf eines einheitlichen Kaufgesetzes von 1935

Art. 23 Abs. 1	607 ¹⁵⁶
----------------------	--------------------

Freiburger Stadtrecht von 1520

2. Tractat, 6. Titel, § 3	145 ²⁵⁰
2. Tractat, 6. Titel, § 8	144 f. ²⁴⁹

Gesetz zur Regelung des Rechts der Allgemeinen Geschäftsbedingungen

AGB-Gesetz	449
------------------	-----

Gesetz zur Dämpfung des Mietanstiegs ...

Gesetz zur Dämpfung des Mietanstiegs auf angespannten Wohnungsmärkten und zur Stärkung des Bestellerprinzips bei der Wohnungsvermittlung vom 21.4.2015, BGBl. I 610..... 73³

Gesetz zur Modernisierung des Schuldrechts

Gesetz zur Modernisierung des Schuldrechts vom 26.11.2001 (BGBl. I, S. 3138)..... 602¹³⁸

Gesetz zur Regelung eines allgemeinen Mindestlohns

Gesetz zur Regelung eines allgemeinen Mindestlohns vom 11.8.2014 (BGBl. I, S. 1348) . 73²

Gesetz zur Umsetzung der Verbraucherrechterichtlinie

Gesetz zur Umsetzung der Verbraucherrechterichtlinie und zur Änderung des Gesetzes zur Regelung der Wohnungsvermittlung vom 20.9.2013 (BGBl. I, S. 3642) 621²³¹

Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland

Art. 2 Abs. 1..... 450 f., 778, 780, 782, 797, 812, 867
Art. 14 797

Hessischer Entwurf von 1853

4. Abt., Art. 46–84, Art. 148 300 f.

Handelsgesetzbuch (HGB)

§ 350..... 315²⁷⁸

Insurance Companies Act

Insurance Companies Act..... 510

Law of Property Act

Law of Property (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (1989) 326¹²

Law Reform (Frustrated Contracts) Act

Law Reform (Frustrated Contracts) Act (1943) 357

Legge n. 1/1991

art. 23, comma 4 465³¹

Legge n. 108/1996

L. n. 108/1996..... 492

*Loi de 1901*Loi fondamentale sur les associations, art. 3 716f.⁵*Loi n° 2018–287*Loi n° 2018–287 du 20 avril 2018 376¹⁵, 383⁵⁰, 407, 567⁵⁴*Motive zum Entwurf eines Bürgerlichen Gesetzbuches für das Deutsche Reich*Motive I 161 = Mugdan I 441 311²⁵⁶Motive I 210 434²⁵Motive I 249 = Mugdan I 490 579²⁸Motive II 2 = Mugdan II 1 311 f.²⁶⁰Motive II 45 f. = Mugdan II 25 594¹⁰²Motive II 115 = Mugdan II, 63 802¹¹²Motive II 209 f. = Mugdan II 115 f. 592⁹¹Motive II 688–690 = Mugdan II 384 f. 314²⁷³Motive II 842 = Mugdan 470 f. 578²³Motive II 843 = Mugdan II 471 578²⁵, 579²⁷Motive III 3 = Mugdan III 2 312²⁶⁰*Nieuw Burgerlijk Wetboek*art. 3:40 2⁵*Ordonnance n° 2016–131 du 10 février 2016*Ordonnance n° 2016–131 du 10 février 2016 1, 2¹⁰, 4, 6²⁷, 376¹⁵, 383⁵⁰, 385, 407, 418,
419 f., 424, 554², 561²⁷, 564, 717, 721, 729*Preußischer Entwurf von 1842*

Preußischer Entwurf 300

*Principles of European Contract Law (PECL)*PECL 588 f.⁷⁴, 708, 738art. 2:101 2⁷

art. 2:103 713

art. 4:109 751⁸⁷, 753art. 6:111 530⁵³, 568⁵⁷, 666art. 9:102 (2) (a) 607¹⁵⁶*Principles of International Commercial Contracts*

PICC 708

PICC art. 3.1.2	737
PICC 1994 art. 3.2	2 ⁶
PICC art. 3.2.7	753
PICC art. 3.3.1	739
PICC 1994 art. 3.10	751 ⁸⁷
PICC artt. 6.2.1–6.2.3	666
PICC art. 6.2.3	530 ⁵³

Principles of Latin American Contract Law

art. 9	3
--------------	---

Progetto italo-francese delle obbligazioni

artt. 10, 27–29	225, 227, 252
-----------------------	---------------

Proposition de loi portant insertion du livre 5 dans le nouveau Code civil, n°55–1806/1

art. 5.27	3 ¹²
-----------------	-----------------

Protokolle der Kommission für die zweite Lesung des Entwurfs des Bürgerlichen Gesetzbuchs

Protokolle I 74 = Mugdan I 688	311 ²⁵⁶
Protokolle I 94 = Mugdan I 710	313 ²⁶⁷
Protokolle I 121 f., 237 f. = Mugdan I 724	318 ²⁸⁹
Protokolle I 314–316 = Mugdan II 528 f.	594 ¹⁰³
Protokolle I 314 f. = Mugdan II 528 f.	599 ¹²⁷
Protokolle I 321 = Mugdan II 529	593 ⁹⁴
Protokolle I 325 f. = Mugdan II 537	595 ¹⁰⁷
Protokolle II 18 f. = Mugdan II 745	316 ²⁸⁰
Protokolle II 42 = Mugdan II 759	314 ²⁶⁹
Protokolle II 54 = Mugdan II 767	797 ⁹⁶
Protokolle II 502–504 = Mugdan II 1041 f.	315 ²⁷⁷
Protokolle II 502 = Mugdan II 1041	317 ²⁸³
Protokolle II 509 f. = Mugdan II 1045	315 ²⁷⁸
Protokolle II 682 = Mugdan II 1169 f.	580 ³⁵
Protokolle II 684 f. = Mugdan II 1170 f.	581 ³⁹
Protokolle II 689 = Mugdan II 1173	294 ¹⁵⁸ , 581 ³⁸
Protokolle II 690 f. = Mugdan II 1174	581 ^{37 f.}
Protokolle II 692 f. = Mugdan II 1175	582 ⁴¹
Protokolle II 692 = Mugdan II 1174 f.	294 ¹⁵⁸ , 582 ⁴⁰
Protokolle II 713–717 = Mugdan II 1099–1103	318 ²⁸⁹

Rapport au Président de la République relatif à l'ordonnance n° 2016–131

Rapport au Président de la République relatif à l'ordonnance n° 2016–131, texte n° 25	2 ¹⁰ , 4, 6 ²⁷ , 717, 721, 729
---	--

Relazione al Re del Ministro Guardasigilli del 1942

n. 603	243 ¹²⁵
n. 613	8, 250, 253, 387
nn. 614 f.	243 ¹²⁵
n. 614	255 ³⁸

Restatement (2nd) of Contract

Ch. 11, § 237	686
---------------------	-----

Road Traffic Act (1988)

Road Traffic Act (1988)	509
-------------------------------	-----

Sale of Goods Act (1979)

sec. 6	511
--------------	-----

Schweizerisches Obligationenrecht

Art. 24 I Ziff. 4	357 ¹⁷⁰
-------------------------	--------------------

Sächsisches BGB

§ 96, § 782, § 1398, § 1399, § 1523	302 f.
---	--------

Seeds, Oils and Fats Order (1919)

Seeds, Oils and Fats Order (1919)	510
---	-----

Statute of Frauds (1677)

Statute of Frauds (1677)	337 ⁶⁷
--------------------------------	-------------------

Sunday Observance Act (1677)

Sunday Observance Act (1677)	509 f.
------------------------------------	--------

t.u.f.

art. 23, comma 5	465 ³¹
------------------------	-------------------

Unfair Contract Terms Act (1977)

Unfair Contract Terms Act (1977)	886 f.
--	--------

Unfair Terms in Consumer Contract Regulations

Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations 1999 SI 1999/2083	886, 888
--	----------

Uniform Commercial Code

§ 2–209(1)	347
------------------	-----

Verwaltungsverfahrensgesetz

§ 60	622, 624 ²⁴⁵
------------	-------------------------

Volksgesetzbuch

Grundregeln in der Zusammenstellung vom Mai 1941, Nr. 29 Abs. 2	614 ²⁰⁰ , 624 ²⁴⁵
---	---

Zahlungskontengesetz

§ 31	451
------------	-----

ZGB DDR

§ 78 f.	622 f., 624 ²⁴⁵
--------------	----------------------------

5. Table of Cases

French

Cass. civ. 3.2.1846, DP 1846.1.159	414 ⁴³
Cass. Req. 7.1.1862, DP 1862.1.188	414 ⁴³
Cass. Req. 23.3.1870, DP 1870.1.327	414 ⁴³
Cass. 6.3.1876 (Canal de Craponne)	520, 556–558, 562
Cass. civ., 23.5.1876, DP 1876.1.254	414 ⁴³
Cass. Req. 7.1.1902, D. 1903, 1.302	413 ³⁶
Cass. civ., 4.8.1915, DP 1916, 1.22	560 ²⁴
Cass. civ., 5.12.1927, DH 1928, 84	560 ²⁴
Cass. civ., 27.5.1952, JCP 1952.IV.111	413 ³⁶
Cass. com., 23.12.1968, D. 1969 somm. 71	414 ⁴²
Cass. com., 12.11.1969, JCP 1971.II.16791	560 ²⁴
Cass. civ. 1ère, 20.2.1973, n° 71–13.855	416
Cass. civ., 29.4.1973, DP 73.1.207	414 ⁴²
Cass. com., 25.9.1984, n° 83–12.666	376 ¹⁷ , 412 f.
Cass. civ. 1ère, 16.12.1986, n° 85–11.396: Bull. civ. 1986, I, n° 301	724 ²¹
Cass. civ. 1ère, 22.7.1987, n° 85–15.947	422 ⁸⁷
Cass. civ. 1ère, 12.7.1989, n° 88–11.443	95 ⁹⁰ , 410 f.
Cass. com., 3.11.1992, n°90–18.547	563 f.
Cass. civ. 1ère, 17.1.1995, n° 92–21.193: Bull. civ. 1995, I, n° 29	724 ²¹
Cass. civ. 1ère, 3.7.1996, n° 94–14.800	382, 420, 511 ⁴⁶ , 723, 734 ²
Cass. com., 22.10.1996, n° 93–18.632	383, 419, 479 ⁷⁴ , 511 ⁴⁶ , 725, 734 ³ , 746, 752
Cass. civ. 1ère, 7.10.1998, n° 96–14.359	5 ²⁶ , 378 ²⁵ , 423 f.
Cass. com., 24.11.1998, n° 96–18.357	563 f.
Cass. com., 9.7.2002, n°99–12.554, Bulletin civil IV, n. 121	445 ⁵⁸
Cass. civ., 19.7.2002, Bull. civ., 2002, 129	734 ³
Cass. civ. 3ème, 30.10.2002, n° 01–01.219	409 ¹¹
Cass. ass. plén., 29.10.2004, n° 03–11.238	378 ²⁷ , 423

Cass. civ. 1ère, 16.11.2004, n°02–17, 381, D. 2004, 3197.....	560 ²⁴
Cass. civ. 1ère, 30.5.2006, n°03–16, 335, D. 2006, 1705.....	560 ²⁴
Cass. civ. 1ère, 7.6.2006, n° 04–17.550.....	422 ⁸²
Cass. com., 23.1.2007, n° 05–13.189.....	413 ³⁵
Cass. com., 27.3.2007, n° 06–10.452.....	382 ⁴⁶ , 420 ⁷⁵
Cass. civ. 1ère, 30.10.2008, n° 07–17.646, Bull. civ. 2008, I, n° 241.....	408 ⁹ , 563, 724 ²¹
Cass. com., 26.5.2009, n° 08–12.691.....	415
Cass. com., 9.6.2009, n° 08–11.420.....	420, 561 ²⁶ , 723 ¹⁸
Cass. com., 28.6.2010, n° 09–11.841.....	419
Cass. com., 29.6.2010, n° 09–67, 369.....	408 ⁹ , 529 ⁵⁰ , 562 ³⁰ , 734 ³ , 746, 752
Cass. civ. 1ère, 1.7.2010, n° 09–15.677.....	563 ³⁵
Cass. com., 14.8.2010, n° 09–16.084.....	722 ¹⁶
Cass. civ. 1ère, 4.11.2011, n° 10–20.114.....	422 f.
Cass. civ. 1ère, 8.3.2012, n° 10–25, 913.....	560 ²²
Cass. com., 23.10.2012, n° 11–23.376.....	722 ¹⁶
Cass. civ. 1ère, 10.9.2015, n°14–20.498, RDC 2016/1.....	570 ⁶⁶
Cass. com., 22.3.2016, n° 14–14.218.....	418 ⁶⁵
Cass. com., 26.4.2017, n° 15–23245.....	726 ²⁶
Cass. com., 17.5.2017, n° 15–15.746.....	410 ²¹ , 418, 728 ²⁸
Cass. civ. 3ème, 18.4.2019, 18–10.693.....	723 ¹⁸
Cass. civ. 2ème, 24.9.2020, n° 19–15.375.....	419 ⁷¹
Cass. civ. 1ère, 16.12.2020, n° 19–13.701.....	421 f. ⁸²

German

Amts- und Landgerichte

AG Bonn 1.3.2016, 106 C 269/15, BeckRS 2016, 6911.....	436 ³⁸
AG Hamburg 6.2.2002, 21a C 572/01, VuR 2003, 114.....	447 ⁶⁹
LG Karlsruhe 15.8.2006, 2 O 350/06, NJW–RR 2007, 200.....	435 ³³

Bundesarbeitsgericht

BAG 17.10.2012, V AZR 792/11, NZA 2013, 266.....	446 ⁶²
BAG 23.9.2015, 5 AZR 767/13, NZA 2016, 295.....	805 ¹²³ , 806 ¹²⁵

Bundesgerichtshof

BGH 23.5.1951, II ZR 71/50, BGHZ 2, 176.....	614 ¹⁹⁸ , 614 ²⁰¹
BGH 15.6.1951, V ZR 86/50, NJW 1951, 836.....	615 ²⁰³
BGH 22.6.1956, I ZR 198/54, BGHZ 21, 102.....	428 ⁴
BGH 5.10.1961, VII ZR 207/60, BGHZ 36, 30.....	828 ¹⁷³
BGH 31.10.1961, VII ZR 285/62, BGHZ 40, 272.....	828 ¹⁷³
BGH 25.6.1962, VII ZR 120/61.....	434 ²⁶
BGH 29.11.1965, VII ZR 214/63, BGHZ 44, 321.....	583 ⁴⁵
BGH 27.10.1966, VII ZR 65/64, WM 1966, 1280.....	430 ¹⁴
BGH 30.5.1968, VII ZR 2/66, BGHZ 50, 227.....	828, 843
BGH 28.6.1968, V ZR 77/65, NJW 1968, 1928.....	434 ³⁰
BGH 11.1.1971, VIII ZR 261/69, BGHZ 55, 261.....	828 ¹⁷⁴ , 829 ¹⁷⁶ , 845 f.
BGH 10.3.1972, V ZR 87/70, WM 1972, 656.....	614 ²⁰¹

BGH 19.1.1973, V ZR 24/71, NJW 1973, 612	583 ⁴⁶ , 786, 833
BGH 21.5.1973, II ZR 54/72, WM 1973, 1202	593 ⁹⁴
BGH 18.10.1973, VII ZR 8/73, BGHZ 61, 289	850 f.
BGH 21.6.1974, V ZR 164/72, BGHZ 62, 388	608 ¹⁶¹
BGH 17.1.1975, V ZR 105/73, NJW 1975, 776	586 ⁶⁶
BGH 24.3.1976, IV ZR 222/74, BGHZ 66, 250	429 ⁹ , 429 ¹¹
BGH 26.10.1979, V ZR 88/77, NJW 1980, 451	585 ⁶⁰
BGH 5.12.1979, IV ZR 107/78, NJW 1980, 1185	432 ²¹
BGH 18.1.1980, V ZR 34/78, WM 1980, 597	446 ⁶⁰
BGH 3.7.1981, V ZR 100/80, BGHZ 81, 135	615 ²⁰⁴
BGH 25.2.1982, II ZR 174/80, BGHZ 83, 122	452 ⁸⁵
BGH 10.1.1984, VI ZR 64/82, NJW 1984, 799	429 ¹⁰
BGH 30.1.1985, VIII ZR 292/83, WM 1985, 647	434 ²⁹
BGH 2.10.1987, V ZR 140/86, NJW 1988, 699	608 ¹⁶¹
BGH 21.3.1988, II ZR 135/87, BGHZ 104, 50	447 ⁷⁴
BGH 2.11.1988, IV ZR 102/87, BGHZ 105, 365	854 ²³¹
BGH 12.7.1989, VIII ZR 286/88, BGHZ 108, 256	583 ⁴⁵
BGH 23.2.1990, V ZR 192/88, NJW-RR 1990, 827	586 ⁶⁴ , 587 ⁶⁸
BGH 26.9.1990, VIII ZR 205/89, NJW-RR 1991, 204	598 ¹²²
BGH 15.10.1991, VI ZR 314/90, BGBZ 115, 364	609 ¹⁶⁶
BGH 14.11.1991, III ZR 4/91, NJW 1992, 498	428 ⁵
BGH 17.6.1992, XII ZR 253/90, NJW 1992, 2690	443 ⁵⁴ , 443 ⁵⁵
BGH 1.10.1992, V ZR 36/91, NJW 1992, 3224	593 ⁹⁴
BGH 10.3.1993, XII ZR 253/91, BGHZ 122, 46	854
BGH 1.12.1993, VIII ZR 259/92, NJW 1994, 515	598 ¹²²
BGH 18.5.1995, VII ZR 11/94, NJW-RR 1995, 1391	429 ⁷
BGH 11.07.1995, X ZR 42/93, NJW 1995, 3311	819 ¹⁵⁰ , 820 ¹⁵³
BGH 21.3.1997, V ZR 355/95, ZIP 1997, 931	447 ⁶⁴ , 447 ⁶⁷
BGH 23.4.1997, VIII ZR 212/96, BGHZ 135, 269	446 ⁶¹
BGH 10.10.1997, V ZR 74-96, NJW-RR 1998, 590	447 ⁷³
BGH 19.1.2001, V ZR 437/99, BGHZ 146, 298 = NJW 2001, 1127	446 ⁶³
BGH 22.6.2001, V ZR 128/00, NJW 2001, 3118	868 ²⁴²
BGH 15.1.2002, X ZR 91/00, NJW 2002, 1044	805 ¹²⁴ , 806 ¹²⁵
BGH 10.6.2002, II ZR 69/00, NJW 2002, 2862	771 ²⁶
BGH 5.5.2003, II ZR 50/01, WM 2003, 1421	818 ¹⁴⁸
BGH 6.5.2003, XI ZR 226/02, NJW 2003, 2230	447 ⁶⁸
BGH 24.7.2003, IX ZR 131/00, NJW 2003, 3486	447 ⁷¹
BGH 26.4.2004, II ZR 155/02, BGHZ 159, 30	452 ⁸⁶
BGH 7.10.2004, I ZR 18/02, NJW 2005, 1360	625 ²⁴⁹
BGH 22.6.2005, VIII ZR 281/04, BGHZ 163, 234	609 ¹⁶⁸
BGH 8.5.2006, II ZR 94/05, NZG 2006, 543	432 ²⁰
BGH 8.3.2007, VII ZR 130/05, NJW-RR 2007, 895	447 ⁷⁵
BGH 29.6.2007, V ZR 1/06, NJW 2007, 2841	447 ⁶⁵
BGH 24.1.2008, III ZR 79/07, NJW-RR 2008, 562	633 ²⁹⁹
BGH 30.5.2008, V ZR 184/07, NJW 2008, 3122	609 ¹⁶⁹
BGH 3.6.2008, XI ZR 353/07, NJW 2008, 2842	805 ¹²³ , 806 ¹²⁵
BGH 9.7.2008, XII ZR 179/05, BGHZ 177, 193	583 ⁴⁶ , 631 f.
BGH 18.12.2008, IX ZR 12/05, NJW 2009, 1141	374 ² , 428 ⁴
BGH 9.1.2009, V ZR 168/07, NJW 2009, 1348	623, 633 ²⁹⁹

BGH 23.2.2009, V ZR 141/08, NJW-RR 2010, 315	609 ¹⁶⁹
BGH 20.7.2010, XI ZR 236/07, BGHZ 186, 269	821 ¹⁵⁴
BGH 30.9.2011, V ZR 17/11, BGHZ 191, 139	624 ²⁴² , 628 ²⁷² , 629 ²⁷⁷
BGH 21.12.2011, VIII ZR 70/08, BGHZ 192, 148	602 ¹³⁸
BGH 14.5.2014, VIII ZR 114/13, NJW 2014, 2708	445 ^{56f.}
BGH 16.6.2015, XI ZR 243/13, BGHZ 205, 377	851–853
BGH 4.5.2016, XII ZR 62/15, NJW 2016, 3718	625 ²⁴⁹
BGH 10.11.2016, IX ZR 119/14, NJW-RR 2017, 377	447 ⁷²
BGH 19.4.2018, IX ZR 230/15, BGHZ 218, 261	821 ¹⁵⁴
BGH 20.3.2019, VIII ZR 88/18, NJW 2019, 2608	855–868
BGH 30.6.2020, XI ZR 119/19, NJW 2020, 2726	452 ⁸⁴

Bundesverfassungsgericht

BVerfG 30.1.1973, 2 BvH 1/72, BVerfGE 34,216	622 ²³⁴
BVerfG 7.2.1990, 1 BvR 26/84, BVerfGE 81, 242	450 ⁷⁹
BVerfG 19.10.1993, 1 BvR 567 und 1044/89, BVerfGE 89, 214	450
BVerfG 6.2.2001, 1 BvR 12/92, BVerfGE 103, 89	450 ⁷⁹

Bundesverwaltungsgericht

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OLG Köln 13.2.1998, 13 W 72/97, NJWE-FER 1999, 40	447 ⁶⁶
OLG Nürnberg 11.8.2000, 6 U 1181/00, NJW-RR 2001, 636	429 ⁶
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Oberster Gerichtshof für die Britische Zone

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OGH 7.7.1949, I ZS 254/48, OGHZ 2, 202	614 ²⁰¹

Reichsgericht

RG 13.5.1889, VI 60/89, RGZ 24, 169	579 ²⁹ , 580 ³⁴ , 763
RG 6.7.1898, I 174/98, RGZ 42, 114	596 ¹¹¹
RG 17.1.1903, I 286/02, RGZ 53, 294	802 ¹¹² , 805
RG 18.2.1903, I 345/02, RGZ 54, 28	590 ⁸²
RG, 12.1.1904, VI 111/04, RGZ 60, 24	849 f.
RG 23.2.1904, II 398/03, RGZ 57, 116	596 f., 614 ¹⁹⁹
RG 16.9.1904, VII 84/04, RGZ 58, 423	627 ²⁶³
RG 18.3.1905, I 574/04, RGZ 60, 284	827 ¹⁷⁰
RG, 11.1.1906, IV 329/05, RGZ 62, 273	785 ⁵⁹ , 798 f., 832
RG 5.4.1907, VII 313/06, RGZ 66, 132, 134	586 ⁶⁵
RG 13.1.1911, VII 336/10, RGZ 75, 145	610 ¹⁷¹
RG 4.3.1911, VI 318/10, RGZ 76,59	802 ¹¹²

RG 10.4.1911, VI 321/10, Gruchot 55 (1911) 953	583 ⁴⁵ , 586 ⁶³ , 587 ⁶⁸
RG 3.2.1914, II 625/13, RGZ 84, 125	612 f. ¹⁸⁸
RG 18.6.1920, II 65/20, RGZ 100, 39, 40.....	434 ²⁵
RG 8.7.1920, III 89/20, RGZ 99, 258.....	596 ¹¹² , 612 ¹⁸⁷
RG 21.9.1920, III 143/20, RGZ 100, 129.....	612 f., 613 ¹⁹⁴
RG 22.10.1920, III 138/20, RGZ 100, 134.....	612
RG 8.12.1920, I 162/20, RGZ 101, 74	613 ¹⁹¹
RG 16.4.1921, V 484/20, RGZ 102, 98	597 ¹¹⁷ , 613 ¹⁹²
RG 29.11.1921, II 247/21, RGZ 103, 177.....	613 ¹⁹¹
RG 3.2.1922, II 640/21, RGZ 103, 328	613
RG 27.6.1922, III 558/21, RGZ 104, 394	597 ¹²⁰
RG 6.1.1923, V 246/22, RGZ 106, 7.....	597 ¹¹⁷ , 613 ¹⁹² , 614 ¹⁹⁸
RG 10.11.1923, III 261/23, RGZ 107, 151.....	626 ²⁵⁴
RG 28.11.1923, V 31/23, RGZ 107, 78	597 ¹¹⁸ , 597 ¹²⁰ , 613
RG 3.3.1924, IV 386/23, RGZ 108, 105	802 f. ¹¹²
RG 7.11.1927, IV 303/27, RGZ 118, 358	586 ⁶³ , 587 ⁶⁸ , 785 ⁶⁰ , 868 ²⁴² , 833
RG 18.11.1927, RGZ 119, 5, 12	832 ¹⁸⁴ , 868 ²⁴²
RG 30.3.1931, VI 552/30, RGZ 132,238.....	586
RG 2.7.1931, IV 14/31, JW 1932, 1372 (Nr. 25).....	583 ⁴⁵
RG 16.4.1934, VI 456/33, RGZ 144, 242, 243	434 ²⁴
RG 5.4.1939, II 155/38, RGZ 160, 257	614 ¹⁹⁸
RG 15.12.1941, V 77/41, RGZ 168, 121.....	615 ²⁰³

Italian

Corte di cassazione

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Cass. 15.5.1943, Rep. Foro it. 1943–1945, Obbligazioni e contratti, n. 324	658 ¹⁰³
Cass. 17.10.1947, n. 1619	658
Cass. 23.8.1949, n. 2394.....	642 ¹⁷
Cass. 7.6.1957, n. 2109, Rep. Foro it. 1957, Obbligazioni e contratti, n. 446	656 ⁹²
Cass. 10.1.1964, n. 53, Giust. civ. 1964, I, 574.....	645 ³⁴
Cass. 17.5.1976, n. 1738, Riv. dir. comm. 1977, II, 341	645 ³⁴
Cass. 7.7.1981, n. 4414, Foro it. 1982, I, 1769.....	493 ¹²³
Cass. 3.6.1983, n. 3800, Foro it. 1984, I, 212	495 ¹³²
Cass. 27.7.1987, n. 6492, Rep. Foro it. 1987, Contratto in genere, n. 365	489 ⁹⁸
Cass., sez. un., 1.10.1987, n. 7341, Giur. it. 1988, I.1, 27	463 ²⁵ , 478 ⁷¹
Cass. 21.12.1987, n. 9500, Giur. it. 1988, I.1, 1560 = Corriere giur. 1988	468 ⁴¹ , 741 ³⁹
Cass. 18.7.1989, n. 3347, Foro it. 1990, I, 564.....	656 ⁹²
Cass. 9.10.1991, n. 10612, Giust. civ. 1991, I, 2895.....	741 ³⁹
Cass. 11.1.1992, n. 247, Corriere giur. 1992, 662.....	656 ⁹¹
Cass. 20.11.1992, n. 12401, Foro it. 1993, I, 1506	467 ³⁸ , 740
Cass. 2.12.1993, n. 11924, Foro it. 1995, I, 626.....	742 ⁴⁵
Cass. 14.11.1994, n. 9562, Giur. it. 1995, I.1, 1920	467 ³⁸
Cass. 26.1.1995, n. 975, Foro it. 1995, I, 2502.....	749 ⁷⁸
Cass. 1.3.1995, n. 2340, Rep. Foro it. 1995, Contratto in genere, n. 432.....	489 ¹⁰¹
Cass. 8.8.1995, n. 8689, Rep. Foro it. 1995, Contratto in genere, n. 307 = Contratti 1995, 578	476 ⁶¹ , 490 ¹⁰⁸ , 658 ¹⁰¹ , 749 ⁸⁰
Cass. 8.9.1998, n. 8857, Rep. Foro it. 1998, Contratto in genere, n. 528.....	656 ⁹⁰

Cass. 19.10.1998, n. 10332, Giur. it. 1999, 2264	747 ⁷¹
Cass. 9.1.1999, n. 117, Giur. it. 1999, 1360	747 ⁷⁰
Cass. 11.1.2001, n. 317, Contratti 2001, 466	257 ⁵⁴
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Cass. 9.10.2003, n. 15064	741 ⁴⁰
Cass. 19.5.2004, n. 9466, Contratti 2004, 979	495 ¹³²
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Cass. 24.3.2006, n. 6631, Contratti 2006, 1085	661 ¹²¹
Cass. 8.5.2006, n. 10490, Giur. it. 2007, 2203 = Corriere giur. 2006, 1718	257 ⁵⁵ , 460 ¹⁴ , 489 ¹⁰⁰ , 742 ⁴⁷
Cass. 25.5.2007, n. 12235, Giur. it. 2008, 326 = Nuova giur. civ. comm. 2007, I, 1177 = Rass.dir.civ. 2008, 1134	258 ⁵⁹ , 490 ¹⁰⁹ , 662 ¹²⁶ , 749 ^{79f}
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Cass. 20.12.2007, n. 26958, Contratti 2008, 786 = Corriere giur., 2008, 921 = Nuova giur. civ. comm. 2008, I, 531	642 ¹⁷ , 646 ³⁸⁻⁶⁴⁷ , 750 ⁸⁴
Cass. 7.10.2008, n. 24769, Giur. it. 2009, I, 1655	258 ⁵⁶
Cass. 2.4.2009, n. 8038, Nuova giur. civ. comm. 2009, I, 998	743
Cass. 8.4.2009, n. 8564, Giust. civ. 2009, I, 1867	748 ⁷³
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Cass. 4.10.2010, n. 20576, Giust. civ. 2011, I, 379	497 ¹³⁹
Cass. 1.1.2011, n. 7557	747 ⁷²
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Cass. 27.4.2011, n. 9404, Nuova giur. civ. comm. 2011, I, 1258	668 ¹⁵⁰
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Cass. 24.1.2012, n. 943, Rep. Foro it. 2012, Mutuo, n. 15	747 ⁷³
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Cass. 25.3.2013, n. 7479	746 ⁶⁹
Cass. 19.4.2013, n. 9640, Rep. Foro it. 2013, Vendita, n. 32	491 ¹¹⁰
Cass. 9.5.2013, n. 10986, Vita not. 2013, 719	495 ¹³²
Cass. 14.6.2013, n. 15025, Rep. Foro it. 2013, Contratto in genere, n. 381	525 ³³ , 659 ¹⁰⁹
Cass. 22.1.2014, n. 1277, Giur. it. 2015, 1090	469 ⁴⁴
Cass. 22.10.2014, n. 22343, Foro it., 2015, I, 2118	259 ⁶² , 654 ⁸¹
Cass., sez. un., 6.3.2015, n. 4628, Resp. civ. prev. 2015, 619	743
Cass. 6.5.2015, n. 9006	259 ⁶²
Cass. 19.10.2015, n. 21122, DeJure	524 ³³
Cass. 4.11.2015, n. 22567, Foro it. 2016, I, 151	491 ¹¹⁰
Cass. 22.12.2015, n. 25793, Rep. Foro it. 2015, Mutuo, n. 19	747 ⁷³

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Cass. 11.3.2016, n. 4825.....	746 ⁶⁹
Cass. 22.4.2016, n. 8209.....	746 ⁶⁹
Cass. 29.7.2016, n. 15904.....	746 ⁶⁹
Cass. 13.10.2016, n. 20620, Rep. Foro it. 2016, Contratto in genere, n. 367.....	749 ⁸⁰
Cass. 11.11.2016, n. 23064, Rep. Foro it. 2016, Transazione, n. 6.....	492 ¹¹³
Cass., sez. un., 2.12.2016, n. 24645, Foro it. 2016, I, 3190.....	745 ⁶⁵
Cass. 17.1.2017, n. 921.....	258 ⁵⁶
Cass., sez. un., 17.2.2017, n. 4222, Foro it., 2017, I, 2007 = Nuova giur. civ. comm. 2017, 1214.....	260 ⁶⁸ , 479 ⁷³
Cass. 3.5.2017, n. 10722.....	482 ⁸⁵
Cass. 28.7.2017, n. 18781, Banca, borsa e tit. cred. 2018, II, 1.....	259 ⁶⁵
Cass. 19.10.2017, n. 24699, Contratti 2018, 415.....	747 ⁷³
Cass. 27.10.2017, n. 25624, Fam.dir. 2018, 437.....	746 ⁶⁹
Cass. 19.1.2018, n. 1465, Foro it. 2018, I, 452 = Giur. comm. 2018, II, 490.....	478 ⁷² , 745 ⁶⁵
Cass. 26.1.2018, n. 2047, Rep. Foro it. 2018, Contratto in genere, n. 375.....	655 ⁸⁷
Cass. 9.2.2018, n. 393, Redazione Giuffrè 2018.....	742 ⁴⁹
Cass. 19.3.2018, n. 6675, Rep. Foro it. 2018, Contratto in genere, n. 71.....	259 ⁶²
Cass., sez. un., 20.4.2018, n. 9909, Rep. Foro it. 2018, Contratto in genere, n. 256.....	658 ¹⁰¹ , 749 ⁸⁰
Cass. 4.5.2018, n. 10612, Rep. Foro it. 2018, Contratto in genere, n. 79.....	258 ⁶¹
Cass. 18.6.2018, n. 15929, Rep. Foro it. 2018, Mutuo, n. 8.....	747 ⁷³
Cass. 21.6.2018, n. 16345, Rep. Foro it. 2018, Contratto in genere, n. 206.....	741 ³⁸
Cass. 27.6.2018, n. 16939.....	461 ¹⁸
Cass. 4.7.2018, n. 17498, Notariato 2018, 635.....	260 ⁶⁷
Cass., sez. un., 24.9.2018, n. 22437, Contratti 2018, 639 = Nuova giur. civ. comm. 2018, 78.....	259 ⁶³ , 479 ⁷⁵ , 745 ⁶⁵ , 746
Cass. 22.11.2018, n. 30181, Rep. Foro it. 2018, Contratto in genere, n. 286.....	258 f. ⁶¹ , 463 ²⁶
Cass. 9.1.2019, n. 345.....	258 ⁵⁸
Cass. 7.2.2019, n. 3679.....	260 ⁶⁷
Cass. 29.3.2019, n. 8766, Rep. Foro it. 2019, Contratto in genere, n. 350.....	647 ⁴³
Cass. 15.5.2019, n. 12884, Corr. giuridico, 2020, 773.....	741 ³⁸
Cass. 25.6.2019, n. 16907.....	746 ⁶⁷
Cass. 21.10.2019, n. 26770.....	747 ⁷³
Cass. 20.4.2020, n. 7963.....	492 ¹¹³
Cass. 13.5.2020, n. 8894, Corriere giur. 2021, 195.....	745 ⁶⁵

Corti d'appello

App. Bologna 12.7.1999, Tributi 2000, 640.....	744 ⁵⁸
App. Genova 19.1.1996, Giur. it. 1998, 1173.....	743 ⁵³
App. Milano 5.2.1997, Giur. it. 1998, I, 1, 488.....	740 ³⁰
App. Napoli 21.12.1989, Dir. giur. 1990, 510.....	744 ⁵⁷
App. Trieste 28.5.2018, n. 254.....	746 ⁶⁷

Tribunali

Trib. Ancona 21.2.2019, n. 349.....	748 ⁷⁵
Trib. Arezzo 20.8.2018, n. 836.....	741 ³⁸

Trib. Bari ord. 14.6.2011, Contratti 2012, 571	667 ¹⁴⁷
Trib. Bari ord. 31.7.2012, in Nuova giur. civ. comm. 2013, I, 117.....	667 ¹⁴⁷
Trib. Bergamo 22.4.2008, Nuova giur. civ. comm. 2009, I, 1.....	491 ¹¹²
Trib. Bologna 1.10.2003, Vita not. 2003, 1297.....	741 ⁴²
Trib. Civitavecchia 20.4.2007	745 ⁶⁴
Trib. Latina 25.2.2005, n. 547, Arch. locazioni 2007, 2, 188	741 ⁴¹
Trib. Latina 11.8.2008, Contratti 2008, 1085.....	748 ⁷⁴
Trib. Milano 5.11.2018, n. 11071	748 ⁷³
Trib. Milano 28.2.2019, n. 2036	748 ⁷³
Trib. Monza 27.10.1989, Foro it., 1990, I, 298.....	492 ¹¹⁶
Trib. Nocera Inferiore 2.3.1995, Giust. civ. 1996, I, 3047	742 ⁴⁸
Trib. Nocera Inferiore 1.6.2018, n. 778	748 ⁷³
Trib. Padova 28.5.2018, n. 1142	741 ³⁸
Trib. Piacenza 8.10.2018, n. 653, Redazione Giuffrè 2018	744 f. ⁶³
Trib. Roma 21.2.2018, n. 3929	741 ³⁷
Trib. Roma 18.7.2018, n. 14319	741 ³⁸
Trib. Roma 13.3.2019, n. 5521	748 ⁷³
Trib. Sanremo 13.12.1993, Giust. civ. 1994, I, 1401	743 ⁵³
Trib. Trani 7.2.2019, n. 329.....	748 ⁷³

Tribunali Amministrativi Regionali

T.A.R. Toscana 27.5.1997, n. 154, Foro amm. T.A.R. 1997, I, 2570.....	744 ⁵⁷
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Common Law & Mixed Jurisdictions

<i>Abbot of Westminster v Clerke</i> (1536) 73 ER (Eng. Rep.) 59	680 ²⁸
<i>Admiral Shipping Co Ltd v Hopkins</i> [1916] 1 KB 429	686 ⁶⁰
<i>Al Nehayan v Kent</i> [2018] EWHC 333 (Comm)	883 ⁶²
<i>Albert D Gaon & Co v Société Interprofessionnelle des Oléagineux</i> <i>Fluides Alimentaires</i> [1960] 2 QB 334	700 ¹²⁴
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<i>Appleby v Myers</i> (1866) LR 2 CP 615	681 f.
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<i>Associated Provincial Picture Houses Ltd v Wednesbury Corporation</i> [1948] 1 KB 223	883 ⁵⁸
<i>Astor Management AG v Atalaya Mining Plc</i> [2017] EWHC 425 (Comm), [2017] 1 Lloyd's Rep. 476	883 ⁶² , 884
<i>Attorney General of Belize v Belize Telecom Ltd</i> [2009] UKPC 10, [2009] 1 WLR 1988.....	691 ⁸⁵
<i>Balfour v Balfour</i> (1919) 2 KB 571	375, 504
<i>Bates v Post Office Ltd (No.3: Common Issues)</i> [2019] EWHC 606 (QB).....	883 ⁶²
<i>Beaton v McDivitt</i> (1987) 13 NSWLR 162.....	326 ¹⁵
<i>Bell v Lever Brothers Ltd</i> → <i>Lever Brothers Ltd v Bell</i> [1931] 1 KB 557, [1932] AC 161.....	360 ¹⁹¹ , 361 ¹⁹⁴ , 380 ³⁴ , 512 f., 699 ¹¹⁹
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<i>Bloxsome v Williams</i> (1824) 3 B & C 232, 107 ER (Eng. Rep.) 720.....	509 f.

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<i>Brewster v Kitchell</i> (1679) 1 Salk. 198, 91 ER (Eng. Rep.) 177	680 ³⁰
<i>Bristol Groundschool Ltd v Whittingham</i> [2014] EWHC 2145 (Ch).....	883 ⁶²
<i>Burgess v Rawnsley</i> [1975] 1 Ch 429	358 ¹⁷⁵
<i>Canary Wharf T1, T2, Management Limited v European Medicines Agency</i> [2019] EWHC 335 (Ch).....	527, 695 f., 699 ¹²⁰
<i>Carlill v Carbolic Smoke Ball Company</i> (1893) 1 QB 256 (HL)	327 ¹⁸
<i>Cathay Pacific Airways Ltd v Lufthansa Technik AG</i> [2020] EWHC 1789 (Ch)	884 ⁶²
<i>Cavendish Square Holding BV v Makdessi</i> [2015] UKSC 67, [2016] AC 1172, [2015] 3 WLR 1373.....	888–890
<i>Central London Property Trust Ltd v High Trees House Ltd</i> [1947] KB 130.....	330 ³⁶ , 502
<i>Chandler v Webster</i> [1904] 1 KB 493 (CA).....	355 ¹⁶³ , 360 ¹⁹²
<i>Chappell & Co Ltd v Nestlé Co Ltd</i> [1960] AC 87 (HL).....	329 ²⁶ , 377 ²² , 501 ⁸
<i>Chartbrook Ltd v Persimmon Homes Ltd</i> [2009] UKHL 38, [2009] 1 AC 1101.....	878 ^{34f.}
<i>Charter Reinsurance Co Ltd v Fagan</i> [1997] AC 313	878 ³⁴
<i>Combe v Combe</i> [1951] 2 KB 215, [1951] 1 All ER 767	377 ²² , 501 f., 504 ¹⁹
<i>Conradie v Rossouw</i> 1919 Appellate Div. Rep. 279	352, 353
<i>Couturier v Hastie</i> (1852) 8 Exch 40; rev'd (1853) 9 Exch 102; (1856) 5 HLC 673, 10 ER (Eng. Rep.) 1065.....	360 ¹⁹¹ , 381 ⁴¹ , 511
<i>CPC Group Ltd v Qatari Diar Real Estate Investment Co</i> [2010] EWHC 1535 (Ch)	881 f. ³³
<i>CTI Group Inc v Transclear SA (The Mary Nour)</i> [2008] EWCA Civ 856, [2008] 2 Lloyd's Rep. 526	691 ⁸² , 693 ⁹¹
<i>Currie v Misa</i> (1875) LR 10 Ex 153	326, 341, 501 ⁶
<i>Dahl v Nelson, Donkin & Co</i> (1881) 6 App. Cas. 38	688 ⁶⁸
<i>Davis Contractors Ltd v Fareham Urban District Council</i> [1956] AC 696 (HL)	361 ¹⁹³ , 527, 689, 691–693, 876, 878
<i>Denny, Mott and Dickinson Ltd v James B. Fraser & Co Ltd</i> [1944] AC 265.....	688 ⁶⁶
<i>Deutsche Morgan Grenfell Group Plc v Inland Revenue Commissioners</i> [2006] UKHL 49, [2007] 1 AC 558	367 ²³¹
<i>Eastwood v Kenyon</i> (1840) 11 Ad. & El. 438, 113 ER (Eng. Rep.) 482.....	346, 352
<i>Edwinton Commercial Corporation v Tsavliris Russ Ltd (The Sea Angel)</i> [2007] EWCA Civ 547, [2007] 2 All ER (Comm) 634.....	690 ⁷⁷ , 692 ⁸⁶ , 693 ⁹²
<i>Essex CC v UBB Waste (Essex) Ltd</i> [2020] EWHC 1581 (TCC)	883 ⁶²
<i>Eugenia, The → Ocean Tramp Tankers Corporation v V / O Soyfracht</i> [1964] 2 QB 226, [1964] 2 WLR 114.....	700 f., 877
<i>Evanturel v Evanturel</i> (1874) LR 6 PC 1.....	378 ²⁶
<i>Everet v Williams</i> (1725) (unreported)	506
<i>FA Tamplin Steamship Co Ltd v Anglo-Mexican Petroleum Products Co Ltd</i> [1916] 2 AC 397 (HL)	361 ¹⁹⁴ , 687, 688 f., 691 ⁸¹
<i>FC Shepherd & Co Ltd v Jerrom</i> [1987] Q.B. 301	683 ⁴⁵
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<i>Golding's Case</i> (1586) 2 Leon. 72, 74 ER (Eng. Rep.) 367.....	340 ⁸¹
<i>Great Peace Shipping Ltd v Tsavliris Salvage (International) Ltd (The Great Peace)</i> [2002] EWCA Civ 1407, [2003] QB 679.....	361 ¹⁹³ , 380, 513

<i>Griffith v Brymer</i> (1903) 19 TLR 434 (KBD)	360 ¹⁹²
<i>Guinness Mahon & Co Ltd v Kensington and Chelsea Royal London Borough Council</i> [1999] QB 215 (CA).....	366 f.
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<i>Hamsard 3147 Ltd (trading as 'Mini Mode Childrenswear') v Boots UK Ltd</i> [2013] EWHC 3251 (Pat)	883 ⁶²
<i>Hawkes v Saunders</i> (1782) 1 Cowp. 289, 98 ER (Eng. Rep.) 1091	345
<i>Hazell v Hammersmith and Fulham LBC</i> [1992] 2 AC 1 (HL)	365
<i>Health & Case Management Ltd v The Physiotherapy Network Ltd</i> [2018] EWHC 869 (QB)	882 ⁵³
<i>Herne Bay Steam Boat Co v Hutton</i> [1903] 2 KB 683 (CA)	360 ¹⁹² , 527, 697–699, 873–875
<i>Heyman v Darwins Ltd</i> [1942] AC 356	683 ⁴⁵
<i>Hirji Mulji v Cheong Yue SS Co</i> [1926] AC 497.....	687
<i>Holman v Johnson</i> (1775) 1 Cowp. 341, 98 ER (Eng. Rep.) 1120.....	509 ⁴⁰
<i>Hyde v Dean & Canon of Windsor</i> (1597) Cro. Eliz. 552, 78 ER (Eng. Rep.) 798.....	680 ³¹
<i>In re Ames' Settlement (Dinwiddy v Ames)</i> [1946] Ch 217.....	358
<i>Investors Compensation Scheme Ltd v West Bromwich Building Society Ltd</i> [1998] 1 WLR 896.....	878 ^{34f.} , 880
<i>Isack v Barbour</i> (1563) KB 27/1107, m. 55.....	340 ⁷⁹
<i>Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines v Steamship Mutual Underwriting Association (Bermuda) Ltd</i> [2011] Lloyd's Rep. 195	680 ⁷⁸
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<i>Jackson v Union Marine Insurance Co.</i> (1874–75) LR 10 CP 125	682, 876 f.
<i>Jayawickreme v Amarasuriya</i> [1918] AC 869 (PC)	352
<i>JM Allan (Merchandising) Ltd v Cloke</i> [1963] 2 QB 340.....	509
<i>Jones v Padavatton</i> [1969] 1 WLR 328.....	504 f.
<i>Joseph Constantine Steamship Line v Imperial Smelting Corp</i> [1942] AC 154.....	683 ⁴⁵ , 689 ⁷⁵
<i>Joubert v Enslin</i> 1910 Appellate Div. Rep. 6.....	350 ¹³⁸
<i>Kennedy v Panama, New Zealand & Australian Royal Mail Co Ltd</i> (1867) LR 2 QB 580.....	363 f.
<i>Kleinwort Benson Ltd v Lincoln City Council</i> [1999] 2 AC 349 (HL)	365 ²²¹ , 365 f. ²²²
<i>Krell v Henry</i> [1903] 2 KB 740 (CA)	360 ¹⁹² , 361 ¹⁹⁴ , 363, 527, 697–699, 873 f.
<i>Kuhl v School Dist No. 76</i> [1952] 51 N.W.2d 746.....	679 ²⁷
<i>Lever Brothers Ltd v Bell</i> → <i>Bell v Lever Brothers Ltd</i> [1931] 1 KB 557 (CA)	364 ²¹³ , 364 ²¹⁴
<i>Lipkin Gorman (a firm) v Karpnale Ltd</i> [1991] 2 AC 548 (HL)	354 ¹⁵⁸
<i>Lowe v Peers</i> (1768) 2 Burr. 2225, 98 ER (Eng. Rep.) 160.....	506 ²⁷
<i>Lucy v Walwyn</i> (1561) KB 27/1026, m. 76.....	341 ⁸⁵
<i>Mahmoud v Ispahani, Re</i> (1921) 2 KB 718	510
<i>Malan & Van der Merwe v Secretan, Boon & Co</i> 1880 Foord's Rep. 94.....	350
<i>Marler v Wilmer</i> (1539) KB 27/1111, m. 64	340 ⁷⁹
<i>Marsh v Rainsford</i> (1588) 2 Leon. 111, 44 ER (Eng. Rep.) 400	341 ⁸³
<i>Mary Nour, The</i> → <i>CTI Group Inc v Transclear SA</i> [2008] EWCA Civ 856.....	691 ⁸² , 693 ⁹¹
<i>Massalia, The</i> → <i>Société Franco-Tunisienne d'Armement v Sidermar SpA</i> [1961] 2 QB 278.....	701 ¹²⁸
<i>Monde Petroleum SA v Western Zagros Ltd</i> [2016] EWHC 1472 (Comm), [2017] 1 All ER (Comm) 1009.....	883 ⁶²

<i>Morley (t/a Morley Estates) v Royal Bank of Scotland</i> [2020] EWHC 88 (Ch)	884 ⁶²
<i>Moses v Macferlan</i> (1760) 2 Burr. 1005, 97 ER (Eng. Rep.) 676	32, 354, 359
<i>Mtembu v Webster</i> (1904) 21 Cape Supreme Court Rep. 323	352
<i>MWB Business Exchange Centres Ltd v Rock Advertising Ltd</i> [2016] EWCA Civ 553, [2017] QB 604	330 ³⁴
<i>MWB Business Exchange Centres Ltd v Rock Advertising Ltd</i> [2018] UKSC 24, [2019] AC 119	347
<i>National Carriers Ltd v Panalpina (Northern) Ltd</i> [1981] AC 675 (HL)	361 ¹⁹³ , 364 ²¹⁴ , 690 ⁷⁶ , 691 ⁸⁴ , 693
<i>National Private Air Transport Services Co (National Air Services) Ltd v Creditrade LLP</i> [2016] EWHC 2144 (Comm)	883 ⁶²
<i>Nema, The → Pioneer Shipping Ltd v BTP Tioxide Ltd</i> [1982] AC 724	677 ¹⁴ , 693 ⁹¹
<i>Nobahar-Cookson v Hut Group Ltd</i> [2016] EWCA Civ 128, [2016] 1 CLC 573	886 ⁷⁵
<i>Ocean Tramp Tankers Corporation v V / O Soyfracht (The Eugenia)</i> [1964] 2 QB 226	700 f., 877
<i>Osborn v The Governors of Guy's Hospital</i> (1726) 2 Str. 728, 93 ER (Eng. Rep.) 812	358 ¹⁷⁵
<i>Pakistan International Airline Corpn v Times Travel (UK) Ltd</i> [2021] UKSC 40, [2021] 3 WLR 727	880 ⁴⁸
<i>Paradine v Jane</i> (1647) Aley 26, 82 ER (Eng. Rep.) 897	361 ¹⁹⁵ , 526 ³⁹ , 679, 680 ³⁰ , 681, 683
<i>Parker v Clar</i> (1960) 1 WLR 286	375 ¹¹ , 505
<i>ParkingEye Ltd v Beavis → Cavendish Square Holding BV v Makdessi</i> [2015] UKSC 67, [2016] AC 1172	888–890
<i>Patel v Mirza</i> [2016] UKSC 42, [2017] AC 467	332 ⁴⁴ , 357 ¹⁷² , 367 ²³² , 379, 507 f.
<i>Pearce v Brooks</i> (1866) LR 1 Ex 213	506 ²⁶ , 872 ⁴
<i>Persimmon Homes Ltd v Ove Arup & Partners Ltd</i> [2017] EWCA Civ 373, [2017] 2 CLC 28	886 ⁷⁵
<i>Petrotec Inc v Petroleo Brasileiro SA Petrobras (No.3)</i> [2005] EWCA Civ 891, [2006] 1 Lloyd's Rep. 121	881 ⁵⁰
<i>Phoenix General Insurance Co. of Greece SA v Halvanon Insurance Co Ltd</i> (1988) QB 216	510
<i>Pillans v van Mierop</i> (1765) 3 Burr. 1663, 97 ER (Eng. Rep.) 1035	344, 345 ¹⁰⁷
<i>Pinnel's Case</i> (1602) 5 Co. Rep. 117a, 77 ER (Eng. Rep.) 237	330 ³⁵
<i>Pioneer Shipping Ltd v BTP Tioxide Ltd (The Nema)</i> [1982] AC 724	677 ¹⁴ , 693 ⁹¹
<i>Prenn v Simmonds</i> [1971] 1 WLR 1381	878–880
<i>Property Alliance Group Ltd v Royal Bank of Scotland Plc</i> [2016] EWHC 3342 (Ch); [2018] EWCA Civ 355, [2018] 1 WLR 3529	883 ⁶²
<i>Pykeryng v Thurgoode</i> (1532) Spelman 4	336
<i>R v Andrews</i> (1973) QB 422	506 ²⁸
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<i>R (Verner) v Derby City Council</i> [2003] EWHC 2708 (Admin)	680 ⁷⁸
<i>Rainy Sky SA v Kookmin Bank</i> [2011] UKSC 50, [2011] 1 WLR. 2900	878 ^{34f.}
<i>Ranieri v Miles</i> [1981] 1 AC 1050	678 ¹⁸
<i>Rood v Wallach</i> 1904 Transvaal Supreme Court Rep. 187	351, 352 f. ¹⁵²
<i>Rowland v Divall</i> [1923] 2 KB 500	358 ¹⁷⁵
<i>Royal Bank of Canada v The King</i> [1913] AC 283 (PC)	356
<i>Scott v Coulson</i> (1903) 2 Ch 249	512 ⁵²
<i>Scottish Navigation Co Ltd v Souter</i> [1916] 1 KB 675	686 ⁶⁰

- Sea Angel, The* → *Edwinton Commercial Corporation v Tsavlis Russ Ltd* [2007] EWCA Civ 547 690⁷⁷, 692⁸⁶, 693⁹²
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- Slade v Morley* (1602) 4 Co. Rep. 92b, 76 ER (Eng. Rep.) 1074 337⁶⁸, 341
- Snelling v John G Snelling Ltd* (1973) 1 QB 87 375¹¹, 505
- Société Franco-Tunisienne d'Armement v Sidermar SpA (The Massalia)*
[1961] 2 QB 278 701¹²⁸
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[2008] EWCA Civ 116, [2008] 1 Lloyd's Rep. 558 882⁵⁵
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188 Con LR 141 883 f.⁶²
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[2017] UKSC 64, [2018] AC 690 345¹⁰⁷
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(Eng. Rep.) 309 360¹⁹¹, 361, 362, 526, 680 f., 691⁸¹, 873
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[2016] EWCA Civ 372, [2016] 2 All ER (Comm) 606 886⁷⁵
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[2021] 3 WLR 521 886⁷⁵
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- Wales (t/a Selective Investment Services) v CBRE Managed Services Ltd*
[2020] EWHC 16 (Comm) 884⁶²
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(QBD Comm Ct) 366
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[1991] 1 QB 1 (CA) 329³¹, 330³³, 503
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[2013] Lloyd's Rep. 526 883 f.

European Union

Aziz v Caixa d'Estalvis de Catalunya, Tarragona i Manresa (C-415/11) 889

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