

Cicero's de legibus

[Law](#), [Justice](#)



Cicero's De Legibus Cicero's De Legibus attempts to answer the very nature of law and justice, and the workings behind such universal ideals. With this assumption of universality, many compelling arguments are presented towards the inherent doings of man. Undoubtedly influenced by previous Greek philosophers, Cicero followed in the traditions of great minds, such as Aristotle, but concluded against the overall consensus that there was an inherent inferiority amongst men. Cicero's early concepts of equality established a set of ideals that would greatly influence western society to come. For the duration of this essay the attention will focus on Book One of De Legibus, and will further analyze Cicero's overlaying conclusion that man is born with the notion of, and desire for justice. This concept of justice is observed by means of direct observation of man's fellowship and union. As a result of those observations, Cicero concluded that " Law is not a product of human thought, nor is it any enactment of peoples, but something eternal which rules the whole universe by its wisdom in command and prohibition. " (230). By deemphasizing human involvement, Cicero romanticized man's desire for justice by relegating the idea to the existence of a celestial brotherhood. With recognition of divine intervention, questions regarding the will of the gods inevitably arose, and suggested that reason amongst the gods does exist, and it is the deciding factor of human livelihood. Inevitably, this concept influence later movements such as Calvinism. John Calvin often quoted Cicero in his writings, and in describing his views on law he states that, " Next to the magistracy in the civil state comes the laws, stoutest sinews of the commonwealth, or as Cicero calls them, the souls, without which the magistracy cannot stand, even as they themselves cannot without

the magistracy. Accordingly, nothing truer could be said than that the law is a silent magistrate; the magistrate, a living law. " (Calvin 215) Many philosophers before Cicero contrived ideals of natural law, so then why does *On the Laws* stand out as such a profound piece of literature? Cicero brought about an entirely new perspective on the inherent equality of man within the realm of natural law. " For the same things are invariably perceived by the senses, and those things which stimulate the senses, stimulate them in the same way in all men; and those rudimentary beginnings of intelligence to which I have referred, which are imprinted on our minds, are imprinted on all minds alike; and speech, the mind's interpreter, though differing in the choice of words, agrees in the sentiments expressed. In fact, there is no human being of any race who, if he finds a guide, cannot attain to virtue. " (229) During a time of reliance on slaves, the fall of the republic, and proclaimed entitlement amongst the aristocracy, these concepts of humility in one's physical and mental ability must have appeared to be alien. (relate to the founding fathers) In actuality, Cicero's perspective of equality continues to be a struggle amongst societies. Even though America's Founding Fathers were well versed in the works of Cicero, and praised his philosophy, many hypocritical actions were practiced. Like Rome of Cicero's time, The United States relied upon the institution of slavery, while at the same time possessing fundamental beliefs of equality. The Founding Fathers were actually so oriented on natural law that they cite it as the main component of The Declaration of Independence. In fact, many of the Founding Fathers were practicing Deist. Deism, which is described by means of clockwork universe theory, encompasses the quintessential concept of

natural law by suggests that there is a divine architect that maintains universal order. As all the ages of the world have not produced a greater statesman and philosopher united than Cicero, his authority should have great weight. (121 Adams) Having noted the influence that Cicero would have on later influential figures, it is important to delve into the origins of Cicero's own ideals, and the factors that shaped such a groundbreaking mentality. He was a prominent figure during the time of the fall of the roman republic, and having opposed Julius Caesar, Cicero was found himself deeply involved in political turmoil. In fact, after Brutus assassinated Caesar, Brutus reportedly called upon Cicero to restore the republic.