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### **Book Review**

**An Introduction to the Study of Law**, edited by Simon Halliday, Edinburgh, W. Green, 2012, 86 pp., £12.50 paperback, ISBN 978-0-414-01869-3

Written for students who are about to study law for the first time, in just 86 pages the contributors to this deceptively simple-looking volume present their readers with an invaluable and sophisticated introduction to the modern study of law as a dynamic and intellectually rich subject. The book was inspired by a teaching team and course at the University of Strathclyde, which sought to provide students with a map reflecting the diversification in modern legal scholarship. As such, it is also a book that will be of interest to lecturers and law schools looking to develop innovative approaches to teaching that draw upon the latest interdisciplinary debates in law, conceptualised (using Downes' phrase) as "a rendezvous subject" (p. 1).

This book does something quite different from other recent introductory guides to studying law at university. Whereas other guides largely maintain the traditional focus on the use of legal materials and methods that are the foundation for legal practice, Halliday *et al.* invite students to embark upon their academic journey into law by drawing upon multiple methods and disciplinary approaches. Students are therefore encouraged to look beyond the study of law as a vocational subject, to thinking critically about the nature of law itself from the outset of their studies. Despite this ambitious objective for an introductory guide, the book is written in a concise style that is deliberately intended as a 'coffee shop' read, where even complex subjects are made quite accessible. References to the relevant literature within each area of scholarship are kept to an absolute minimum in order to keep the focus on reflecting on the value and purpose of each approach to the study of law. This is something that the author of each chapter has done extremely effectively.

Chapter 1 begins with the most traditional, so-called 'doctrinal' or 'black-letter' approach to the study of law. Whilst questioning the appropriateness of these terms for the study of legal methods, Jenny Steele presents some interesting reflections both on the importance for law students of understanding how law works in practice, and why legal scholars must look beyond this if they are to understand the nature of law itself. This sets the context for the subsequent chapters that take the reader by the hand through a series of short introductions to other approaches to the study of law that many students often struggle or are reluctant to engage with.

In his chapter on Law and Philosophy John Gardner addresses the apparent tension between legal method, where students are taught to argue from authority, and philosophical approaches that question the role and basis of authority in law. Importantly, Gardner emphasises that whilst many students trained during their law studies to argue from authority subsequently find it difficult to recognise this problem, the ability to understand and philosophically think "without authority" (p. 30) has intrinsic intellectual value for any analytical career. Chapters 3 and 4 offer succinct springboard foundations to the use of social-scientific methods underlying empirical approaches, and the major critical approaches

to understanding how law operates. The final three chapters on law and popular culture, historical and comparative approaches seek to illustrate how the focus of legal study can be opened up to enrich our understanding of the nature and foundations of law in context.

This book has come at a time where the interdisciplinary turn in academic scholarship has generated growing momentum amongst law lecturers and law schools to re-think the conventional design and teaching of law as an academic subject. Alongside other recent innovative works on law teaching, such as *Integrating Socio-Legal Studies Into the Law Curriculum*, edited by Caroline Hunter, 2012, Palgrave Macmillan, *An Introduction to the Study of Law* signposts a fresh approach to the study of law for the next generation – as an interdisciplinary, diverse, sophisticated and intellectually rigorous subject. The beauty of this little introductory book is that it can effectively open students' minds to the various possibilities and richness of the study of law from the start of their university studies. This book certainly sparked my imagination, and I would recommend it as essential reading to any intending law student.

It is our responsibility as law teachers to provide students with curricula that will afford them the opportunity to engage with the range of approaches to studying law from an early stage. For law teachers interested in developing creative and critically engaging courses, this book would serve as an excellent starting-point for designing a first year introductory critical thinking course on the study of law. It would also provide an equally useful reference point for redesigning core law courses, thereby making room throughout the curriculum for the variety of approaches that exist beyond the doctrinal.

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