

William H. F. Altman, (2016) *The Revival of Platonism in Cicero's Late Philosophy: Platonis aemulus and the invention of Cicero*. Lanham, MD; London: Lexington Books. xxxii + 351 pp. \$100.00. ISBN 9781498527118 (hbk).

In Altman's two books on Plato, *Plato the Teacher* (2012) and *The Guardians in Action* (2016), we find the traditional reading of Plato, i.e., the philosopher of 'unchanging, eternal, and transcendent Ideas' (p. xviii), combined with a rather unique interpretation of Plato as a pedagogue, whose main goal is not to instantiate the ideal state in reality but rather to spread an enlightened form of democracy through an ennobling education program of philosophy. Altman's interpretation of Cicero as reader of Plato naturally progresses from these two books. Cicero is not the Academic Skeptic, as recent scholarship has argued, but rather an advocate for Platonic transcendence – and one no less relevant to our own historical moment than to the crisis for which Cicero's philosophy was immediately intended: the fallen Republic. Central to Altman's argument on Cicero is the main theme of his earlier work on Plato: the return to the cave. According to Altman, although Plato's belief in transcendent Ideas of the world of intelligibility is genuine, the goal of Plato as philosophical pedagogue is not transcendence but rather a return to the chaotic world of becoming, in which politics take place. Cicero then, in his emulation and rivalry of Plato, is picking up where Plato left off. He is not merely indulging in Platonic transcendence but relying on his philosophical rhetoric at its most subtle level to win over an ideologically fraught and often incredulous Roman readership to political enlightenment and devotion to the Ideas.

Altman's unique reading relies partly on an unusual ordering of Cicero's dialogues and partly on a repositioning of Cicero's skeptical persona as an insincere stance, deployed to meet a skeptical readership halfway in order to win them over incrementally to Platonic transcendence. Altman derives his re-ordering of Cicero's dialogues chiefly from Book 2 of the *de Divinatione* where Cicero oddly lists the *de Fato*, which had yet to be written, as second and the *de Re publica* as the last of three items (*de Divinatione* 2.3). Altman argues that the only logical explanation for this unchronological ordering must be that Cicero had esteemed his *de Re publica* so highly that he saw the rest of his philosophical repertoire as existing to prepare the reader for it. Altman strengthens this position by pointing to the second reading list offered by Cicero in *de Divinatione*, which follows closely after the first but focuses instead on rhetoric, or 'the precepts of speaking' (Altman's translation of *dicendi praecepta*) (p. xii). In this second list, it is striking that the third item is the *Orator* in which Cicero, according to Altman, embraces the eternal, unchanging ideas

that he had apparently rejected in his middle works. Viewing the *de Re publica* (especially, the *Somnium Scipionis*) and the *Orator* as the intended crescendo-pieces to Cicero's political and rhetorical philosophy, respectively, furnishes Altman's overall argument with the advantage of recasting works, such as the *Academica*, as transitional moments in a pedagogical journey that ends with a genuinely felt embrace of Platonism.

One of the more interesting moments of this pedagogical journey comes in Chapter 1, which is devoted to *de Legibus*. Altman sees Cicero's main reason for not finishing *de Legibus* in the fact that he makes his own Platonism all too transparent, which would have hurt Cicero's pedagogical enterprise of disguising himself as a skeptic only to reveal the true light of his Platonism only at the end of his philosophical canon. The crux of his argument comes in Cicero's own words, *nemo ipsius tam similis esset quam omnes sunt omnium* ('no one is as similar to oneself as all are to all' at 1.29, my translation), which is followed by an explanation of how individual error leads human beings not to recognize their common humanity. This argument has transcendent implications for Stoic cosmopolitanism (the idea of all humans belonging to the rational, universal city of gods and men). For Cicero, however, this Stoic cosmopolitanism finds its bedrock in Plato's cave allegory: 'An awareness of the contingency and comparative insignificance of the self depends on a prior awareness of an ethical and ontological center outside of oneself, and thus ethical altruism follows from an ontological Copernicanism that Plato had imagined in the Cave Allegory' (p. 47). Altman, however, does go a bit too far in calling Cicero an altruist: 'an altruistic return to the cave is considerably easier for someone who has overcome the illusion of 'individuality', and service to our fellow men is infinitely easier for those who regard everyone else as equal to, and essentially the same as, ourselves' (ibid.). This myth of Cicero's altruism is not only contradicted by the Roman senator's acquisition of private property but also by the Ciceronian Scipio's rejection of democracy in *de Re publica*: 'and when all matters are administrated through the people, albeit a just and moderate people, equality itself becomes unfair (*ipsa aequabilitas ... iniqua*), as it permits no degrees of difference in status (*nullos gradus dignitatis*)' (*de Re publica* 1.43, my translation). This, of course, does not preclude an Aristotelian generosity, the precondition for which is private wealth. Altruism, however, is a far cry from generosity and is most successfully deployed as an ideological straw man requiring that no individual live for one's own gain but rather must dedicate oneself wholly to others. Since Cicero advocates the pursuit of self-interest as well as devotion to the state, he is enlightened and generous, but not altruistic – and that's a good thing!