1. What’s it all about?

This introductory chapter sets out the book’s scope and primary goals, and outlines some useful works on jurisprudence recommended by instructors in American law schools. It distinguishes between descriptive legal theory, normative legal theory, and critical legal theory, and describes Lon Fuller’s entertaining hypothetical ‘Case of the Speluncean Explorers’, a popular launching pad for the comprehension of legal ideas. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the point of legal theory, suggesting that analytical clarity is paramount in times of turmoil when the voice of the demagogue is loudest. Careful consideration of the most fundamental questions of law, justice, and the meaning of legal concepts is particularly important. Legal theory has a central function in defining, shaping, and safeguarding the values that underpin our society.
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