

Laws (Cicero; excerpt)

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Laws

(Excerpt)

By Cicero

51 BC

[Cicero. *De Legibus*. Translated by Thomas L. Pangle. Princeton, N.J.: The Witherspoon Institute. 2011. Book 1, sections 18-19.]

Cicero himself speaking:

Now let us see the principles of justice. The most learned men have been pleased to begin with law, which is correct if it is defined in the way they do: law is the supreme reason inherent in nature, which commands those things which ought to be done and prohibits the contrary. This same reason, when it is confirmed and completed in the human mind, is law. And so they judge that law is prudence, whose strength is to command what it is right to do and forbid wrongdoing. . . . So if this is correctly said, as it usually seems to me for the most part, then the beginning of justice is from law, which is a force of nature, the mind and reasoning of the prudent, the standard of justice and injustice. But since this whole speech of ours now is directed to the reasoning of the populace, it will be necessary to speak popularly, and to name "law" as the vulgar do: that which is written and which decrees what it wishes, either commanding or prohibiting. But in constituting justice in truth let us take the beginning from that supreme law which was born before all the centuries and before any written law or any city was constituted.

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