The Epistemological Foundations of Law
The Epistemological Foundations of Law
Readings and Commentary

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Carolina Academic Press
Durham, North Carolina
Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Dore, Isaak I. (Isaak Ismail), 1950-
The Epistemological foundations of law : readings and commentary / by Isaak I. Dore.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
K230.D668A34 2007
340'.1--dc22 2007008243

CAROLINA ACADEMIC PRESS
700 Kent Street
Durham, North Carolina 27701
Telephone (919) 489-7486
Fax (919) 493-5668
www.cap-press.com

Printed in the United States of America
For Maa
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Foreword

This book differs from the standard jurisprudence textbook in that it examines law as a truth claim. Its major theme is whether there are any eternal truths about the law, and, if so, whether they are knowable. The twin quest for knowledge and truth raises the basic question of epistemology of what are the foundations of human knowledge? In other words, how do we know that whatever we believe about the world, about the human condition, or about law is true? The central project of the book, then, is an investigation into the epistemological foundations of law. Among the major questions it discusses are: What is the nature of law? Does it have a “true” meaning? If so, is it knowable? What is the role of reason? What is the relationship between law and morality, or between law and the citizen? What is the nature of the obligation to obey the law and how does it arise? Does law have any founding principles? If so, what are they, and how can they be identified, evaluated and critiqued?

The first Western philosopher who explicitly asserted that law is a truth claim was Socrates. It is not surprising that other Western philosophers followed this path. The materials herein trace the origins of this claim to some 500 years before Socrates walked the streets of Athens. The materials divide this period into two, the first being the era of the great Greek poets and playwrights such as Homer, Hesiod, and Sophocles, who lived between the eighth and fifth centuries BCE (the prephilosophic period). The second is the period between 625 BCE, when Thales was born, and 470 BCE, marked by the birth of Socrates (the Presocratic period). Indeed, the complete historical profile unfolds in these materials over eight overlapping historical/philosophical periods: (1) The prephilosophical period. (2) The Presocratic period (Chapter 2). (3) The Postsocratic period (Chapters 3–4). (4) The Roman period (Chapter 5, first part). (5) The medieval/Christian period (Chapter 5, last part). (6) The Enlightenment period (Chapter 6). (7) The modern period (Chapters 7–11). (8) The postmodern period (Chapters 12–13).

It goes without saying that this periodization is disputable. The periods, however, are intended to serve as analytical categories on which the organizational framework of the book rests. They also incidentally serve as evolutionary guideposts in a grand intellectual voyage, so that the reader gets an integrated picture of law not just as a social phenomenon but also as a truth claim, which, like all truth claims, can be critically evaluated.
Acknowledgments

This book is the culmination of many years of research, and many persons have contributed to its completion. First, I thank Dean Jeffrey Lewis of Saint Louis University School of Law for his support and encouragement as well as my colleagues at the School of Law for their comments as the manuscript went through various drafts. My thanks also go to Professor David Sloss of Saint Louis University School of Law for his comments, to Laura Underkuffler, Arthur Larson Professor, Duke University School of Law, and to Professor Jennifer Hart-Weed and Professor Ronald Weed, both in the Department of Philosophy of Tyndale University, Toronto. My colleague Mike Nevin endured many office visits from me regarding copyright issues. I would like to thank him and Professor Mark McKenna for their advice on these issues.

Special thanks go to a number of colleagues and friends in France where portions of the book were researched. Jacques Leroy, Dean of the Faculté de droit, d’économie et de gestion of the Université d’Orléans generously placed at my disposition all facilities of his faculty during an eight-month sabbatical at the Université d’Orléans. I am also indebted to Joël Monéger, holder of the Chaire Jean Monet, Doyen honoraire of the Faculté de droit, d’économie et de gestion of the Université d’Orléans, and directeur de l’institut de droit économique, fiscal et social of the Université de Paris-Dauphine, for his comments on some sections on French philosophy. I must also thank Denis and Annick Durand for letting me have the run of their magnificent Château de Viéville in St. Cyr en Val (reputed to be the stomping ground of Joan of Arc) during the writing of portions of the manuscript in France.

I also benefited from the assistance of Peggy McDermott, Law Librarian and Assistant Professor of Legal Research, at the Saint Louis University School of Law. She showed exemplary kindness and patience in the face of my numerous requests and questions. Another invaluable resource was my assistant and clerical supervisor at Saint Louis University School of Law, Stephanie Haley. Stephanie not only expertly prepared the manuscript for publication but also provided much-needed technical support. My sincere thanks are also due to Laura Poole, whose good humor and exceptional editorial skills did much to improve the overall quality of the book.

This book could not have been completed without the solid efforts of an army of research assistants, including Jon Bowman, Paul Sander, Kelly Stoltz, Chelsea Ashbrook, Mike Knepper, Patrick Sullivan, Chris LaRose, and Connor Sperry.

Finally, I would like to thank my family, particularly my children Philip and Rachel, for their unwavering support throughout the writing of the book. (I know that being conscripted to proof tracts from Kant, Hume and Marx during that senior year in high school could not have been much fun!)
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Acknowledgments


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