

‘ Consulares philosophi ’ again

In an article in the *Revue des études augustiniennes* V, 1959, pp. 99-102, Professor Michel RUCH deals with this unusual metaphor ascribed to Cicero by St. Augustine, and offers an interpretation. I find myself in agreement with the main point in his interpretation. I cannot, however, agree with some of the arguments he offers and with some of the points he makes. I also suggest that some points should be made more clearly and distinctly, and that one or two historical considerations should be added.

I shall begin with a minor point. Professor Ruch offers at the outset two interpretations which, in his own words, « paraissent au départ possibles » : *a.* that ‘ consulares ’ is the noun and ‘ philosophi ’ the adjective which describes it ; *b.* the other way round. He starts with considering the ‘ possibility ’ *a* quite seriously, and only some more evidence he brings later on from other passages in Cicero makes him reject it in the end. I find all this a waste of effort. A hard look at the two texts of St. Augustine would convince anybody that, in both contexts, the talk is about philosophers, not about ‘ consulares ’. In the passage from the *Epistula ad Nectarium* (which, incidentally, is *Epistula CIV*, and the passage quoted from it appears on pp. 583-4 of vol. XXXIII of the *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*), Augustine is discussing the various opinions of philosophers about life after death, and the ‘ consulares philosophi ’ are contrasted with a philosopher, Epicurus, not with other consulares. The same applies to the passage from *Contra Iulianum* IV, xv, 76, where, again, the context is clearly philosophical, not political and ‘ consularis ’. Since only a few lines are quoted by Ruch, it may be useful to quote the passage at some length to illustrate this :

‘ Verum, obsecro te, si philosophos nobis antepone gestiebas, cur non potius eos commemorasti, qui de moribus, quae pars ab eis philosophiae vocatur ethica, quam nos moralem dicimus, solertissime disputantur ? hoc enim tibi potissimum congruebat, qui honestate quidem mentis inferius, tamen bonum esse censes corporis voluptatem. sed quis non quid prospexeris cernat ? ne scilicet... nuncupavit ; et ipsi Stoici maxime inimicissimi voluptatis,

quorum testimonium ex persona Balbi apud Ciceronem disputantis, verum quidem, sed quod tibi prorsus nihil prodesset, interponendum putasti '.

In both passages the talk is about *philosophi*, not about *consulares*. This in itself is enough to rule out the possibility of Ruch's interpretation *a*, and to make it impossible « au départ ». Add to this the fact that, in the passage from the *Contra Iulianum*, the ' *consulares philosophi* ' are called also ' *honestiores philosophi* '. If we took ' *consulares* ' as a noun, described by the ' adjective ' ' *philosophi* ', we should have no choice but to do the same to ' *honestiores* '. How would Professor Ruch translate this ? Perhaps « tous les honnêtes gens qui ont été convaincus de l'immortalité de l'âme » ? But enough of this ' possibility '.

Professor Ruch does seem to arrive at the more correct conclusion when, on p. 100, he quotes the Ciceronian phrases ' *plebei philosophi* ' and ' *minuti philosophi* '. I agree with the main conclusion he reaches on pp. 100-101, but I shall try to make it look a little clearer.

In the passage from *Tusc. Disp.* II, 3, 8, Epicurus and Metrodorus are contrasted with ' *Plato reliquique Socratici et deinceps ei qui ab his profecti sunt* '. In *De Div.* I, 30, 62, it is again Plato and Socrates whose *authority* (notice this word !) is preferred to that of Epicurus and the ' *minuti philosophi* '. In the *Epistula ad Nectarium*, it is again Epicurus who is contrasted with the ' *consulares philosophi* ' — and, says St. Augustine, they are called ' *consulares philosophi* ' ' *quod eorum magni pendat auctoritatem* '. This seems to shew as conclusively as one can in a case like this, that the phrase ' *consulares philosophi* ' designates Plato, Socrates and their disciples ' *et deinceps ei qui ab his profecti sunt* '.

Why one should also read into this phrase the meaning « ceux qui n'ont pas la ' *disserendi elegantia* ' », I cannot see. It is true that in *Tusc. Disp.* II, 2, 6, ' *disserendi elegantia* ' is considered as one of the virtues of those very philosophers who are called ' *consulares philosophi* ' ; that in *De Fin.* IV, 10, 24 the word *elegantiora* is contrasted with the word *popularia*. One could add to this that in *De Div.* I, 30, 62, Cicero says of Epicurus ' *sentit autem nihil umquam elegans, nihil decorum* '. But all this would not mean that this ' *disserendi elegantia* ' is part of the *concept* ' *consulares philosophi* '. It so happened in fact, that these ' *consulares philosophi* ' also had ' *disserendi elegantia* ', which Epicurus, the ' *plebeius philosophus* ', lacked : it was not, however, their ' *elegantia* ' that turned them into ' *consulares philosophi* ', nor was it his lack of it that made Epicurus a ' *plebeius philosophus* '. As Cicero himself says (*De Fin.* I, 5, 15) : ' *Oratio me istius philosophi non offendit : nam et complectitur verbis quod vult et dicit plane quod intelligam. et tamen a philosopho, si afferat eloquentiam, non asperner : si non habeat, non admodum flagitem* '.

Nor can I see why one should accept Ruch's sophisticated treatment of phrases like 'quasi maiorum gentium Stoicus'. They are good examples of Cicero's use of political metaphors for various kinds and ranks of philosophers. But it looks as if Ruch wants us to treat this in a more precise way, using formulae like: 'patres minorum gentium = plebei', 'patres maiorum gentium = patricii', and then the non sequitur: 'maiores = consulares'. This latter one is far from being precise, first, because 'fuerint patricii minorum gentium' (*Fam.* IX, 21, 1), and, secondly, because in the actual terminology of Roman politics 'consulares' is something different from 'patricii', as we all know. True, 'consulares philosophi' is contrasted with 'plebei philosophi', and then there is the 'senatus philosophorum'. But I still suggest that all one can read into it is the fact that Cicero uses various political phrases to designate philosophers of varying importance and authority. In other words, as we would probably say in our business metaphors, these are his phrases for 'first rate' and 'second rate' philosophers. Mathematical precision should not, perhaps, be demanded in the use of metaphors.

The fact that Cicero uses political metaphors like 'plebei philosophi' and 'senatus philosophorum' in a context like this seems to prove — as far as one can prove in a matter like this — that Augustine is referring to what is almost certainly a real Ciceronian phrase. The fact, pointed out by Ruch, that this metaphor does not recur in any of Cicero's extant writings, proves only that it is a very unusual metaphor, which, of course, is true. So, for that matter, are the phrases 'senatus philosophorum' and 'maiorum gentium Stoicus', and each of them, as far as I know, occurs only once. The words *quasi* and *tamquam* used by Augustine seem to point in the same direction. Cicero normally uses one of these words to introduce unusual metaphors: a look at Merguet will provide a few examples (e. g. *Q. F.* III, 1, 5). But what more do we need than two of the phrases we have just discussed? In *Lucullus* (= *Acad. Pr.*) 41, 126 (and not 1, 26 as quoted in Ruch) Cleanthes is called 'quasi maiorum gentium Stoicus'; and in *De Nat. Deor.* I, 34, 94 Cicero is using the phrase 'tamquam senatum philosophorum recitares' (it is a pity that Ruch did not find it necessary to mention this *tamquam*). I suggest that Augustine is citing an actual Ciceronian metaphor — a metaphor like this, being so unusual, is outstanding enough to be remembered. Being a good Ciceronian and a good writer of Latin, he knows that a phrase like this should be introduced with a *quasi* or a *tamquam*. Quoting from memory, he cannot remember which of these two was used by Cicero, and therefore uses once 'quasi' and once 'tamquam'.

Ruch (p. 102) rightly mentions the influence of Antiochus of Ascalon as a possible explanation for the attitude expressed by this phrase. The passages he quotes from *De Fin.* Book V, where Piso is talking, are sufficient in themselves to represent the opinions of Antiochus on that matter, and can be supplemented by a passage in *Acad. (Post.)* I, 4, 17, where Varro, another disciple of Antiochus, says very similar things. One should,

however, remember, that Cicero never considered himself a disciple of Antiochus or a member of his 'Vetus Academia'. His own view of the matter is given in a passage in *Tusc. Disp.* V, 4, 11, among other places. And yet, one can see from the passages brought by Ruch, and from a few other passages I shall presently quote, that Cicero does put great value on the authority of Socrates and Plato. Is it something more than the influence of Antiochus — an influence which Cicero does so much to resist? It may be the general attitude of the age, with its appeal to the 'antiqui' and their authority. This characteristic of the age has been indicated and discussed recently — although not with as much documentation as one would wish — by Professor Olof Gigon in a paper in *Entre-tiens de la Fondation Hardt*, Tome III, pp. 24-61.

This is, I think, as far as one can go in explaining Cicero's use of this metaphor. It is, however, interesting to see how Augustine himself explains Cicero's use of an uncommon metaphor — and at this point, I fear, one must part ways with him. As I tried to shew, he is almost certainly quoting a real metaphor actually used by Cicero. But the explanations he gives for Cicero's use of this metaphor are, I think, to a large extent his own. This can be shewn from the simple fact that in each of the two places where he quotes this phrase, he gives it a different explanation. In the passage in *Adv. Iul.* the reason given for Cicero's use of this metaphor is 'propter ipsam honestatem' — naturally, in an ethical context. In the *Epistle to Nectarius*, the reason is 'quod eorum magni pendat auctoritatem' in the disputes about immortality — again a natural thing in a passage concerned with this sort of problem. But all this looks as though all that Augustine really knows about this metaphor is that Cicero uses it for the 'antiqui' of the Socratic and Platonic schools, and in various places he tries to give what is his own interpretation to this fact.

To prove this, one has only to continue the passage from the *Epistula ad Nectarium*:

... 'quod eorum magni pendat auctoritatem, quoniam, cum extremum diem fungimur, non extingui animam sed emigrare censent, et ut merita quoque eius adserunt seu bona seu mala ad beatitudinem vel ad miseriam permanere. hoc congruit et litteris sacris, quarum me cupio litteratorem'.

In other words, Augustine makes Cicero call the Socratics 'consulares philosophi' and accept their 'auctoritas' because they believed in immortality and in rewards and punishments after death. Now this looks a little suspicious in a Christian writer so much influenced by the Platonists, and who always does his best to shew that Plato was a kind of 'praeparatio evangelica'. But the problem may, perhaps, be solved if we look at a few texts. In *De Div.* I, 30, 62 — a passage quoted by Ruch to illustrate another point — Cicero says he would trust the *auctoritas* of Plato and Socrates more than anything Epicurus said. The context here

is divination, not exactly the same thing as immortality, although a problem of the same kind. But the same note is heard again in *Orator* XIII, 42 : ' me autem qui Isocratem non diligunt una cum Socrate et cum Platone errare patiantur '. Here the context is far removed from the question of immortality or any religious problem : Cicero is provoking the authority of Socrates and Plato on a matter of what we would call literary criticism. But then, in *Tusc. Disp.* I, 17, 39 he uses almost the same phrase — ' errare mehercule malo cum Platone... quam cum istis vera sentire ' — and this time in connection with the question of immortality.

What happened, I think, is that Augustine, being much more interested in his later life in religious than in any other questions, remembered more vividly a fact that, to him, was of greater significance : that Cicero provokes the authority of Plato on the question of immortality. After all, thinking of immortality and life after death, the example of Plato will come to mind naturally. As a next step, Augustine assumed that Plato's — and Socrates' — belief in immortality was what made Cicero put so much on their authority. In this he is plainly wrong. Immortality, as we have seen, is only one of the problems where the authority of Plato and Socrates is called forth.

It is, perhaps, a little more disconcerting to find Professor Ruch making a similar mistake when, without warning, he translates ' consulares philosophi ' under possibility *a* as ' tous les illustres Romains qui ont été convaincus de l'immortalité de l'âme ' — as if the word ' philosophus ' means ' a believer in immortality ' — and when he says again (p. 101) : « Une fois de plus nous constatons que sont désignés par *antiqui* ceux qui croient en l'immortalité de l'âme. » This I cannot understand. If Ruch wants to remind us that, as a matter of *fact*, Socrates and Plato believed in immortality (or at least did so as far as Cicero and Augustine are concerned), it is very kind of him : but I cannot see how this helps us towards a better understanding of the term ' antiqui ' or the metaphor ' consulares philosophi '. But it looks as though Ruch wants us to believe that a belief in immortality is included in the *meaning* of the word ' antiqui ' as used by Cicero in contexts of this type. For he says : « Hirzel (*Untersuchungen zu Ciceros philosophischen Schriften* II p. 428 et 834) a relevé, en de nombreux endroits chez Cicéron, la même valeur du terme *antiquus*. » This, to me, is incomprehensible. I have looked up the pages in Hirzel again and again. There is no mention in either of these two pages that Hirzel thinks that the word *antiquus* means ' believer in immortality '. Nor do I think that Ruch himself could prove that this is the *meaning* of the word ' antiquus ' in any place in Cicero. I repeat : what we are after is the meaning of a word, « la valeur du terme *antiquus* ». Nobody contests the *fact* that, for Cicero and Augustine, Plato and Socrates were believers in immortality. What I contest is that this makes any difference to the meaning of the Latin word ' antiqui ' when used of them. The *term* ' Roman Catholic priest ', for example, does not have the *meaning*

' an unmarried man ', although, as a matter of *fact*, every single priest of the Roman Catholic Church is an unmarried man.

One minor question remains : where did Cicero use this metaphor ? It is a minor question, because, at present, we would hardly be able to make much of it even if we knew that this phrase was used, say, in the *Hortensius*. It is, however, unanswerable as well — at the present state of the fragments and remains of Cicero's lost writings. In the Teubner edition, it is counted, as Fragment 102, among the fragments of the *Hortensius*. It is, however, not included in Professor Grilli's new edition of that dialogue. Grilli follows his practice, not to include fragments that do not mention the *Hortensius* by name as their source. He is probably right : a phrase like this could occur in more than one of the lost writings. Nor does it make much difference.

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