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Who is Consoled by the *Consolation of Philosophy*?

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A Thesis

In

The Department

Of

Philosophy

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## Abstract

### Who is Consoled by the *Consolation of Philosophy*?

Kiriakos Katakos

We developed the answer to this question on the basis of Boethius' own expectations, namely that a good life, an honest life deserves its reward and not the ultimate punishment of death. Then, following a long journey accompanied by Lady Philosophy, Boethius understood that God's ways do not coincide with human thinking and the nature of Fortune. This led him to the reconsidering of the notion of virtue and also the notion of Providence. Thus, the story of the *Consolation of Philosophy* becomes the search for a spiritual reward, a reward which is only in the power of a good God. But to reach this conclusion one has to accept the means leading to it, namely the conviction that human intelligence is able to rise with the help of philosophy beyond ordinary understanding of good and evil and penetrate the mysteries of God.

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## Remarks on Abbreviations and References

*The Consolation of Philosophy*

All quotations are taken from:

Boethius. *The Consolation of Philosophy*,

translated by V.E. Watts,

published by Penguin Books, 1969.

All page references in the thesis are to this edition.

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION: THE LIFE AND WORKS OF BOETHIUS

### a) Birth and formation

Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius was born in Rome at approximately 480 AD. As his nomenclature indicates, he was part of the very illustrious gens of Anicia. Their renown as nobility was only increased when they had converted to Christianity in the middle of the fourth century. In the fifth century, this line produced two emperors (Petronius Maximus in 455, and Olybrius in 472) and a pope (Felix III from 483-492).

While Boethius was still a child, his father died. He was subsequently taken in the guardianship of the leading families in Rome, especially that of Symmachus. Symmachus was himself consul in 485, and later became prefect of Rome and head of the senate in 524-525. "He was a man of correct and stately eloquence, of irreproachable character: the Cato of his age, but with the old Stoic virtues softened and refined by his Christian faith; a diligent student, and the author of a Roman history in seven books, a man also full of fine local patriotism for the great city which was his home, and willing to spend some of his vast wealth freely in the repair of her public buildings...."<sup>1</sup> Since Boethius was brought into the household of Symmachus, their companionship spanned a lifetime. Symmachus was Boethius' closest friend. He played a significant role in all aspects of his life. He was a lover of letters and high culture. He knew Greek and greatly esteemed the Hellenic culture of the Eastern Empire. Consequently, Boethius was provided with the richest education consisting of more than merely Latin letters but also of the Greek arts and sciences. As this kind of education was absent in the Latin West, there have been conjectures that Boethius was sent to the East



to be educated. Athens and Alexandria were the cultural centres wherein he would have imbibed that learning revered by Symmachus. He developed a great yearning for all the liberal arts and the speculative philosophy of the Greeks. Since his adolescence, disregarding his youth, his zeal for learning brought him a degree of maturity, in his youth, study was a pleasure, and what for some was a burden, for him was a privilege.<sup>2</sup> In time, this zeal bore its fruits.

Symmachus later became Boethius' father-in-law since Boethius married Symmachus' daughter Rusticiana. She bore two sons, Boethius and Symmachus.

#### b) Public life

Boethius entered public life early, following Plato's teaching that philosophers must involve themselves in politics in order "to prevent the reins of government falling into the hands of wicked and unprincipled men to the ruin and destruction of the good" (C of P, Bk. I, Ch 4, p. 41). It seems, however, that his early tasks were not essentially administrative. In his early twenties, he had begun to write and translate works on the liberal arts and had acquired a reputation as a scientist. Consequently, King Theodoric sought his help on several occasions. For example, he desired a waterclock to be made for the king of the Burgundians, and an orrery, which would exhibit the expertise and learning that manifested itself in Theodoric's realm. For the king of the Franks, he was asked to choose a player of the cithara since he was knowledgeable in the discipline of music. He had been given the honorary titles of Patrician and Senator, which provided the freedom to pursue his literary aspirations. It was

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<sup>1</sup>Hodgkin, T. *Italy and her Invaders* III. 2nd ed. Oxford, 1896, p. 525.

<sup>2</sup>Cappuyns, M. art. Boèce, DHGE 9, 1937, p. 349.

in the year 510 that he received his first nominal title which was that of Consul for the year.

From this time on, we can safely conjecture that he joined his literary pursuits with his public career, since we lack any record of his life for the next decade.

In 522, he was made *Magister Officiorum*. His duties were to provide the general maintenance of all public services of the state, including the courts. In this same year, his two sons were appointed jointly to the office of Consul. It was a year of great honour and pride. Boethius honoured Theodoric in return with a panegyric in his name.

### c) Italy and Theodoric

In the fifth century, Italy was devastated by wars and weakened by political and cultural decadence. The weakness and deterioration of Roman rule left Italy an easy target for invaders. The invaders were the Goths who controlled what is now central and Eastern Europe, from Gaul to the Danube. In 493, seventeen years after the Goths took control of Italy, Theodoric the Ostrogoth became king of Italy and attempted a revival of peace and prosperity, ruled by the principle of Roman civility and respect for the authority of justice. He was leader who had brought his people a long way, through many a battle in search of a new home. He was firm and courageous. He also possessed a deep respect for Roman tradition. As a child, he had spent ten years in Constantinople, in the imperial court. Although he was a Goth, his chief political policy as the king of Italy was based on Roman law, following carefully the *Theodosian Code*. His ideal was to subordinate the Romans and the Goths of Italy to the same rules equally. Due to Theodoric's wise rule, from 493 to 523, Rome was under relative peace.

Theodoric, in terms of organised religion, was very tolerant. Although an Arian, he

was anything but a religious fanatic. He did not involve himself in the theological controversies of his day, but he could not control the direction that these controversies had taken. It was roughly within the context of these controversies that his successful reign was compromised, although, in the end, the reasons were far from religious.

#### d) Politics and theology

The major theological controversies of that age centred on how the church should officially understand the Trinity, and the person of Christ. This controversy divided the churches of the West from those of the East. Rome upheld the formula of the Council of Chalcedone of 451. This formula affirmed "that Christ was made known in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, and without separation".<sup>3</sup> Another formula known as Monophysitism affirmed that the person of Christ has only one, the divine, nature. This doctrine was upheld for the most part by the ruling class of Constantinople and Alexandria. In 482, the Emperor Zeno commissioned a document written by Acacius, patriarch of Constantinople. It was named the *Henotikon* and its aim was to mediate between the two positions. Its solution, however, was essentially to omit mentioning anything of the central problematic concerning the nature of Christ. Rome vehemently rejected the document, further being angered by the fact that an emperor commissioned it without the authority of the pope. Acacius was ex-communicated by Rome in 484, and thus begun the Acacian schism which lasted from 484 to 519. Rome would not, under any circumstances, come to an agreement until the name of Acacius was omitted from the diptychs by reason of

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<sup>3</sup>Mair, J. 'The Text of the Opuscula Sacra', in Gibson, M.T. (ed.) *Boethius, his life, thought, and influence*. Oxford, 1981, p. 207.

official ex-communication.

In 519, under the emperor Justin, Rome's wishes were granted and the schism ended. The end of the schism, though, brought about a new dilemma: the advent of religious persecution, instigated by Justin, the Orthodox Christian emperor of the East against the Arian Christians of the East. Furthermore, the grandson of Theodoric, Segevic, died by order of his father, the Catholic king of Italy. Theodoric's sister Amalafrika, queen of the Vandals, was imprisoned by the Catholic Hilderic.

Perhaps Theodoric felt cheated by a lack of toleration and civility from other leaders. Further, perhaps by concluding that there was growing a general conspiracy against Arianism which would ultimately threaten his hold on Italy, Theodoric began to think about the possibility of treasonous activity against his imperial court, and then, retribution against those who might stand in his way. This became apparent in the ruling against Boethius. The charge of treason was made against one man, the senator Albinus. Afraid that Albinus would be imprisoned without being tried, Boethius attempted a defence. It seems that Theodoric would not tolerate such a stand even by the illustrious Boethius. So, through his imprudence, Boethius fuelled the wrath of Theodoric, and sealed his fate.

His downfall, though, was equally precipitated by some falsifications of the senate itself. In the *Consolation of Philosophy*, Boethius is disillusioned by their dishonesty, especially since he stood up for "that most venerable order". He speaks of false testimony against him given by certain individuals like Basilus. Basilus "had previously been dismissed from the royal service and was forced into impeaching [Boethius] by his debts" (Bk. 1, Ch 4, p. 42). Boethius complains that if he had been given a chance, he would have won his

freedom based on the weight of the false testimony. At the end, he was charged with treason. then there was an additional charge of divination directed at his work as a philosopher. This charge is based on the Theodosian Code's condemnation against fortune-tellers and numerologists. It might have happened that Boethius had fallen victim of such an accusation since most were ignorant of the speculative sciences, which contributed to the confusion between fortune-telling and philosophy.

These circumstances forced Theodoric to act as a tyrant, thus ending the life of Boethius in the year of 524 or 525.

#### e) Ambition and accomplishments

The initial ambition of Boethius was to translate and comment on all the works of Plato and Aristotle. All he accomplished in this task were the translations of the logical writings of Aristotle. Nevertheless, the Middle Ages esteemed him as a logician, and until well into the twelfth century, his translation was the primary source of Aristotelianism in the West. Consequently, it was from Boethius that the Middle Ages learned to discuss the universals, the topics, and to form syllogisms according to the rules of Aristotle.<sup>4</sup>

An extension of his philosophical interests was his works on the liberal arts, which came to be known as the quadrivium, or "the four paths leading to philosophy". Consequently, through his translations and commentaries of the Hellenic writers, Boethius shaped for centuries the educational curriculum of the Middle Ages.

Boethius also influenced the Middle Ages with his theological writings. They were

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<sup>4</sup>McKeon, R. (ed.) *Selections from Medieval Philosophers*. Charles Scribner's Sons- New York. 1929, p. 66.

written in order to provide a clear, logical, and universal solution to the theological controversies of his age. Their peculiar characteristic was that by applying Aristotelian logic to the problem of the Trinity, Boethius sought to reconcile faith and reason. This formula was at the source of the intellectual spirit of theology and philosophy in the Middle Ages.

Finally, Boethius wrote his masterpiece, the *Consolation of Philosophy*. It was written while in prison awaiting execution. Its subject-matter concerns the universal suffering of humankind brought about by the evil forces operating in the world. In order to find consolation for his own suffering, and to find meaning in this apparently absurd world, Boethius turns to philosophy. The work alternates between prose and poetry. Boethius adopted a dialogue form, which featured a pseudo-dialogue between the personification of philosophy and himself. This work had a great influence on all aspects of medieval culture. It contains elements of both pagan and Christian wisdom. We can say that it is a work that exhibits their fundamental agreements. Its ideas are contained within the problems of fortune and happiness, evil and the omnipotence of God, God's foreknowledge and human free will. Its concerns and solutions were profoundly human, and were shared by the schoolmen of the Middle Ages, as well as such poets as Dante. It has been translated into several languages, its translators including Geoffrey Chaucer, King Alfred, and Queen Elizabeth I.

## CHAPTER I- WHY IS THERE A NEED FOR A CONSOLATION?

### Introduction

If a troubled individual seeks consolation in a reading of Boethius' last work, the *Consolation of Philosophy*, will the work offer this individual a genuine consolation? Boethius, through his own ordeal, offered posterity comfort in times of suffering and confusion. If the *Consolation of Philosophy* can remain relevant to contemporary readers, despite the gap between today's culture and that of the Middle Ages, what are those elements that transcend cultural differences and offer the individual the proper wisdom for him to be consoled? What we are searching for, then, is the basic wisdom inherent in Boethius' work.

Let us start our reading with the title of the work. It should give some indication of the work's problematic. We are placed within the realm of a philosophical consolation, therefore, our first order of business is to decide how to enter this realm and discern down which path the author wishes to guide us. We believe that if this path of inquiry is followed, we will be rewarded with an authentic understanding of this work. Let us, then, propose a question that might lead us into its problematic: who is consoled by the *Consolation of Philosophy*? Why do we believe that this is a valid beginning? Although there are many ways to enter into a reading of this work, our primary concern is to satisfy the requirements we have set for ourselves in the previous paragraph. We wish to address the individual for which such a work has greatest significance. We must remember that Boethius was alone facing his death, seeking within himself the elements that will lead him to consolation. Boethius' journey must become our journey.

Our aim is not a general study of the historical appearances of a consolation found

within the history of literature and literary genres, since scholarship of the *Consolation of Philosophy* has already focused extensively on these aspects. Our thesis is not a work of research in the sense of recapitulating what has been written on the subject; rather it is a work of reflection. Let us justify and orient our project through the words of an authority on philosophy in the Middle Ages:

"After centuries in which logical and metaphysical discussions were grounded on distinctions learned from Boethius, and after further centuries in which only his *Consolation of Philosophy* was remembered and his translations and commentaries were almost forgotten among better attested interpretations of the ancient philosophy. Boethius has come in recent times to suggest problems, rarely to philosophers, but more often to scholars. Whether he is to be classed as an original thinker or as an encyclopaedic transmitter of the fragments of an ancient tradition: whether the Boethius of the theological treatises and the Boethius of the philosophic works are one person, are subjects for scholarly inquietude. Yet that such questions should have arisen, itself throws light on the nature of Boethius' contribution to philosophy. Historically, and not a little intellectually, he falls in the line of translators, commentators, and encyclopedists which runs through Chalcidius, Macrobius, Martianus Capella, Cassiodorus, Isidore of Seville, and the Venerable Bede. And for Christianity, whether because he was a pagan (which is highly improbable), or because he held to a conviction that faith and reason are independent (which is to attribute to him an almost anachronistic sophistication), or because his pagan philosophy and his Christian faith existed unmixed side by side in his thought, his exposition of the Aristotelian logic prepared the development of an intellectualist tradition; at the other end of the tradition the opportunity and need might arise to analyse and state faith radically distinct from knowledge; meanwhile reason and understanding could be discussed in logical, metaphysical, and psychological terms".<sup>5</sup>

It is our intention to discuss the *Consolation of Philosophy* in metaphysical terms because as a true neo-Platonist, Boethius believed in the possibility of surpassing our mind and communicating with the absolute, which is God.

We are aware that Boethius entered the Middle Ages through the controversies raised

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<sup>5</sup>McKeon, R. (ed.) *Selections from Medieval Philosophers*. Charles Scribner's sons- New York, 1929, pp. 65-66.



according to the Aristotelian and Platonic conception of the universals. Here we can quote

Richard McKeon again:

"The entire Book [Book I of the second edition of the commentaries of the *Isagoge* of Porphyry] is commentary on not more than a page of text from Porphyry, and a good two-thirds of it is devoted to developing and enforcing in full detail a remark of his concerning the utility of the study of logic. The remaining part is devoted to a penetrating -and startlingly cautious- discussion of the problem of the universal. As in the case of the defence of logic, the discussion grows out of a remark by Porphyry -his refusal to discuss in an introductory work questions concerning the possible existence of genera and species outside our mind; concerning their nature, corporeal or incorporeal; and their relations to sensible objects. To answer such problems in any detail would be to develop an entire philosophy. Particularly, it would necessitate a choice between Plato and Aristotle as Boethius conceived and stated them. Boethius, none the less, with reservations and for reasons which he carefully states, undertakes the discussion of the basic notions of the problem. The later development of scholastic philosophy is based, significantly, upon these questions. It is needless of course to say, as has frequently been said, that Boethius introduced the question to the middle ages and set the twelfth century to discussing the universal: the problem is to be found in Augustine, and it would be difficult to proceed far in philosophy without encountering it. Yet it is striking that most usually the discussion was introduced in twelfth century writings by a reference to Boethius and to his translation of the questions of Porphyry".<sup>6</sup>

Within the essential problematic of the *Consolation of Philosophy*, i.e. when anyone might experience the terrible consequences of an existence such as that of Boethius, the logical questions stated above will be useless. Help can only come from a novel conception of a spiritual existence, such as the existence of God, if the human mind is capable of attaining to it. This will be the story of the consolation.

The basic presupposition of our work is that an authentic reading will emerge if we remain within those circumstances out of which there arose a need for a consolation. Our first question must then be: Why is there a need for a consolation? Out of the original setting of

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<sup>6</sup>McKeon, R. *ibid.* pp. 67-68.

the *Consolation of Philosophy*, that is, the banishment of Boethius, our interpretation will begin. The latter problem is at the base of Boethius' philosophical reflection in the *Consolation of Philosophy*. The requirements, therefore, that must be met in order to reach a consolation, i.e., those requirements which remain within the conditions that create the need for a consolation, set the horizon out of which Boethius' philosophy will emerge. Philosophy must then become that wisdom, which is the only thing, left to the individual who is caught up in the web of events, which can prepare the victim for the outcome of the events.

The approach to the *Consolation of Philosophy* can be twofold: either 1) we accept the Platonic and neo-Platonic philosophy of reaching beyond the sensible, in which case, the consolation will be a spiritual, a sort of "religious", consolation, which goes beyond earthly conditions of life; or 2) we reject, and many do, the Platonic and neo-Platonic approach to reality, in which case, the *Consolation of Philosophy* will be rendered meaningless. We do not think that we should reproduce all the arguments of the atheists, empiricists, and agnostics against the existence of the Platonic ideas or the existence of a spiritual reality as we find it both in Plotinus and St-Augustine (*Confessions*, Bk. 7). Therefore, our task, for these reasons, will be limited to what can be retrieved from the *Consolation of Philosophy* both on the metaphysical and on the ethical level. Our title demands these distinctions and it will dictate the analysis that follows.

a) Why is there a need for a consolation?

If we wish to deal with the problematic of the *Consolation of Philosophy*, we must seek out that which constitutes its essence. For this reason, we first must ask the "why" of the title. Is there a reason it is called a consolation? Or, might we ask when came the

moment that Boethius needed to be consoled? Generally speaking, we seek a consolation when we suffer; Boethius did suffer. What were the particulars of his suffering? We know that, through his philosophical undertaking, he involved himself in very innocent affairs. He sought to translate and comment on the scientific and philosophical writings of the Hellenic authors. His intention was to enlighten his contemporaries and humankind in general through the learning of the Greeks. This seemingly innocent venture brought upon his head the greatest disaster. Hence, we are introduced to Boethius amidst the worst moments of his life. His first words are grief-stricken, overwhelmed by melancholy, his only wish is to be snatched away by death. As death fails to arrive, he is left to write his complaints against "fickle Fortune":

"First fickle Fortune gave me wealth short-lived  
Then in a moment all but ruined me.  
Since Fortune changed her trustless countenance,  
Small welcome to the days prolonging life.  
Foolish the friends who called me happy then  
Whose fall shows how my foothold was unsure".  
(Bk. 1, Ch 1, p. 35)

Boethius' disappointment was especially great because Fortune had favoured him throughout his life. He was born into nobility; he was given a rich education; he was assured a career in public life; he had the opportunity and the time to pursue his personal goals and interests in philosophy; and finally, he was surrounded by supportive family and friends. Therefore, he found happiness in life because all he sought from life was fulfilled. Boethius' happiness, then, was dependent on the gifts that Fortune had given him. Once Fortune withdrew these gifts Boethius suddenly became unhappy. At the beginning of the work, then, we find Boethius

in a state of unhappiness. In pursuit of the reasons of Boethius' consolation, we must penetrate his suffering by seeking the root of his unhappiness. The road by which to enter Boethius' world then is through his conception of happiness.

How is Boethius' conception of happiness related to the realities of his daily life? We learn this by listening to Boethius' complaints. Imprisoned in a dungeon, Boethius describes thus his present conditions to Lady Philosophy: "Surely the severity of fortune's attack on me needs no further mention; it is self-evident. Look at the mere appearance of this place. Is it the library of my house which you chose yourself as a place of sure repose and where you so often used to sit with me discussing all the topics of philosophy"? (Bk. 1, Ch 4, p. 41) He almost blames the great Lady when he says to her: "This, then, is how you reward your followers" (Bk. 1, Ch 4, p. 41). We here are given the first indication of how Boethius understood the place of Fortune in his life. His good fortune was a reward for being a disciple of philosophy - in other words - for being a man of virtue.

Let us further reflect on Boethius' conception of life, and his expectations of its end, happiness. It is here that we may uncover the nature and extent of his dismay. We have stated in our general introduction that Boethius entered public life in the spirit of Plato's teaching, which seeks the benefit of humankind. Virtue as the guiding principle of action secures the foundations of a strong state. He says to Lady philosophy: "You and God are my witnesses that the only consideration to impel me to any office was a general desire for good. This was the reason why I had no alternative but grimly to resist evil and why in the struggle to defend justice I have always been indifferent to the hatred I inspired in men who wielded greater power than mine - an indifference inspired by the knowledge that I had freely followed my

conscience" (Bk. 1, Ch 4, p. 41). Therefore, in following the wisdom of his predecessors, he had learned that virtue is the source of a good life. According to this teaching, man must be virtuous both in mind and in deed, and human deeds must be the consequence of a mind intent on doing good. If his happiness is the end of virtue, are Boethius' expectations that his virtue will assure him good fortune as long as he dwells on earth not that which constitutes Boethius' rational belief concerning his notion of happiness? In Boethius' mind then happiness is a reward, and what we shall term an external reward, i.e., fortune, fame, success. This would mean that a rational person would normally expect to benefit from virtuous action. This follows from the principle that a virtuous person generally does what is rational. Then, we can now understand why Boethius blamed the world, a world that had condemned him for his honesty and his innocence in trying to enrich humanity through his writings. He says: "And now you [Lady Philosophy] see the outcome of my innocence - instead of reward for true goodness, punishment for a crime I did not commit" (Bk. 1, Ch 4, p. 45). Boethius is troubled by the very incomprehensible attitude of his fellow citizens: "Over and above all this, another weight is added to my load of ills in that the world does not judge actions on their merit, but on their chance results, and they consider that only those things which are blessed with a happy outcome have been undertaken with sound advice" (Bk. 1, Ch 4, p. 46). This means that Fortune rules in the world; only now, Boethius realises that fortune is blind, then, where would we find the reason that commands virtuous action? His downfall has left Boethius confused because the notion of merit is overshadowed by the notion of chance. The introduction of the notion of chance topples his rational expectations since it opposes the notion of reason. If this is the case, Boethius finds himself in an impossible situation because

his present conditions in the dungeon are totally opposed to what he expected from Fortune, and from life. Under these circumstances, the following problem arises, which will be a central problem of our reflections: does life still hold a purpose for Boethius? Given his expectations of external rewards, how can happiness be achieved in a dungeon awaiting execution? What we witness is the collapse of a conception of life based on what we shall term external happiness.

Let us then sum up the latter part of our reflections, answering why there was a need for a consolation. Boethius' conception of happiness was based on the reward for virtue, a reward dependent on Fortune, which is an arbitrary external force. This view presupposes that the world, which is governed by Fortune, must reward us justly according to our deeds, hence, Fortune must be a fair judge in measuring the value of each individual. If we act virtuously, we ultimately depend on an uncontrollable external force to reap the benefits of our actions. The notion of merit will also depend on external forces, i.e., on Fortune. Thus, when the notion of merit collapses under the weight of chance, so too our whole conception of happiness and of life collapses.

This outlook on life determines the need for a consolation. In the moments of our life when our expectations are not fulfilled, when our mind cannot accept the irrationality of a situation which results in suffering, we are in need of consolation; but if the irrationality of life has placed a wall before our eyes, have we any chance to find a consolation? How can we leap beyond this wall? In other words, how can we speak of a consolation as a remedy? The consolation, then, has to take into account the double aspect of happiness: the one based on expectations grounded on a good life, a life of virtue, hence, happiness as a merit. Then

comes the disappointment in these rational expectations. Boethius' main challenge becomes to re-define his life and his conception of happiness in a world whose events are governed by an irrational force: chance or fortune.

#### b) Fortune and destiny

Boethius' challenge of re-defining his conception of happiness may be better understood if we speak of it within the context of one's destiny. This notion is here conceived as the base of Boethius' problem of happiness, since happiness as an end of life implies a particular direction within a particular destiny. Given our previous conclusions, we are in agreement with Lady Philosophy on the cause of Boethius' suffering: "If I have fully diagnosed the cause and nature of your condition - says Lady Philosophy - you are wasting away in pining and longing for your former good fortune" (Bk. 2, Ch 1, p. 54). She diagnosed Boethius' ills correctly: Boethius looked to his fortunes to find happiness, that is, in the world that surrounded him, i.e., his family, friends, and works, he found his destiny.

In his existential crisis, and the loss of his privileged lifestyle, he discovered what came between him and his destiny: the inconstancy of fortune. Since good and evil are equally in Fortune's power, there cannot be a predictable outcome to existence. The very fact that the concrete world creates the central problem for us (in that we always run a risk in making a life in this world; whatever our choices may be, they always contain the double aspect that our undertakings might succeed or they might fail) demands that our attention must be focused on Boethius' existential reality.

Let us further reflect on this issue, which is always part of our discussion on the problem of happiness. Before his downfall, Boethius saw the world as a system of causes and

effects: for him nothing was beyond the sight of rational laws. When his fortune was good, and he was happy, he was able to see only this aspect of reality. As expressed in this excerpt of a poem he wrote of a world watched over by a supremely rational God, another aspect eventually occurred to Boethius:

"All things thou holdest in strict bounds, -  
To human acts alone denied  
Thy fit control as Lord of all.  
Why else does slippery Fortune change  
So much, and punishment more fit  
For crime oppress the innocent?  
Corrupted men sit throned on high;  
By strange reversal evilness  
Downtreads the necks of holy men  
Heap condemnation on the just;  
....  
Look down on all earth's wretchedness;  
Of this great work is man so mean  
A part, by Fortune to be tossed?"  
(Bk. 1, Ch 5, pp. 47-48)

Had Boethius not been condemned, perhaps he might have affirmed the supreme reason underlying his conception of reality. Life, though, since it is located in the concrete, taught him otherwise. The nature and power of fortune became obvious. Life, then, is inextricably related to the fortuitous aspect of the concrete world. This obstacle is unavoidable. At the centre of man's existence lies the tension existing between a rational order and fortune.

What, then, did Boethius discover amidst his change of fortune? He discovered contingency as the supreme reality of the concrete world. Fortune, as much as it is an external reward, is also external to our control; this is the irrational element of the existential sphere. In Boethius' eyes, chance has become the principal force of the world and man must succumb to its whims. Examples in the world are plenty: people born into chaotic



circumstances, families and homes broken by war and destruction; in other words, men and women that have no control over the external forces that determine their destinies. This is stated in the *Consolation of Philosophy* when the goddess Fortuna is speaking: "Inconstancy is my very essence; it is the game I never cease to play as I turn my wheel in its ever changing circle, filled with joy as I bring the top to the bottom and the bottom to the top" (Bk. 2, Ch 2, p. 57). Lady Philosophy further reminds Boethius that "there is no constancy in human affairs, when a single swift hour can bring a man to nothing" (Bk. 2, Ch 3, p. 60). This is the reason why the nature of human affairs is "fraught with anxiety" (Bk. 2, Ch 4, p. 62). Boethius lived the full intensity of this truth. He discovered that life as he lived it was just one possibility, and beyond this was the totality of reality. Life holds many meanings. Whatever one may envision concerning his own life may not be approved by his neighbour as Boethius did not approve of the wickedness in the world. The existential sphere is the sphere of the possible.

In our reflections, then, we have seen how happiness ultimately depends on a conception of life and reality. When we speak of happiness as the end of life, our conception of happiness indicates the purpose of our life. If we know that we should live a good life, and at the same time we may be punished for our goodness and not reap the benefits of our goodness while the wicked prosper, then, what would be the point of living, say, according to the commandments? Can we speak of any purpose to life at all? With the introduction of the reality of Fortune, the notion of destiny becomes problematic. If life is dragged along by fortune, then, life is merely a burden once it is devoid of the notion of the certainty of happiness. Without this certainty, our direction in life becomes uncertain, and only if we are

fortunate may we find true happiness. This is unfathomable for the rational mind of Boethius and this is why he has trouble accepting his downfall. Fortune has led us to an impasse and it is here that we must attempt to leap beyond this impasse, if it is at all possible. One thing is certain, though, it will be Boethius' task to restore the notion of destiny so that it may become acceptable in his mind if he is to find any happiness in the last days of his life. The pursuit of re-conceiving this notion will be at the centre of what follows in the rest of our reflections.

Let us put this impasse within the context of the consolation. A consolation presupposes a solution, but what may serve as our starting-point? The solution must arise out of the nature of our problem. We have identified our problem as arising out of the tension found in life between what is rational, and what is irrational. It seems, then, that this absurdity is the primordial condition of man. Existence, because it contains both the rational and the irrational is a paradox and is in need of a resolution without abolishing its primordial characteristics. This fact demands that we leap out of the world of rationalist wisdom concerning human destiny, into one that arises from the questioning of the dearly held principle of the world's rational essence. Must this not give birth to a wisdom that may surpass any rationalist philosophy that will help us out of our impasse? Is this not where there is a need for another kind of wisdom, and perhaps, another kind of happiness, when our philosophies have collapsed under the weight of the contingency of existence? Boethius, facing this new eventuality questions the validity of the very principles that have previously held his understanding of reality together. Then, there is a need for a wisdom that takes into account the brute forces operating in our existence. It is here that we come upon our greatest

difficulty: is there an acceptable, or reasonable solution for Boethius' happiness in this world that may restore his sense of destiny?

c) Poetry as a false remedy

The primary obstacle for Boethius in his destitution was to find where he may turn for help in dealing with the absurd turning of his existence. This was his primary need. His reason having been beaten by the blows of fortune, his vision of reality was described by him in the following way: "I seem to see the wicked haunts of criminals overflowing with happiness and joy; I seem to see all the most desperate of men threatening new false denunciations; I seem to see good men lying prostrate with fear at the danger I am in while all abandoned villains are encouraged to attempt every crime in the expectation of impunity or even in the hope of reward for its accomplishments; and I seem to see the innocent deprived of peace and safety and even of all chance of self-defence" (Bk. 1, Ch 4, p. 46). Perhaps we can liken Boethius' situation with that of Adam and Eve in the Bible who were cast out of paradise onto a world previously unknown to them, and hence, very frightening. In both cases, do these frightened and confused individuals not need some form of aid, perhaps some sort of shelter? It is with this problematic that we must presently deal. Will any shelter do? We must answer the question of what help is required in these situations, always within the context of the requirements of a consolation.

Why do we need a shelter? In Boethius' case, it must serve as a relief from the pressures of the external world. Boethius first tried to find such relief in poetry:

"I who once composed with eager zest  
Am driven by grief to shelter in sad songs;  
All torn the Muses' cheeks who spell the words  
For elegies that wet my face with tears.  
No terror could discourage them at least  
From coming with me on my way.  
(Bk. 1, Ch 1, p. 35)

Grief drives Boethius to find shelter in sad songs that make manifest all his complaints against fortune. He wishes to bring out the tragedy of the universal suffering of humankind, to lament the profound unfairness of its condition. He wishes to protest. If such a protest is at the source of how Boethius will deal with his suffering, can we properly call this a solution for an individual facing the absurdities of his existence? This all depends on what Boethius conceives as a solution to his problem. Does he merely want to cope with his suffering, or does he rather wish to overcome his suffering? The answer to this question will become evident once we clarify the significance of his abandonment of the Muses of Poetry for the help of Lady Philosophy.

The poetry that he began writing was melancholic. In it, Boethius escapes the task of trying to overcome his suffering. This is why he is merely complaining, and melancholic poetry becomes inefficient because with it Boethius is intensifying his sorrow since such poetry is at the source of these complaints. It is here, then, that Lady Philosophy intervenes and tries to correct Boethius' confusion. As Boethius says, she became angry "at the sight of the Muses of Poetry at my bedside dictating words to accompany my tears" (Bk. 1, Ch 1, p. 36). Why? Because, as Lady Philosophy explains, "they have no medicine to ease [our] pains, only sweetened poisons to make them worse. These are the very women who kill the rich and

fruitful harvests of Reason with the barren thorns of Passion" (Bk. 1, Ch 1, p. 36). Lady Philosophy begins her argument thus: "When [evil] forces attack us in superior numbers, our general conducts a tactical withdrawal of his forces to a strong point.... Safe from their furious activity on our ramparts above, we can smile at their efforts to collect all the most useless booty: our citadel cannot fall to the assaults of folly" (Bk. 1, Ch 3, p. 40). Philosophy, then, seems to contain those elements that will aid man in times of crisis. When Lady Philosophy is banishing the Muses of Poetry from the mind of Boethius, she says: "Sirens is a better name for you and your deadly enticements: begone, and leave him for my own Muses to heal and cure" (Bk. 1, Ch 1, p. 36). Lady Philosophy seeks to prepare the way for the wisdom required for our existential problems. As such, she is preparing the way for an overcoming of suffering by coming to terms with the adverse reality with which men and women have sometimes to deal. Therefore, for a remedy of our suffering, we need those elements, which enables us to face the pitfalls of our existence. Along these lines shall we find the significance of Boethius' leap out of the realm of melancholy onto the path of philosophy.

#### d) The consolation of philosophy

Generally speaking, philosophy must concern itself with all the problems that have to do with reality. Some people use philosophy for this end. Among these problems, there are some that affect people more deeply than others. When people search for the laws of the inner workings of the natural world, we speak of natural philosophy. When they search to provide an adequate theory to bind men and women within a state, and to lay bare its proper foundations, we speak of political philosophy. In our present reflections, we are concerned with existential problems that challenge philosophy most since they are problems that make

us suffer profoundly because they threaten the very foundation of our existence. For instance, what is the true nature of happiness amidst the unforeseeability and injustice of the concrete realm? If the source of happiness lies in an individual's hopes to establish a good life here on earth, then, are his hopes illusions, and his notion of destiny meaningless? We have already spoken of the reality of the concrete world with its peculiar characteristic that it allows all men and women to seek happiness, good and evil alike. Then, the concrete will lay many pitfalls for the manifestation of virtue in the world, which has already been said to be the ground of happiness. The question of happiness, then, is an enduring question for humankind in that it is never exhausted within the realm of concrete existence. For those who wish to pursue such problems, as did Boethius, they must make it an ever-pressing question for philosophy.

We have, then, returned to our problematic. Let us now see whether we have acquired a guide that will help us on our way. Can we speak of philosophy as a guide toward a consolation? This depends on what we mean by a guide. When do we need one? When the path we are in does not have a clear direction. What is the function of the guide? It must have the ability to provide hints and signs that will advance one on a path always toward a particular direction. Then, the consolation of Boethius requires two elements: the guide or teacher, and the follower or student. What is being presupposed? First, it is in man's in-born powers that he can be consoled. Then, that a philosophical wisdom may be a proper means to travel within the paradoxes of human existence. Then, for Boethius, it will mean that he has to reconsider the means to reach his goal - consolation.

The means that is likely to take Boethius out of his desperate situation is a new

power, an intellectual illumination. Then, philosophy must be the vehicle that will transport Boethius from darkness into the light of wisdom. This conviction follows the Platonic and neo-Platonic teaching of the soul's ascent to the sun or to the centre point of concentric circles. According to this teaching, the human soul is imprisoned in the body in darkness. However, it is in the soul's nature to rise above this darkness towards the illuminating sun, the ultimate seat of truth. This illuminating action must here be applied to the darkness of an existential crisis.

We had already discarded, following Boethius, the false remedy of poetry, because of the influence such poetry had on Boethius: "His neck bends low in shackles thrust/and he is forced beneath the weight/to contemplate the lowly dust" (Bk. 1, Ch 2, p. 37). Poetry, then, did not seek to provide or develop the human powers that will be needed for a consolation. The movement from poetry to philosophy is the requirement that allows Boethius to leap from a passive state of subservience to an active role of consolation. What are the conditions for such an active role on the part of man? The influence of melancholic poetry has the following effect on the mind of man:

"So sinks the mind in deep despair  
And sight grows dim: when storms of life  
Blow surging up the weight of care,  
It banishes its inward light  
And turns in trust to the dark without".  
(Bk. 1, Ch 2, p. 37)

If we speak of the dark without and the inward light, our leap leads us within. Then, it is the first task of philosophy to restore the proper conditions under which an individual will be able to overcome his suffering. Philosophy must search for the essence of man, which makes the

leap from poetry to philosophy an authentic leap from the passions that drag a man according to their whims, back to his senses, and his mastery over his passions. What are these passions? Where do they find their source? Is it not when man puts his trust in fortune that her sudden changes will utterly turn a man inside out? "It is as if you had become swollen and calloused under the influence of these disturbing passions...." (Bk. 1, Ch 5, p. 49). Lady Philosophy tells Boethius. Lady Philosophy scolds Boethius saying: "I gave you arms to protect you and keep your strength unimpaired, but you threw them away" (Bk. 1, Ch 2, p. 38). For Boethius, the move into philosophy is a move into himself as the primary condition of his recovery through an intellectual illumination.

We have, then, achieved our first major step into the consolation of Boethius: inwardness. Lady Philosophy says to Boethius: "And so it is not the sight of this place which gives me concern but your own appearance, and it is not the walls of your library with their glass and ivory decoration that I am looking for, but the seat of your mind. That is the place where I once stored away - not my books, but - the thing that makes them have any value, the philosophy they contain" (Bk. 1, Ch 5, pp. 48-49). Why? Because it is through the human intellectual capacity that we find what is of greatest value, which is truth. Truth in the sense of what the mind may accept as solutions to what it finds problematic. Nothing can work out such problems and find truth and wisdom but the human mind. Then, man will be able to convert this truth into a wisdom for a way of life. Nothing can make such a wisdom its end but the soul of man. These possibilities are contained in the being of man. As Plato said, the soul naturally strives towards the light of truth since it is immaterial, and hence, can hold eternal truths. These are the powers of man and it is only through the operation of these



faculties, the will and the mind, that will advance him toward wisdom. It is here that we justify the presence of Lady Philosophy: as a good guide, she has the proper methods that will put these faculties into operation. The inward leap is one that signifies man's calling to see himself clearly, and to come to terms with his own suffering.

This philosophical undertaking will be developed within the context of the metaphysical reflections that will follow in the rest of our reflections, which are grounded on our understanding that the pursuit to solve human problems through an intellectual exercise, is an ethical duty for all men and women. This is Boethius' conviction. We shall see how Boethius reconsiders his previous convictions and shapes a broader conception of reality whose acceptance is the essential condition for his consolation. Our reflections have thus far tried to clarify the distinction between poetry and philosophy as Boethius' primary action toward his consolation. It will become evident, though, that philosophy itself will have to undergo a transformation, i.e. it will have to be broadened, since our next order of business will be to challenge philosophy with Boethius' expectation of death.

## CHAPTER II- DEATH AND REVELATION

### Introduction

In the previous chapter, the goal was to establish the reasons why Boethius needed to be consoled. Boethius' own complaints led us to the problem of happiness. Since happiness is the end of human life, we all have certain expectations which are the ground of our happiness. Since our expectations are not necessarily fulfilled in the here and now of our existence, this implies the possibility of our unhappiness. Facing this eventuality, man may reach an impasse in his life if his previous convictions and reasoning are overshadowed by irrational forces, as was the case with Boethius. At this point, that chapter introduced the notion of consolation containing the possibility of a counterbalance to the state of unhappiness. Boethius sought a consolation as a response to his downfall. In addition, he raised the question of a philosophical consolation, seeking to overcome his suffering through the means of an intellectual illumination with the help of philosophy. Since Boethius' rational expectations were shattered, he needed a new kind of wisdom at the source of his consolation. This implies that he was in need of some sort of revelation that would serve as the starting-point for his further reflections. Why? Since Boethius' conception of happiness remained unfulfilled in prison, he was forced to seek a conception of happiness elsewhere than in external rewards. All that awaited him in his cell was death, therefore, the problem of happiness, for Boethius, had to be resolved within his expectation of death. It, then, becomes the object of the following chapter to see what the expectation of death can reveal about human happiness, and see to what extent it can provide the conditions which would counterbalance suffering.

a) How to die?

How is it that we can speak of death and revelation? What can death reveal? We can perhaps re-phrase this question by asking, can the expectation of death bring about the conditions for a revelation? Is it not that Boethius, in his own reflections, is faced with the question of how to die? In his place of banishment, Boethius is confined to radically different circumstances than in his former life. Briefly, if there are no more benefits and no advantages to be sought from life, he can have no expectations save what awaits him by the hands of his executioners. This very condition is at the source of our problem concerning happiness. Happiness has reached its very limitations since it no longer holds any meaning attached to good fortune. It seems that the meaning of life has been negated for Boethius by death which awaits him. When facing these unavoidable circumstances, his life, or his conception of life, can no longer hold the same meaning as before, he can no longer have any more practical expectations for himself. Hence, the role of fortune has ceased at the limit of life.

The expectation of death, then, becomes, paradoxically, the underlying condition of Boethius' life in his place of banishment. We must call this condition a paradox since all practical expectations are negated and life itself seems to have reached its limit for Boethius. What, then, can be gained in his own reflections in the *Consolation of Philosophy*? As Boethius previously fathomed a proper way to live, now, he wishes to call on philosophy to teach him a proper way to die. This is the underlying condition of his consolation. If to be consoled though implies the overcoming of suffering, we must be able to speak of happiness in the expectation of death. Can philosophy turn death, or the expectation of death, into such a wisdom which is not practical, i.e. not for life, but for the end of all activity? If this is

possible, then, it must be Boethius' only consolation before his death. Boethius has no choice but to face the facts of his own downfall. His sole task in order to console himself is to alleviate the tension created by the clash between a life ruled by reason and the forces of fortune. He must radically change his expectations. A radical change which becomes the resolution of a paradox comes only through a revelation. Whence is this revelation?

b) The revealing of fortune

Is it not here that we need our guide to provide hints towards the resolution of our most incomprehensible problems? Can Boethius make his banishment meaningful? Since Boethius has no choice but to face the facts of his own downfall, what does he discover? It is here that Lady Philosophy says that Boethius' downfall is also part of a revelation. What is a revelation? It is the revealing of a truth so far hidden to man. Lady Philosophy explains: "You [Boethius] have discovered the changing faces of the random goddess. To others she still veils herself but to you she has revealed herself to the full" (Bk. 2, Ch 1, p. 55). Whence is this revelation? Lady Philosophy explains: fortune, because it is inconstant, is not always bad, "For bad fortune, I think, is more use to a man than good fortune. Good fortune always seems to bring happiness, but deceives you with her smiles; whereas bad fortune is always truthful because by changing she shows her true fickleness" (Bk. 2, Ch 8, p. 76). The truth revealed is the contingency of the concrete which indicates the finiteness of things in the world. Then, let us see what conclusions we can draw from this revelation.

The very revelation of the fickleness of fortune implies that life based solely on the expectations of external rewards cannot bring happiness. Happiness, it seems, is not determined by our existential situations. Boethius must prove this to himself since it is the

first indication that happiness is not exhausted within the notion of fortune, thus remaining possible even in his place of banishment. Then, we must reconsider the notion of happiness, and see if we can discover its true nature.

Whence is happiness? So far, our conviction was that virtue is the ground of happiness. It follows, then, that the virtuous person must be happy. It also must follow that the wicked person is unhappy. It is our task to demonstrate the truths of these beliefs. Can we call Boethius a virtuous man? He sought virtue throughout his life, but he became unhappy when his expectations of fortune, fame, and success, were not fulfilled. Was it not Boethius' error to put his trust in fortune in order to achieve happiness without taking the risk of being virtuous and, in spite of it, being disappointed? Lady Philosophy says to Boethius:

"If after freely choosing [Fortune] as the mistress to rule your life you want to draw up a law to control her coming and going, you will be acting without any justification and your very impatience will only worsen a lot which you cannot alter. Commit your boat to the winds and you must sail whichever way they blow, not just where you want" (Bk. 2, Ch 1, p. 55). She later concludes: "So you should not wear yourself out by setting your heart on living according to a law of your own in a world shared by everyone" (Bk. 2, Ch 2, p. 58). We learn here that Boethius' error is to attach the notion of external merit to virtue. Can we truthfully call virtue an external result of our conception of life? This depends on what we mean by virtue, and what reality it implies for man's life.

c) Virtue and happiness: reconsidering the notion of virtue

Virtue, as opposed to wickedness, reflects the notion of the Good. When man is convinced that he must be virtuous in order to be happy, as was the case with Boethius, his

conception of reality hinges on the notion of the Good as the underlying principle of this reality. Boethius took this presupposition as the purpose of an ethical life, i.e. a good life. Here, the Good implies the notion of perfection realised in this world. Furthermore, Boethius is convinced that the world is created by a perfect being as expressed in the following assertion: "In fact I know that God the creator watches over His creation. The day will never come that sees me abandon the truth of this belief" (Bk. 1, Ch 6, p. 50). Boethius' starting-point is a good and perfect God. Such a world implies order, which further implies purpose, and cannot be governed by chance. In fact, if God is perfection, the end or purpose of the world must be God as well. All things have their purpose, but, what is their purpose in following God? Lady Philosophy says: "So that it is by goodness that He rules all things, since He rules them by Himself and we have agreed that He is the good. It is this which is the helm and rudder, so to speak, by which the fabric of the universe is kept constant and unimpaired" (Bk. 3, Ch 12, p. 111). In sum, all things seek the Good in their participation of God's perfection on earth, natural creatures in their natural ends, and spiritual creatures in their spiritual ends. In the case of man's role in the universe, happiness is his purpose. Therefore, happiness is also his good which must carry within it a degree of perfection. If virtue is the ground of happiness, virtue is the source of man's good. When man seeks happiness, he seeks virtue as the underlying condition of human life.

Here lies the central question. Wherein lies virtue? Where is its source? For Boethius, it was attached to the notion of external rewards. Then, virtue was attached to certain practical expectations which were the ground of Boethius' conception of life. Happiness, then, will depend on how we conceive "human life", because our conception of

virtue is also attached to our conception of life. When man grounds his life on fame and success, he is interpreting happiness and virtue as external merit. Consolation will only be possible if Boethius changes his conception of a good life. Then, if happiness will not be attached to the notion of external rewards, to what notion will it be attached? Here we face a difficulty. Is it not the case that, in this world, human virtue, as the proper end of humankind, must necessarily be followed in order to achieve true human goodness? Therefore, virtue, as the underlying principle of human nature, is a duty. Human freedom is meaningless without the notion of duty, otherwise, even wickedness would be acceptable. We witness here the revision of important notions such as virtue, good, and happiness. as they are linked with duty.

#### d) Duty as the distinguishing feature of man's reality in the world

With the notion of duty, we have advanced in our reflections concerning the problem of human happiness. since we have acquired a standard that may measure the validity of our conceptions of happiness, and the extent and nature of our errors. What does duty imply? The pursuit of virtue must be exercised without expectation of practical reward. In seeking the good in wealth or power, people deceive themselves and falsely attribute the good to such ends. This falsification reflects the turning away from reality, i.e. from perfection, which was claimed to be the driving force of a good life. Hence, the "false happiness" Lady Philosophy speaks of, is a lack of reality, a lack of goodness.

Our problem, then, becomes a metaphysical problem. Let us listen to Lady Philosophy concerning the errors of men and women in seeking their specific ends: "And so when a being endowed with a godlike quality in virtue of his rational nature thinks that his

only splendour lies in the possession of inanimate goods, it is the overthrow of the natural order" (Bk. 2, Ch 5, p. 67). Can we not translate the overthrow of the natural order as the turning away from reality that we have mentioned above? For what is the natural order but reality itself organised in a single end, which is a perfect and good God. Lady Philosophy says: "This world would never have coalesced into one form out of such diverse and antagonistic parts had there not been one who could unify such diversity....Nature's fixed order could not proceed on its path and the various kinds of change could not exhibit motions so orderly in place, time, effect, distance from one another, and nature, unless there was one unmoving and stable power to regulate them. For this power, whatever it is, through which creation remains in existence and in motion, I use the word which all people use, namely God" (Bk. 3, Ch 12, p. 110). God's creation is the totality of reality, the all, and the one. This order, though, becomes threatened by human error. Human error in man's pursuit of happiness leads us to human nature as a metaphysical problem since human error compromises the nature of reality itself in man's turning away from his duty as man. Then, it is Lady Philosophy's task to restore Boethius' conception of happiness so that it may reflect her standard which is the proper functioning of the natural order, or the order of reality. Lady Philosophy tells Boethius that in seeking "to adorn [his] superior nature with inferior objects, [he is] oblivious of the great wrong [he does his] Creator" (Bk. 2, Ch 5, p. 67).

How does man compromise his being by seeking existential wealth and power? We should ask, can these earthly goods bestow on man what is required by his being? Lady Philosophy says to Boethius: "If every good is agreed to be more valuable than whatever it belongs to, then by your own judgement when you account the most worthless of objects as



goods of yours you make yourself lower than those very things, and it is no less than you deserve. Indeed, the condition of human nature is just this; man towers above the rest of creation so long as he recognises his own nature, and when he forgets it, he sinks lower than the beasts" (Bk. 2, Ch 5, pp. 67-68).

There are degrees of reality because there are degrees of being. All things are real insofar as they exercise their powers in seeking their proper ends. The ends, which form the meaning of the creature, are always greater in being than the creatures themselves. Therefore, in their physical existence, all creatures reflect their dependence on a higher being, their form, which is given by God. This is God's gift to each creature. In the case of man, since he is rational, he must recognise his superiority over other creatures. Lady Philosophy says: "For other living things to be ignorant of themselves, is natural; but for man, it is a defect" (Bk. 2, Ch 5, p. 68). It is a defect because it is man's duty to recognise the purpose of his being to be greater than external rewards. Duty implies this recognition. It is in this notion that man discovers the measure of himself as the measure of his being. Otherwise, as Lady Philosophy says, man loses his reality when he does not exercise his powers properly and turns away from God as the purpose of his virtue. Therefore, men and women who turn away from their true nature lose their reality as human beings. Here are some examples Lady Philosophy gives as expressed in the following metaphors: "The result is that you cannot think of anyone as human whom you see transformed by wickedness. You could say that someone who robs with violence and burns with greed is like a wolf. A wild and restless man who is forever exercising his tongue in lawsuits could be compared to a dog yapping. A man whose habit is to lie hidden in an ambush and steal by trapping people would be likened to a fox....So what

happens is that when a man abandons goodness and ceases to be human, being unable to rise to a divine condition, he sinks to the level of being an animal" (Bk. 4, Ch 3, p. 125).

Let us sum up our reflections on happiness. We tried to identify the essential error Boethius committed as the source of his unhappiness. We traced it back to his notion of a good life which is grounded in the notion of virtue. His expectations reflect a conception of "human life" which necessarily bound us to the consideration of what "human life" implies.

For Boethius, it implied an ethical life manifested in practical results. After further reflection concerning the nature of human virtue and the reality it reflects, we discovered that human virtue is attached only to the notion of duty which specifies the constitution of man's being in this world. This led to the question of man's reality, which became our central problematic.

We wished to show the true nature of happiness as the true good of man, then, it was possible only by showing the conditions of man's reality and power in this world. If man "towers above all other creatures", it is because his nature is qualitatively higher than all other creatures within the metaphysical structure of being, that contains all creatures participating in God's perfection. It was impossible, then, for Boethius to seek the good of his being in inanimate objects, such as wealth and offices, and truly claim to deserve happiness. Happiness, rather, is deserved only by those men and women who are powerful.

#### e) Man and power

How can man be powerful? The question of power is intimately related to Boethius' situation, as the primary condition of his consolation. Let us, then, bring our reflections back to Boethius in his place of banishment. His struggle with his suffering brought on by his unhappiness, is that of a man fighting to regain his senses and his place in the universe. In

other words, he is trying to make his alien surroundings acceptable so that he may recover his being as man. The question that we shall shortly have to face is how can man, as a rational essence, make his banishment acceptable? This question is linked with that of human nature which is central to Boethius' work, as Lady Philosophy had said towards the beginning of her dialogue with Boethius: "Now I know the other cause - she says - or rather the major cause of your illness: you have forgotten your true nature" (Bk. 1, Ch 6, p. 51). Therefore, the being of man is at stake in this work since it becomes the target of the wicked forces operating in the concrete. If there is any wisdom inherent in the *Consolation of Philosophy*, it must arise out of the struggle by Boethius to restore his being in discovering the extent of his powers. This problem is evident in the case of Boethius, since he must face suffering in his solitude, without any other expectation but death. Can evil truly overcome what is good, can wickedness overcome virtue? If not, then, the human spirit is here put to its greatest test.

It is the present concern of this chapter to develop further the nature of man and see, if at all, it is properly equipped to deal with the conflict Boethius faces in his banishment. Lady Philosophy says to Boethius: "Providence has given its creatures one great reason to go on living, namely the instinctive desire for the greatest possible self-preservation. There is no reason, therefore, for you to have any doubt that all things have an instinctive desire to preserve their life and avoid destruction" (Bk. 3, Ch 11, p. 107). Can we not say further that, in the case of man, this instinctive desire to preserve his life, must transcend the realm of his physical nature and become a conscious desire since man must will to preserve his life in destitute times, when his spiritual well-being is threatened? Then, in the case of Boethius, his consolation must become a spiritual resolution. Is this possibility inherent in human nature?

It is here that we find the different definitions of man and the "reality" they represent. Can we not say that each definition imposes its limits on the reality of man, or the extent of his powers? Let us take Boethius' definition which was given by him at the beginning of his work: "man is a rational and mortal animal" (Bk. 1, Ch 6, p. 51). What does this imply? Man is that animal on this earth that is able to reason. It reflects Boethius' conception of reality as rational and intelligible. It is true that man is rational, but Lady Philosophy asks, is he not also "something more"? Something more than what? Something more than rational? The irrational elements of life and reality enter through this door. In other words, does man not sometimes need to be something more than simply rational, since the world itself is not always rational, and hence, not always intelligible? Furthermore, is virtue not something more than simply advantageous to man in a world that also contains evil? Then, is virtue not something more than something dictated by reason, and duty based on reason? The same can be said for happiness. Therefore, our notions must reflect the extent of all eventualities: our conceptions must always be above all eventualities. Then, if man is to maintain his being in a world in which his reality is assured by a good and omnipotent God, he must discover in himself the power to overcome all conflicts that threaten the status of his being. What is that requirement that must be fulfilled so that man can maintain his being? It is here that Boethius must face his greatest challenge, since he must discover his greatest powers. Therefore, he discovers the true meaning of his duty: he must act according to his nature despite the pitfalls he is facing in his life. How does Lady Philosophy correct Boethius' definition of man? What is her conception that befits the notion of duty? She says: "Other creatures are content with what is their own, but [your] mind is made in the image of God" (Bk. 2, Ch 5, p. 67).

With this definition, Lady Philosophy is trying to penetrate the essence of that creature that "towers above the rest of creation". She says that "it is the nature of anything to perform what is proper to it" (Bk. 2, Ch 6, p. 71), since Boethius is created human, he must dwell on this earth. How must he dwell? He must dwell in the image of God, i.e. he must realise his true being when, in his dwelling, he reveals God. How does man reveal God? Does he not reveal God to the extent that he exercises his duty as man in the world?

The great Lady says: "Now, there are two things on which all performance of human activity depends, will and power. If either of them is lacking, there is no activity that can be performed" (Bk. 4, Ch 2, p. 119). If human power on this earth is to reveal God, then, man reveals God in his virtue, when man wills virtue. Lady Philosophy continues: "Therefore, men's power or ability is to be judged by what they can do, and their weakness by what they can't do....-then, she turns to Boethius- Do you remember....that the instinctive direction of the human will, manifested through a variety of pursuits, was entirely towards happiness"? (Bk. 4, Ch 2, p. 119) She continues: "so that without difference of instinct all men, good and bad alike, strive to reach the good....But surely men become good by acquiring goodness....So that good men obtain what they are looking for....But if the wicked obtained what they want - that is goodness - they could not be wicked....Since, then, both groups want goodness, and one obtains it and the other doesn't, surely there can be no doubt of the power of the good and the weakness of the bad" (Bk. 4, Ch 2, p. 119-120). Man reveals God, and hence, exercises his duty when he wills the good; and if the wicked man or woman is not powerful since he or she does not exercise his or her duty, or cannot, evil cannot exist. Lady Philosophy says: "....you must judge the man who achieves the goal of all endeavour, beyond

which there is nothing, to be supreme in power" (Bk. 4, Ch 2, p. 121). Further she says: "Men who give up the common goal of all things that exist, thereby cease to exist themselves" (Bk. 4, Ch 2, p. 122).

Let us reflect further on man as an image of God. Lady Philosophy says that man's greatest endowment is the "divinity" he can acquire. Man may not be perfect, but he has the divine power of creating a meaningful life by imposing a form on the world around him. Since man is not perfect, his inventions are subordinate realities, i.e. they contain only a degree of reality. Therefore, every event in the concrete is always a revelation of the degree of perfection of each event or each act. They are made meaningful to man because man contains within him the notion of virtue, and hence, the duty of seeing the degree of virtue in the world and in himself. In such a way, he is able to judge the degree of reality in the world. By betraying him, the goddess Fortune revealed to Boethius the imperfections of the world due to the imperfection of humankind's constant pursuit of happiness in things other than virtue. Lady Philosophy says: "Human perversity, then, makes divisions of that which by nature is one and simple, and in attempting to obtain part of something that has not parts, succeeds in getting neither the part which is nothing - nor the whole which they are not interested in" (Bk. 3, Ch 9, p. 95). This is a picture of a world that contains both good and evil, truth and error, and "since good and evil are opposites" (Bk. 4, Ch 2, p. 118), there arises a tension for the virtuous man who is affected by evil. This is the case of Boethius since his fate was regulated by the implications of wickedness in the world. Therefore, the true power of man in the pursuit of virtue is the alleviation of this tension. Man shows his true power when he is able to conquer evil, or the suffering that is brought on by evil. In so doing, Boethius will be able

to preserve the reality of his being since he will be preserving the spiritual essence of his being which is goodness. We discover, then, the nature of human striving, not only as a physical need, but also as a spiritual need. This need requires a man or a woman to surpass what is rationally acceptable in life to what becomes a spiritual acceptance.

Having established, with the help of Lady Philosophy, the conditions of true happiness, the next step depends on Boethius. Can Boethius overcome his suffering in his dungeon? While expecting death, can Boethius find any sort of happiness? Happiness is the end of man. The end of man is also to dwell in the image of God, and this means to accomplish his duty as man, which is to be virtuous or to be good. In other words, Boethius must fashion his expectations according to the spiritual essence of the world. Since man has also a spiritual essence, he may pursue goodness under any circumstances. Then, all that is left for Boethius, is to pursue God within his condition of being banished. Will Boethius be able to realise true happiness? Is it not a greater possibility to find happiness in his place of banishment, since all other expectations are lost? Hence, the total negation of practical expectations will be the absolute revealing of God. Only when man negates all other things, God can take possession of the human soul. Then, we are left with the following question: how can Boethius reveal God in his place of banishment? This revelation can only be a spiritual exercise.

We have made a circle to return to the inwardness we spoke of before. If we try to express the underlying conviction of the *Consolation of Philosophy*, we learn that man himself has to try to overcome his pitfalls. These reflections, then, seek to lead Boethius back to where Lady Philosophy originally intended. Lady Philosophy had told Boethius: "You

seem to have forgotten the oldest law of your community, that any man who has chosen to make his dwelling there has the sacred right never to be banished. So there can be no fear of exile for any man within its walls and moat" (Bk. 1, Ch 5, p. 48). The great Lady seeks to bring Boethius back to his homeland, to his authentic dwelling, to the kingdom of God where man has the honour of dwelling, but only if he corresponds to His image. The happiness of Boethius, and his being, depends on this condition. It is in this dwelling that we have found the true notion of happiness. So that happiness may always be possible for man, happiness must be beyond all finite conceptions of happiness. What is remaining in our reflections is to see how Boethius succeeded in revealing God in his dungeon, and hence, how he found true happiness.



## CHAPTER III- GOD AND REVELATION

### Introduction

The previous chapter raised the question of the validity of a reflection on happiness within the expectation of death. At the limit of life, how could the ground and end of life, which is happiness, be made meaningful? These considerations raised the question of a wisdom for the end of all activity. Such a wisdom is only possible once a good life and not external virtuous acts constitute the aim of life. External rewards had to be shown as deterrents for the pursuit of virtue. Therefore, our reflections of Boethius' banishment as the underlying condition of his consolation had brought us to a situation where man, devoid of all practical distractions, is more able to be open for the revelation of God. In this chapter, we wish to show how Boethius realised his duty as man, and how he maintained his status as a being in this world, which is God's world. Then, we will have to demonstrate how he was able to solve the dilemma of the gap between man and God. We will try to penetrate that movement of the will that we had mentioned earlier concerning Boethius' neo-Platonic belief that man can climb the ladder towards God. The wisdom we were seeking to lift us beyond the tension between the rational and the irrational is a pursuit of God under any circumstances. The subject of the present chapter is this pursuit.

How can Boethius reach God in his reflections? How does God become a reality for him? The problem for Boethius in his dungeon is that God no longer made sense to him. Before his downfall, Boethius' world was meaningful insofar as it was intelligible, thus, created by a supremely rational and perfect God. Only such a conception of reality had made his life an authentic life. The world appeared different, unintelligible in his downfall since he

became the victim of injustice. His vision of the world had become blurred by the consideration that evil can conquer virtue. He says: "But the greatest cause of my sadness is really this - the fact that in spite of a good helmsman to guide the world, evil can still exist and even pass unpunished....[and also] when wickedness rules and flourishes not only does virtue go unrewarded, it is even trodden underfoot by the wicked and punished in the place of crime. That this can happen in the realm of an omniscient and omnipotent God Who wills only good. is beyond perplexity and complaint" (Bk. 4, Ch 1, p. 116). Boethius' sufferings are yet increased by his conviction that evil existed in spite of a perfect and good God.

Boethius therefore says: "Why this is all turned upside down, why good men are oppressed by punishments reserved for crime and bad men can snatch the rewards that belong to virtue surprises me very much, and I would like to know from you [Lady Philosophy] the reason for this unjust confusion" (Bk. 4, Ch 5, p. 133). Such a state of affairs is incompatible with God's justice operating in the world. In his downfall, Boethius witnessed the collapse of justice. For Boethius, justice reveals itself within the realm of reward and punishment. If man must be virtuous, then, the virtuous must obtain a reward, and the wicked a punishment. Otherwise, both these notions would be meaningless. For Boethius, God's justice is revealed only when the notion of merit is applied properly within the considerations of good and evil. Here, Boethius reaches an impasse.

This impasse reveals yet a greater problem and that is the nature of reality. Boethius says that if virtue is punishable, then, "what grounds are there for distinguishing between God and the haphazards of chance, [if] sometimes He is pleasant to the good and unpleasant to the bad, and other times He grants the bad their wishes and denies the good" (Bk. 4, Ch 5, p.

133)? How can God be the ground of this variability in man's existential sphere? This question haunts the mind of Boethius because, in spite of all the adverse events, Boethius cannot reject God. He says: "But my wonder is only increased by the knowledge that the ruling power of the universe is God" (Bk. 4, Ch 5, p. 133). This paradox must be solved if Boethius is to find what he deems is true happiness for man: the authentic pursuit of God by means of intellectual illumination.

a) Where is God within the limits of human reason?

If we speak of an intellectual illumination, we are emphasising the intellectual, and hence, philosophical aspects of God's revelation to man. God's omnipotence must be proved based on the incontestable truths that form the basis of Boethius' philosophy. In other words, Boethius must demonstrate God's omnipotence. The problem is, though, how can the omnipotence of God appear to Boethius in a world where contingency seems to be the supreme reality? In the existential sphere, there appears the tension between virtue and evil, hence, God very often conceals Himself from the sight of man. Then, in the confusion of the appearances in the world of fortune, what are the essential conditions of God's justice? Where is the immutable God within the variability of the world of fortune? The implication is that we are searching for some order behind the contingency of the existential sphere. If the supreme reality of the world is based on divine justice, how does this justice operate in the world of fortune?

If we accept Boethius' conviction that there must be a divine justice governing the world, the world of Boethius, then, must be a world divided between appearance and reality. The problem is, how do these two levels interact, what is the basis of their relationship? As

we have stated earlier, the world is a creation of a perfect and good God, hence, all things are images that reflect this perfection. The appearance of things is their way of existing, which is held together by an order that provides the meaning, and hence, the being for this appearance. In the world of natural creatures, this order is easily visible to the eye of man.

In the world of human affairs, the events that appear often display a disorder that confounds the mind of man. This disorder was seen as a consequence of human error since man can compromise his being when he turns from virtue to vice. Therefore, the only appearances that are intelligible to human reason are the proper manifestations of being. When being is not manifested, i.e. when wickedness manifests itself in the world, appearances are created that lend to a vision of disorder, which points to another aspect of the concrete world than intelligible reality. For Boethius, this disorder appeared as a world ruled by chance. Boethius had thought that if human freedom, that must pursue virtue, is not pleasing to God - as it seemed in Boethius' case - then, there can be no justice in the world. Or, if there is a God of Justice, He must be hidden to the sight of man. Then, there must be a level of reality beyond the grasp of human reason. Lady Philosophy contradicts Boethius by saying:

"But hidden cause confounds the human heart,  
Perplexed by things that rarely come to pass,  
For unexpected things the people dread.  
Then let the clouds of ignorance give way  
And these events will no more wondrous seem".  
(Bk. 4, Ch 5, p. 134)

There are phenomena that are wondrous, that is, they are enigmatic to human reason. The task of Lady Philosophy is to use philosophical methods "to unravel the causes of matters that lie hidden and unfold reasons veiled in darkness" (Bk. 4, Ch 6, p. 134). Since Boethius is very

disturbed by these strange phenomena, he is begging Lady Philosophy to tell him her teaching on this point. Lady Philosophy's help is needed, because God manifests Himself only in the appearances of the world; He, in Himself, is beyond the sight of human reason. In what form does Lady Philosophy give aid to Boethius if not by stressing the power of human reason, which will also indicate its limits.

Here is the way that Lady Philosophy expresses the theory of human knowledge:

"But if the active mind of its  
Own power can nothing learn or find,  
But lies all passive to receive  
The imprint of bodies from without;  
....  
Whence comes to minds this concept strong  
Which thus discerns and sees all things  
....  
And yet passivity in things  
That live precedes the calling forth  
And stirring of the power of mind;  
....  
The active power of mind then roused  
Calls forth the species from within  
To motions of a similar kind:  
And fitting them to marks impressed  
From outside mingles images  
Received with forms it hides within".  
(Bk. 5, Ch 4, p. 160-161)

The metaphysical principle underlying this theory is that for knowledge to occur, the same must be known by the same. For this principle to be realised, the matter of knowledge, which is the visible and concrete world of creation, thus unlike the immaterial nature of the mind, must somehow be transformed with the contact between the visible world and man. The impressions man receives must, then, correspond to the ideas of things man possesses in his mind. These ideas correspond to the order displayed in the world, therefore, man is capable

of discovering the intelligibility of things visible to his eyes. The extent of man's knowledge corresponds to that which is intelligible in the world.

The fact that there are irrational events, or unintelligible appearances, to the sight of man implies that God operates in ways that are invisible to human reason. This view reflects the qualitative levels of knowledge. Lady Philosophy says: "the superior manner of knowledge includes the inferior, but it is quite impossible for the inferior to rise to the superior" (Bk. 5, Ch 4, p. 158). This is so, because "everything that is known is comprehended not according to its own nature, but according to the ability to know of those who do the knowing" (Bk. 5, Ch 4, p. 157). So, as Lady Philosophy says, the only way to catch a glimpse of the order underlying strange phenomena "is with a really lively intellectual fire" (Bk. 4, Ch 6, p. 134). How can we understand the significance of this intellectual fire? Lady Philosophy explains that even if we "don't know the reason behind the great plan of the universe, there is no need for [us] to doubt that a good power rules the world and that everything happens aright" (Bk. 4, Ch 5, p. 133). Therefore, Boethius must have faith in a reality higher, and greater, than that which can be grasped by human reason.

#### b) Providence and fate

These terms express the belief in two world orders. The one devised by a good governor; the other is at the mercy of occult powers. Let us, then, reflect on the problem of divine justice. If it is presupposed that man cannot always see the right meaning of the things in the world, then, man cannot always see God's justice operating in the world. This implies a reconsideration of the notion of justice and also the nature of God Himself. If justice is attached to the notion of virtue, then, the virtuous must necessarily obtain their just rewards.

while the wicked must obtain their due punishment. If virtue is the duty of man, then, as Lady Philosophy says, man should "regard the goal of every action as its reward" (Bk. 4, Ch 3, p. 134). The virtuous man should find his reward in his virtue, and the wicked man should find his punishment in his wickedness. The thesis that "good deeds never lack rewards, or crimes their appropriate punishment" (Bk. 4, Ch 3, p. 123-124), assures the supreme goodness of the world, which assures that its being is its goodness.

Let us, then, follow this train of thought to its natural conclusion. The latter notion of justice reflects a reality where God, who is the Creator, is always right. God is always right because God is Providence, and must provide the assurance of justice in the world. The world of appearance, on the other hand, is the realm of Fate. This distinction denotes two levels of reality. The first is the level of perfection which holds the totality of all things together. The second level is that which manifests itself insofar as it is fashioned by the degrees of the perfection manifested by creatures. God provides and creatures exist insofar as they must use their in-born capacities to realise goodness. Lady Philosophy explains: "The generation of all things, the whole progress of things subject to change and whatever moves in any way, receive their causes....from the unchanging mind of God" (Bk. 4, Ch 6, p. 135). Then Lady Philosophy describes these phenomena by distinguishing the two orders: "Providence is the divine reason itself...fate, on the other hand, is the planned order inherent in things subject to change through the medium of which Providence binds everything in its own allotted place" (Bk. 4, Ch 6, p. 135). Providence is the supreme provider of the world of creation; this notion of provision reflects the characteristic of a world which is carefully, and lovingly created, where every creature is assured the proper means for its survival. We

can call this the plenitude of the divine Being whose perfection overflows and creates an image of its perfection as the artist expresses the ideas that can no longer be contained within his mind. The explanation Lady Philosophy gives of these two orders is based on the notion of Time and Eternity: "So this unfolding of the plan of time when brought together as a unified whole in the foresight of God's mind is Providence; and the same unified whole when dissolved and unfolded in the course of time is Fate" (Bk. 4, Ch 6, p. 135). All that exists in time, then, is held together by the being of God, therefore, all phenomena can be traced to a cause which ultimately finds intelligibility in God. Therefore, in this conception of reality, the notion of blind chance is being replaced by the notion of fate. However, what does the latter notion say concerning the irrationalities in the world?

As we have already stated, what is irrational or unintelligible in the realm of human freedom, is manifested by evil wills. How can such manifestations be permitted in a world governed by divine justice? The notion of fate, if it is to replace the notion of blind chance, must be shown to be grounded on the underlying goodness of Providence. This is the requirement that shatters the notion of chance which implies a lack of causality or ground, a world of pure disorder. Boethius' conviction is that the world cannot be grounded on such a notion since its essence is goodness. What is problematic, though, for Boethius, is how to work out the difficulty of the appearance of evil in a world whose essence is goodness. According to his notion of fate, Boethius wishes to show that even evil cannot surpass goodness, that, evil is simply a lack of goodness and hence, justifies the earlier assertion that evil has no reality. The metaphysical difficulty is solved by Boethius with the notion of providence that becomes the proper standard for evaluating each individual. In other words,



God, as provider, provides each creature with the means to reach out for goodness. Concerning the being of man, freedom is that which allows men and women to reach out for goodness, hence, freedom is what underlies the notion of human fate: God provided humanity with freedom, and hence, he oversees every possible manifestation of this freedom, both virtue and vice. What does conceiving reality in such a way imply for Boethius in his banishment; what conclusions must he draw from his own reflections? How must God's justice be understood in his dungeon?

At this point, Lady Philosophy continues: "[Fate] holds sway, too, over the acts and fortunes of men through the indissoluble chain of causes; and since it takes its origins from unchanging Providence, it follows that these causes, too, are unchanging" (Bk. 4, Ch 6, p. 137). If Providence is reflected in every aspect of Fate, then, all that occurs in the world is proper despite the fact that this is hidden to the mind of man. The fact that it is hidden reflects the essential difference between man and God. The plan of a Supreme Being necessarily cannot be fully grasped by the intelligence of lower beings. Therefore, man cannot know God in His totality, but he can come to know Him as a Supreme Being only when thinking properly the nature of reality, as Lady Philosophy has exposed it. Lady Philosophy urges to see God's providence in the following way: "[God] looks out from the watch tower of Providence, sees what suits each person, and applies to him whatever He knows is suitable" (Bk. 4, Ch 6, p. 138). If man is unable to see this, it is because "there is confusion and error in [man's] thinking" (Bk. 4, Ch 6, p. 138). Then, the question of divine justice is just that, divine: only God can contain the errors of man without affecting His being, since, for Him, all phenomena necessarily lead to goodness. From God's standpoint, all is good and just, and

even evil, which is a consequence of human freedom, cannot be anything but a manifestation of divine justice. So, Lady Philosophy says: "All fortune is certainly good" (Bk. 4, Ch 7, p. 142). How? "All fortune whether pleasant or adverse is meant either to reward or discipline the good or to punish or correct the bad" (Bk. 4, Ch 7, p. 142-143). Boethius himself has erred concerning the nature of happiness even though he was not wicked. His error was to put his trust in external rewards thus making him vulnerable to the shifts in fortune, and hence, making him weak. Powerful are those who see everything as a manifestation of divine justice. By following the reasoning of Lady Philosophy, Boethius finally came to understand his banishment as an act of justice on the part of God, since his banishment, or the condition beyond the distractions of external rewards, enabled him to reflect on the nature of happiness, and so, find it in God. "Some men at the price of a glorious death have won a fame that generations will venerate; some indomitable in the face of punishment have given others an example that evil cannot defeat virtue. There is no doubt that it is right that these things happen, that they are planned and that they are suited to those to whom they actually happen" (Bk. 4, Ch 6, p. 139). Therefore, all events are regulated by a divine intelligence as the totality of all possibilities.

The notion of chance, then, collapses under the power of fate which is a reflection of Providence. Chance is meaningless in such a world that is dependent upon a Supreme Being. Lady Philosophy says: "If God imposes order upon all things, there is no opportunity for random events" (Bk. 5, Ch 1, p. 147). This is so because "nothing comes out of nothing" (Bk. 5, Ch 1, p. 147), "thus chance which seems to flit with reins all loose/Endures the bit and heeds the rule of law" (Bk. 5, Ch 1, p. 149).

What significance do these principles have for Boethius in his place of banishment?

His reason rebels against his death which he sees as irrational, yet his life still has meaning since its intelligibility lies in a higher realm: "It is not allowed to man to comprehend in thought all the ways of the divine work or expound them in speech. Let it be enough that we have seen that God, the author of all natures, orders all things and directs them towards goodness" (Bk. 4, Ch 6, p. 141). If this is so, how is it that man can pursue God, and thereby, find the true meaning of life? If man can come to pursue God in his place of banishment, then, it is because his life can be meaningful despite the irreconcilable gap between the will of man and the will of God. But Boethius has still another problem to solve: how can this gap be bridged?

c) Freedom and happiness

The pursuit of God is possible only if this pursuit has meaning for the life of man. It has this meaning only if God is the ultimate end of man's life. But if God is not always intelligible to human reason, how can man see God as his end? If he cannot, such efforts, as Boethius had undertaken, are in vain. Rather, there is a reason for Boethius' efforts to pursue his happiness in his dungeon and this lies in Boethius' notion of the will, or human freedom, as he exercised it. Man is made in the image of God in that freedom is that capacity in man that distinguishes him from the rest of creation. Lady Philosophy says: "There is freedom, for it would be impossible for any rational nature to exist without it" (Bk. 5, Ch 2, p. 149).

What does the power of freedom bestow on man? As Lady Philosophy further specifies, it is the "power of judgement to decide each matter....[to] distinguish what to avoid and what to desire....[in general] man pursues what he judges to be desirable and avoids that which he

thinks undesirable" (Bk. 5, Ch 2, p. 149). Then, human freedom is the condition which allows human reason, not only to know the nature of things in the world, but also to know the difference between virtue and vice, and hence, to come to understand the duty of man in the world. If man can create a life for himself which corresponds to his duty, this creative capacity reflects his image in the nature of God, i.e. the capacity of realising good through his will in the world. This capacity is freedom, which is the power to choose between good and evil. However, this leaves the ultimate question open: how? Boethius' answer is simple: man pursues God through virtuous acts. Our argument seems to have gone in a circle, hence, we have to ask again, whence is virtue? Is it not identical with happiness?

Whence is such a wisdom to be found which leads to happiness? God is the source of its meaning, but how can man find God in his banishment? Without any practical expectations, how does man come to pursue happiness if, perhaps, even God has abandoned him? This is the crux of the problem. How can Boethius truly come to communicate with God, which is the only way toward his consolation? If man can come to know the intelligibility of finite creatures, how can this knowledge lead him to an infinite being, a being that is perfect? Only God can reveal Himself to Boethius in His totality. In other words, God had to reveal Himself as a mystery, Who governs the world justly despite its seeming irrationality.

#### d) Reason and faith

Boethius' reflections brought him to the limits of human reason, where he discovered the extent of its powers, and also, what it cannot do alone. It is here, then, that we may speak of the faith of Boethius. His faith gave him the will to make the leap and find, above the

irrationality of fortune, the ultimate meaning of his life. It is in this leap that he overcame the realm of contingency and the condition of alienation by proving to himself, beyond the capacities of reason, that God is still the principle of all reality. If Boethius had trusted only in the world's appearances, he would have remained discouraged in the face of his downfall.

Then, human freedom is not tied only to practical considerations as Lady Philosophy explains concerning the nature of freedom: "Human souls are of necessity more free when they continue in the contemplation of the mind of God and less free when they descend to bodies, and less still when they are imprisoned in earthly flesh and blood. They reach an extremity of enslavement when they give themselves up to wickedness and lose possession of their proper reason" (Bk. 5, Ch 2, p. 149). The meaning of human life depends on what the individual accepts as his standard of meaning. This standard will determine the solution that is acceptable to an individual in an existential crisis. Boethius' pursuit of happiness made sense only because his notion of happiness, and hence, of human life, depended on the view that virtue is always possible in any situation as long as man has a will to pursue God. Faith in God is at the source of this will. In Boethius' case, the pursuit of God signified the overcoming of suffering. Hence, the good are always more powerful than the wicked as long as God is at the source of their actions. For Boethius, his consolation was a transcendence of the contingent that occurred within himself. This ability of the human will indicates Boethius' notion of human nature.

The ability of human freedom as a spiritual transcendence can only occur in a world wherein man can surpass the finiteness of things, a world that assures human existence a place and a reality beyond all other creatures. Man is made in the image of God only in a world

whose reality is twofold: temporal and eternal.

e) Time and eternity

What is the significance of this dual aspect of reality? The distinction between these two notions is interchangeable with the distinction between providence and fate, where the former is the source of the latter. Lady Philosophy says: "God ought not to be considered as older than the created world in extent of time, but rather in the property of the immediacy of his nature" (Bk. 5, Ch 6, p. 164). The nature of man is only likened to the nature of God. God is the Supreme Creator, Who created the world out of nothing, whereas man creates the world only through the powers of his intelligence and his freedom; his creations always being measured with reference to the perfection of God. Otherwise, if these two levels had not a qualitative distinction, the meaning of human freedom would be swallowed up in a divine determinism, thus, rendering meaningless the purpose of human existence as the pursuit of virtue.

Therefore, it is primordial that man exist in time while at the same time, be intimately related to the eternal realm of God. What is the nature of eternity? Lady Philosophy says that it is "the complete, simultaneous and perfect possession of everlasting life" (Bk. 5, Ch 6, p. 163), as opposed to time wherein man cannot "embrace simultaneously the whole extent of [his] life" (Bk. 5, Ch 6, p. 164). In both cases, Lady Philosophy is expressing the manner of being of both man and God. God contains the totality of reality in His being, therefore, he cannot be affected by the temporal order, but can observe it in his eternal present, whereas man in his finite existence, has to somehow make it meaningful within the sphere of time. Therefore, the existence of man can be likened to a series of concentric circles all revolving

around their centre, being measured by their centre according to the standard of their speed. which signifies the extent of their relation to the unmoving centre. Then, human existence is meaningful only as it is measured by the divine plan. Man, in time, must realise God's eternal plan. How can we solve this paradox?

This is how the *Consolation of Philosophy* solves it:

"When once the mind beheld the mind of God  
Did it both sum and separate truths perceive?  
Now hidden in the body's density  
It does not lose all memory of itself.  
The many separate truths are lost, yet still  
It holds the sum. Therefore who seeks the truth  
In neither state will be: he does not know,  
And yet he is not wholly ignorant.  
So he reflects upon the sum retained  
And kept in mind, and thinks of what on high  
He saw, that he may add the parts forgot  
To that which he retains".  
(Bk. 5, Ch 3, p. 154)

When man moves in the world of time, when he makes use of his powers to impose a meaning on the world around him, he necessarily imposes an idea which is beyond the finiteness of things. What is he creating? A way of life. What is at the source of a way of life? Values. Values engender a way of life, which in turn govern this way of life. Whence are these values? They find their source in the eternal ideas of God. Therefore, man grounds his life according to values, and hence, creates his life according to the image of God. In the temporal order, man exists, not merely as a finite creature dwelling on earth, but rather, he dwells on this earth as a being who can reach out for perfection. Without the eternal realm, man could not grasp the meaning of his life on earth. It is the ability to grasp the world with the insight of value which likens man to God since "God sees all things in His eternal present" (Bk. 5,

Ch 6, p. 165-166), in one global grasp of all things. The ability to create a way of life finds its source in the immediate intuition of meaning (values), which must, then, be applied to a particular situation. This notion of eternity, as the totality of all possibilities, allows man to transcend his finite state, hence, to transcend his miseries, and to maintain his being, or the image of God, even within the circumstances of banishment, since human nature is necessarily linked with the eternity of God.



## CONCLUSION- WHO IS CONSOLED BY THE *CONSOLATION OF PHILOSOPHY*?

Having travelled through Boethius' own reflections, or ideas, and seen how these ideas have been applied to his particular existential problem, we now return to our initial question: who is consoled by the *Consolation of Philosophy*? Or we could perhaps ask, does Boethius' philosophy have the power to offer a consolation for us in destitute times? Only those individuals who accept his ideas will be able to apply them in similar circumstances. If his ideas enable man to overcome suffering he might have to face in the existential sphere, then, our reflections bring us back to a reconsideration of Boethius' presuppositions. We do not wish to emphasise that Boethius was able to console himself, rather, we wish to grasp those elements that underlie the power to console anyone who accepts Boethius' solution. It is only such a consideration that will have any significance for the "who" expressed in the title of our work. If we have chosen to emphasise this "who", it is because a consolation becomes a possibility only when an individual recognises such a possibility in himself. In other words, a consolation becomes a subjective truth. Subjectivity is accomplished only within a particular existential situation. Only in the concrete can there arise a paradox that calls for a wisdom whose acceptance goes beyond the powers of reason. A consolation, then, necessarily implies the overcoming of such a paradox once man is able to discover a meaning for his earthly existence which is beyond its apparent futility. Boethius was consoled because he was able to restore his sense of destiny. This was possible because he was able to see himself as a being made in the image of God, and not simply as a rational animal. Therefore, it was only by seeing himself as the image of God that he could accept the truth of God in his place of banishment.

How can such a definition of man reflect the powers that enabled Boethius to restore a meaning to his life and transcend the paradoxes of his existence? What we are searching for is the way Boethius was able to operate within the internal logic of the existential sphere. The essential characteristic of this logic is that it does not correspond to the principle of consistency required by reason. This realisation forces us to look at the context of Boethius' consolation as a philosophical consolation. This would mean that man's being as the image of God will guarantee the proper way of philosophising.

Our reflections have shown that any consolation that we expect from philosophy is based on the broadening of the meaning of philosophy itself. This means that the ability to philosophise has to enable man to move within and beyond the irrational. It is here that we reach a difficulty. The main obstacle in Boethius' struggle was the invisibility of God when he was faced with the reality of random events and the apparent defeat of virtue by the forces of evil. God had become inoperative in Boethius' life. Therefore, it seemed that the power to philosophise had reached its limits when it had to face the paradoxes of human existence. A solution, then, was only made possible when it contained the realisation that what is primordial to the highest power of the irrational is the very notion of God. In other words, it is one thing to affirm that God is the principle of reality without which the world would be unintelligible, and yet another to live this truth as a subjective existential experience.

How did Boethius accomplish such a difficult task? His existential experience forced him to either accept God or reject Him. He could not reject Him, but now, he would have to find another avenue leading towards his understanding of God as the supreme governor of the universe which had to correspond to his spiritual need of restoring a meaning to his life.

This was undertaken from the very beginning of the *Consolation of Philosophy* when Boethius had difficulty travelling in his own philosophy, i.e. the way he philosophised before his downfall. His philosophy had reached its limitations with the disorder witnessed in the existential sphere, and with the negation of all practical considerations. However, Boethius had transformed this impasse into the need for a guide personified in a great Lady, a Lady of "awe-inspiring appearance, her eyes burning and keen beyond the usual power of men" (Bk. 1, Ch1, p. 35). In other words, Boethius was in need of a guide that could convert his faith in God into a wisdom that would teach him how to die, or that would enable him to reconcile himself with his impending death. His inability to do this without a new philosophy reflected his inability to "see" any meaning within the paradox he was living in his place of banishment. His previous life had not furnished him with the experiences that shook the very foundations of reason and intelligibility. Boethius' subjective experience of God in his dungeon, required that the usual power of reason had to be surpassed.

Lady Philosophy, then, became the symbol of a new way of philosophising. "I will give your mind wings - she had said to Boethius - on which to lift itself: all disquiet shall be driven away and you will be able to return safely to your homeland. I will be your guide, your path and your conveyance" (Bk. 4, Ch 1, p. 117). This reflects the revelation of new truths arising out of the existential problematic, and the problem of human suffering. This is possible only if there is an elevation of human capabilities that will be able to grasp these new truths and live according to them. Moreover, the surpassing of a "vision" of reality also implies a transformation of Boethius' "vision" of God that must restore the meaning of God as it should be understood by a true believer.

At the very beginning of the work, Boethius, while speaking about the order in the world, said that he "could never believe that events of such regularity are due to the haphazards of chance" (Bk. 1, Ch 6, p. 50). God on this level, is revealed in the regularity of events. The essential characteristic of the world, then, becomes order, and hence, intelligibility. God, then, is a cosmic organiser, which implies that He is responsible for the organisation of matter and motion into processes of intelligible life. Then, man, who is able to grasp this intelligibility through reason, and is able to shape his own life in rational terms, is rightly called a "rational animal". The metaphysical structure of reality, then, reflects the extent of man's capacities for authentic activity.

Man as a "rational animal" faces a world that is likewise rational. This is consistent with Aristotle's realism and his notion of substance. As a composite of matter and form, everything that exists is necessarily intelligible to man; all things can be transformed into an object of knowledge. The principle of the substance played this role in Boethius' philosophy when he wrote about the rational knowledge of the natural world. However, the requirements of natural philosophy differ from those of the question of human destiny. If we accept Aristotle's presuppositions concerning human rational knowledge and enter a discussion of human happiness as Boethius faced it, the internal logic of the existential sphere would elude us. This is the difficulty. Boethius' capacity to philosophise reached its limits when he was unable to account for the notion of destiny, which rendered the notion of human life meaningless. He sought, in his reflections, a wisdom that can answer the existential paradoxes, and hence, sought to discover the meaning of human life under any circumstances. This meant that Boethius had to extend the limits of philosophy, which implied the

reconsideration of his presuppositions, in order to resolve the paradoxes that he lived during the last year of his existence. What carried him to such a conclusion is the distinction between meaning and reason, since whatever is meaningful is not necessarily rational, or determinable by human reason.

Man, then, if he wants to be happy, has to be able to operate within the paradoxes of existence, since only in the concrete can man create a meaning to his life. In the resolution of these paradoxes lies the meaning of his life. The next question is: How is man able to extend his powers and find meaning within alien surroundings? Somehow man has to grasp meaning beyond the scope of his reason. But, whence is this meaning? For Boethius, a reconsideration of what is meaningful necessarily implied the recovery of his sense of destiny which he found in a reconsideration of his notion of God, and what it implies, a reconsideration of man's relationship to God. What is Boethius' starting-point? Boethius conceives of a world unlike Aristotle's, but like Plato's, which is created according to eternal ideas. Since man is part of creation, like the rest of creation, he participates in the perfection of God's eternal ideas. This implies the division of reality into two world orders, which also implies different levels of being. This is expressed as the distinction between the *intellectibilia* and the *intelligibilia*. By introducing different levels of being, Boethius was able to express different levels of reality, and the powers corresponding to each level, i.e. the powers that are responsible for the understanding of the makeup of reality, and finally, all its possibilities. God affirms the reality of the world by preserving in each being the goodness which is the spiritual essence of His being. Then, it becomes Boethius' duty, as a man, to search for the meaning of his participation in God's being. This pursuit is man's authentic

activity in this world, and without it, he cannot discover an authentic way of life. Therefore, a notion of destiny has to be built in to his philosophy of life, and to his philosophy in general.

How does man fit in God's plan was, for Boethius, the question that led to a notion of destiny as he struggled to find purpose to his downfall through philosophical means. Boethius discovered that this purpose cannot rest merely with the rational expectations of external merit since it becomes clear in his banishment that man's participation in God's glory requires something more. Then, the source of man's being, and hence, power, precedes reason. This will become evident once we consider the significance of man's participation in God's glory.

What is the meaning of this participation? It is Boethius' presupposition that the end of man is happiness, and that the ground of happiness is virtue. The difficulty lies in the knowing of what virtue means. This is the greatest difficulty for man: since the capacity that distinguishes him from the rest of creation is his reason, how can he come to understand a notion which is irrational, or, in other words, indeterminable? This characteristic of virtue lies in the notion of participation. The participation of all creatures in an eternal realm renders reality more than simply rational, since the standard of intelligibility acquires an imprecise character. This imprecise character of reality is evident in the realm of human freedom that realises in the concrete degrees of meaning. This aspect of reality cannot follow the consistency required by a rational conception of things. For example, we can refer again to Boethius' rational expectations of external merit which is based on the notion of justice practised by the legal systems. Since it is a rational conception, when Boethius experienced the irrationality of his own downfall, his reason could not penetrate the irrational images of the world. That is why he was seeing such frightening images at the beginning of his work,

where chaos and evil had apparently taken over the reins of the world. Therefore, notions such as virtue and happiness, and hence, of human power, had to be re-discovered beyond the limits of human reason. Where is this beyond? In the perfection of God's intelligence where the eternal ideas have also their source. How, then, can man recognise the true source of his own being?

It is at this point that we have to begin philosophising in a new way, namely broadening our understanding to reach the meaning of human life. Life within the kingdom of a good and perfect Being seeks this perfection as its end. It seeks to return to its source. To do this, though, man must somehow have the capacity to recognise this source, which leads him beyond rational concepts. God is no longer a concept but a notion that must be realised in one's life. The good of man, then, must emanate from the perfection of God. The source of man's good is virtue. Virtue, then, or the Good, must be interchangeable with the notion of God which is the underlying principle of human life, and not any rational expectations of external merit. Through virtue, man participates in God's perfection. Virtue must realise in the concrete a life which is governed by values that find their origin in God's perfection. Therefore, man contains within himself notions which are eternal, and since they are beyond determination, irrational. Boethius follows Plato's metaphysics here to make his point that man's capacity to create a life according to values, which are only meaningful in the concrete, lies with a higher power. Plato's teaching that the soul is eternal, in the sense that it can contemplate the eternal ideas, explains how man is able to be conscious of notions such as the Good and apply them in his life. Hence, Boethius is able to express a philosophy of life which is required by his existential problematic, and not merely an abstract metaphysical

system. At the source of man's capacity to create a way of life are the absolute notions. In the soul's ascent to God as the fulfilment of man's participation in God's perfection, God guides man on his way by means of a higher way of philosophising that moves within the logic of absolute notions. Philosophy, as the pursuit of God, follows the steps of the soul's ascent, the precondition of man's ability to communicate with God.

Therefore, in his reconsiderations of the meaning of human life, Boethius discovered that beyond practical philosophy, philosophy moves within the logic of absolutes, which allows man to resolve the paradoxes of the concrete realm. Those notions which are the source of a way of life can guide man toward the accomplishment of this way of life despite the pitfalls of the realm of fortune. The logic of absolutes, then, in order to surpass these pitfalls and guide man toward his destiny, within the limitations of human intelligence, moves in negative terms. All absolute notions are interchangeable with the notion of God, but, since man can affirm only what is rationally determinable, he can affirm an authentic way of life only by negating what is not, i.e. false happiness. God, then, revealed Himself to Boethius in his dungeon through the negation of Boethius' previous conception of happiness and previous conception of virtue which was external reward. The thread that Lady Philosophy used to guide Boethius to true happiness was the negation of false happiness, since the latter conception could no longer be meaningful in Boethius' dungeon. She had said: "Since, then, you have seen the form both of imperfect and perfect good, I think we now have to show where this perfect happiness is to be found" (Bk. 3, Ch 10, p. 99). Therefore, meaning is revealed by the ability to measure one's concrete existence by God's perfection.

This ability links man with the divine intelligence and provides him with an opening



towards the infinite realisation of his virtue on earth. The notion of duty will replace the old notion of virtue and project the notion of freedom beyond purely practical considerations. Since the logic of absolute notions links happiness with duty, it is always possible for man to understand the meaning of life as long as he pursues God.

Underlying all these reflections is the conviction that God is the centre of the universe, which is why man must concern himself with the will of God. If to truly exist for man is to participate in God's perfection, then, he must always seek to understand and to do what the will of God commands. In other words, man must dwell according to values, which is another way of expressing man's participation in divine laws as the primordial condition of his existence. This conviction is exemplified in the Ten Commandments, whose significance lies in a will greater than the will of man. The will of man is rather the reflection of the will of God. First, and foremost, man is commanded to honour God, which means, to trust God under any circumstances. Boethius had to have such a trust in God if he was going to do His will in his banishment, or we might say, to philosophise in God's image.

Through such a trust, the relationship between man and God changes. It becomes religious. If man must see the world through God's "vision" of reality, God, then, becomes a mystery, and philosophy, in the Aristotelian sense of the term, extends toward a theology. What is intelligible to God may be a paradox to reason, but this paradox turns into a mystery, which implies a resolution only through faith that there is a truth hidden behind the veil of paradox. This is the essential aspect of Boethius' philosophy that must be accepted by those who seek consolation in Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*. Only when reason became grounded on a higher authority, and philosophy grounded on the primacy of a Supreme

Being, hence, in a primacy of theology, did it become possible for Boethius to define man as made in the image of God. Boethius' philosophy, then, puts in its centre the mystical which gives man a spiritual level to his freedom that transcends the inconstancy of the concrete world.

The theological aspect of the *Consolation of Philosophy* that we have stated in our conclusion links Boethius' Platonism and neo-Platonism with Christian theology. In the words of an authority of philosophy in the middle ages, Étienne Gilson, all the theological doctrines with which we have concluded our thesis "are stated in the *De Consolatione Philosophiae* without the support of the Scriptures, which is not surprising after all, since it is Philosophy speaking. Let us however note the case, apparently unique, in Book III, prose 12, where Boethius says of the Sovereign Good that it 'reacheth from end to end mightily, and ordereth all things sweetly'. This is undeniably the citation of a well-known text from Wisdom (8, 1) which Saint Augustine had indefatigably quoted. If one takes into account the fact that in the preamble to the *De Trinitate*, Boethius openly quotes Saint-Augustine as his authority, one hardly risks being mistaken in saying that where the doctrine of the *De Consolatione Philosophiae* coincides with that of Saint-Augustine, the coincidence is not fortuitous. Even when he is speaking only as a philosopher Boethius thinks as a Christian".<sup>7</sup> Thus we conclude the story of Boethius' consolation.

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<sup>7</sup>Gilson, E. *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*. Random House, New York, 1955, pp. 101-102.

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