

NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

A NOTE ON MINUCIUS FELIX, *OCTAVIUS* 4.4

G. L. CARVER

Itaque progrediar ulterius: de toto integro mihi cum Octavio res est. Si placet, ut ipsius sectae homo cum eo disputem, iam profecto intellet facilius esse in contubernalibus disputare quam conserere sapientiam. (Oct. 4.4)

THERE APPEARS TO BE EVIDENCE to suggest that the line *ut ipsius sectae homo cum eo disputem* in the above passage is spurious. The entirety of *Oct.* 4.4 is somewhat ambiguous, but, has, I believe, been correctly interpreted in Pellegrino's paraphrase: "in una conversazione fra amici è facile a Ottavio biasimare la mia religione; ma non altrettanto se discutiamo con argomenti filosofici, al che io son pronto."¹ Waltzing is in substantial agreement: "ce sera une discussion en règle, comme celle des philosophes et non une conversation entre amis."²

It is clear that Caecilius is challenging Octavius to engage in philosophic controversy (*conserere sapientiam*), rather than to a discussion among friends (*in contubernalibus disputare*), for the following reasons: (1) the context itself suggests preparations for a philosophical debate rather than a conversation among friends, as is evidenced by the selection of an arbiter, and by Caecilius' phrase "*de toto . . . res est*" (*Oct.* 4.4), (2) "*intellet*" would be meaningless if Caecilius were merely proposing a continuation of the informal discussion, (3) a philosophical contest is what in fact ensues, (4) in ch. 39 a military metaphor is used to describe the discussion that has just concluded.

The antithesis *in contubernalibus disputare quam conserere sapientiam* is obscured by the verb *disputem*. One is misled by the use of the same verb in the phrases *ut . . . disputem* and *in contubernalibus disputare* to suppose that it is the first member of the antithesis rather than the second which Caecilius proposes. The confusion is heightened a few lines later by another use of *disputare* (*Oct.* 5.5), which must refer to *conserere sapientiam*, the activity proposed. This confusing use of *disputare* may have led an editor to misinterpret the passage and then to add *ut . . . disputem* as an erroneous explanation, to the effect that it was the first element of the antithesis rather than the second which Caecilius was proposing.

¹M. Pellegrino, *M. Minucii Felicis Octavius con introduzione e commento (Scrittori latini commentati per le scuole* 173; Turin 1947) 69.

²J. P. Waltzing, *Minucius Felix Octavius* (Bruges 1909) 56.

It seems all the more probable that *ut . . . disputem* was the addition of a later hand when one further considers its redundancy after the phrase *de toto . . . res est* and the notorious textual problems surrounding the phrase *ipsius sectae*.³ J. Mähly,⁴ the first critic to propose an emendation, either by the insertion of *non* before *ipsius sectae* or by the reading *ut ipse alius sectae*, also noted the obscured antithesis and unnatural wording of the passage, but not aware of *ut . . . disputem* as the main cause of the difficulty, proposed converting *sapientiam* to *more sapientium*.

It is possible that *si placet* governs *disputem* directly and not through *ut*.⁵ On this interpretation, *ut* would belong to the phrase *ipsius sectae homo* ("as one of the same school"). Whether the dependent clause is introduced by *ut* or not, however, the antithesis between *in contubernali-bus disputare* and *conserere sapientiam* is in either case obscured. Likewise, on either interpretation, the phrase *de toto . . . res est* is redundant. If the clause *ut . . . disputem* is omitted, there is a logical train of thought, "I will have it out with Octavius from start to finish; then, if he wishes, he will find out. . . ." But if *ut . . . disputem* be included, the balance shifts ("If he wishes me to argue with him, then he will find out. . . ."), thus leaving the clause *de toto . . . res est* conspicuously redundant. Further, with the omission of *ut . . . disputem* a neatly balanced structure results, with clear stresses felt on *placet* and on *intelleget*, both verbs being in the third person singular. But, if *ut . . . disputem* be included, the balanced stress on the two verbs is diminished by the longer construction. Although the clause *ut . . . disputem* would be balanced by another dependent clause (*facilius esse . . . sapientiam*), there is a measure of inconcinnity, since the first clause has a subjunctive verb (with or without *ut*), while the second is cast in the infinitive construction. It would seem probable, had Minucius himself composed a clause dependent on *placet*, that he would have used an infinitive construction (*si placet [me] . . . cum eo disputare*), in order to balance *iam intelleget . . . facilius esse* with more even parallelism.⁶

The impersonal *placet* is used in the *Octavius* in only two other passages (*Oct.* 2.3; 19.3), neither of which is followed by a subjunctive clause. In *Oct.* 19.3 *si placet* alone is similarly used in the context of a proposal: *Recenseamus, si placet, disciplinam philosophorum*.

³For a discussion of *ipsius sectae*, see J. Beaujeau's recent commentary, *Minucius Felix Octavius. Texte établi et traduit* (Coll. Budé; Paris 1964) 75.

⁴J. Mähly, "Kritische Beiträge zu Minucius Felix," *Jbb. f. class. Philol.* 99 (1869) 422-437.

⁵For the construction, see Hofmann-Szantyr 289, p. 531².

⁶In *Oct.* 2.3 Minucius does, in fact, employ the infinitive after *placet*. And structural concinnity is a hallmark of his style. For a discussion of this, see C. Becker, *Der 'Octavius' des Minucius Felix* (Bayer. Akad. d. Wiss., Phil.-Hist. Kl., 2) (Munich 1967) 82-84.

Oct. 4.4 is located in a section that seems to contain reminiscences of a bucolic singing match,⁷ in which *si placet* alone is a natural expression occurring within the context of the challenge to the contest, as in Calp. *Ecl.* 6.60: *iudice me sane contendite, si libet . . .*; *ibid.* 66: *si placet, antra magis vicinaque saxa petamus.*

Another possible influence on this section of the *Octavius* is Cicero's *De Legibus* 1.14 f.,⁸ in which again the parenthetical *si placet* appears without a dependent clause: *Nos vero, et hac quidem ad Lirem, si placet, per ripam et umbram. . . .*

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY, TEMPE

⁷Compare the similarity in situation and language between Caecilius' melancholy attitude just before the debate with Octavius is staged and Corydon's very similar temper at the opening of Calpurnius' *Ecl.* 4 before he contests with Amyntas in amoebean song:

M. Quid tacitus, Corydon, vultuque subinde minaci quidve sub hac platano, quam garrulus adstrepit umor, insueta statione sedes? iuvat algida forsán ripa levatque diem vicini spiritus amnis? C. Carmina iam dudum, non quae nemorale resulent, volvimus . . . (Calp. *Ecl.* 4.1-6)

. . . Caecilius nihil intendere neque de contentione ridere, sed tacens, anxius, segregatus dolere nescio quid vultu fatebatur. Cui ego: "Quid hoc est rei? cur non agnosco, Caecili, alacritatem tuam illam et illam oculorum etiam in seriis hilaritatem requiro?" Tum ille: "Iam dudum me Octavi nostri acriter angit et remordet oratio . . ." (*Oct.* 4.1-3)

⁸See S. Colombo, "Osservazioni sulla composizione letteraria e sulle fonti di M. Minucio Felice," *Didaskaleion* 3 (1914) 81,82 for *De Legibus* as a general source of the proem of the *Octavius*. Note especially the similarity in the language of the two works, which is noticeable mainly in their peripatetic stages:

Quin igitur ad illa spatia nostra sedesque pergimus? Ubi, cum satis erit ambulatum, requiescemus. (*Leg.* 1.14)

Visne igitur ut . . . spatiis . . . insistens, interdum adquiescens . . . disputat . . . ripa inambulantes, tum autem residentes . . . (*Leg.* 1.15)

. . . in istis . . . obicibus residamus, ut et requiescere possimus et intentius disputare. (*Oct.* 4.5)

Cicero's *disputat* in *Leg.* 1.15 may be the source of the troublesome *disputare* of *Oct.* 4.5, which occurs in an analogous context and with other verbal parallels.