

# Cicero's "Republic" Book III, line XXII - "True Law Is Right Reason In Agreement With Nature"

Post by "Cassius" of January 16, 2022 at 12:29 PM

I refer to his passage from Cicero's "Republic" very often to contrast it as essentially the opposite of Epicurus' view of justice, but I always have a hard time finding it when I need it. This post is just to provide some links and clips to the key passage:

Attalus: {22.} [33] L . . . True law is right reason in agreement with nature , it is of universal application, unchanging and everlasting; it summons to duty by its commands, and averts from wrongdoing by its prohibitions. And it does not lay its commands or prohibitions upon good men in vain, though neither have any effect on the wicked. It is a sin to try to alter this law, nor is it allowable to attempt to repeal any part of it, and it is impossible to abolish it entirely. We cannot be freed from its obligations by senate or people, and we need not look outside ourselves for an expounder or interpreter of it. And there will not be different laws at Rome and at Athens, or different laws now and in the future, but one eternal and unchangeable law will be valid for all nations and all times, and there will be one master and ruler, that is, God, over us all, for he is the author of this law, its promulgator, and its enforcing judge. Whoever is disobedient is fleeing from himself and denying his human nature, and by reason of this very fact he will suffer the worst penalties, even if he escapes what is commonly considered punishment. . . .

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## MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO

. . . sed iuventuti nostrae minime audiendus; quippe, si ita sensit, ut loquitur, est homo impurus; sin aliter, quod malo, oratio est tamen immanis. . .  
(*Nonius*, p. 323. 17 et 324. 15.)

33 XXII. . . . Est quidem vera lex recta ratio naturae congruens, diffusa in omnes, constans, sempiterna, quae vocet ad officium iubendo, vetando a fraude deterreat; quae tamen neque probos frustra iubet aut vetat, nec improbos iubendo aut vetando movet. huic legi nec obrogari fas est neque derogari ex hac aliquid licet neque tota abrogari potest, nec vero aut per senatum aut per populum abrogari.

## THE REPUBLIC III. XXI. 32-XXIII. 34

*Laelius*. . . . But he<sup>1</sup> certainly ought not to have our young men as his audience. For if he really believes what he says, he is a villain; but if not, as I prefer to think, what he says is at any rate pernicious. . . .

XXII. . . . True law is right reason in agreement with nature; it is of universal application, unchanging and everlasting; it summons to duty by its commands, and averts from wrongdoing by its prohibitions. And it does not lay its commands or prohibitions upon good men in vain, though neither have any effect on the wicked. It is a sin to try to alter this law, nor is it allowable to attempt to repeal any part of it, and it is impossible to abolish

promised yesterday that you would plead at large on my side of the argument. If you cannot spare time for this, at any rate do not desert us; we all ask it of you.

*Laelius.*—This Carneades ought not to be even listened to by our young men. I think all the while that I am hearing him, that he must be a very impure person; if he be not, as I would fain believe, his discourse is not less pernicious.

XXII.<sup>1</sup> True law is right reason conformable to nature, universal, unchangeable, eternal, whose commands urge us to duty, and whose prohibitions restrain us from evil. Whether it enjoins or forbids, the good respect its injunctions, and the wicked treat them with indifference. This law cannot be contradicted by any other law, and is not liable either to derogation or abrogation. Neither the senate nor the people can give us any dispensation for not obeying this universal law of justice. It needs no other expositor and interpreter than our own conscience. It is not one thing at Rome, and another at Athens; one thing to-day, and another to-morrow; but in all times and nations this universal law must for ever reign, eternal and imperishable. It is the sovereign master and emperor of all beings. God himself is its author, its promulgator, its enforcer. And he who does not obey it flies from himself, and does violence to the very nature of man. And by so doing he will endure the severest penalties even if he avoid the other evils which are usually accounted punishments.

XXIII. I am aware that in the third book of Cicero's treatise on the Commonwealth (unless I am mistaken), it is argued that no war