

ON THE COMMONWEALTH

MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO (C. 106-43 B.C.)

from *The U.S. Constitution: A Reader*, p. 29

Marcus Tullius Cicero was the great defender of the Roman republic and a master of oratory. The author of several books on politics, philosophy, and rhetoric, he was the first to speak of natural law as a moral or political law, and was an important influence on the Founders.

C. 54–51 B.C.

...[33] True law is right reason, consonant with nature, spread through all people. It is constant and eternal; it summons to duty by its orders, it deters from crime by its prohibitions. Its orders and prohibitions to good people are never given in vain; but it does not move the wicked by these orders or prohibitions. It is wrong to pass laws obviating this law; it is not permitted to abrogate any of it; it cannot be totally repealed. We cannot be released from this law by the senate or the people, and it needs no exegete or interpreter like Sextus Aelius. There will not be one law at Rome and another at Athens, one now and another later; but all nations at all times will be bound by this one eternal and unchangeable law, and the god will be the one common master and general (so to speak) of all people. He is the author, expounder, and mover of this law; and the person who does not obey it will be in exile from himself. Insofar as he scorns his nature as a human being, by this very fact he will pay the greatest penalty, even if he escapes all the other things that are generally recognized as punishments....

Marcus Tullius Cicero, "On the Commonwealth," in James E. G. Zetzel, ed., *On the Commonwealth and On the Laws* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 71–72.