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I. Introduction

In the *Consolation of Philosophy*, a personified Philosophy leads a fictionalized version of Boethius through a series of obstacles that hinder him from finding happiness within his prison cell: the role of fortune, the false paths to happiness, the problem of evil, the disproportion between people’s conduct and their deserts, and, finally, whether Providence necessitates our outcomes.¹

As the pair discuss each problem, a recurring argumentative move and countermove plays out. Forgetful of what he’d previously learned from Philosophy because of his grief, the prisoner takes reality to lack order and intelligibility, blaming the world for his present misfortunes.² Philosophy, by contrast, argues that reality is ordered and intelligible. Human beings have difficulty seeing this order on account of ignorance, “intemperate passion” (I.1), and essential epistemic limitations (cf. V.4). Philosophy seeks to show Boethius that reality is not to blame for his despair; instead, it originates in Boethius having “forgotten who he really is” and the true nature of things (I.2): “I used to know [nature’s order], but in my grief, I can’t remember” (I.6).³ Given this diagnosis, Philosophy apparently needs only remind him of what he once knew.⁴

¹ The *Consolation* is cited from Boethius (2008), the *Phaedo* from Plato (1998), and *In Phaedonem I* from Damascius (1977). “Boethius” refer to the imprisoned character rather than the author unless specified otherwise.

² I.1: “In my salad days, I was rich, and whimsical Fortune smiled [...], but then she turned away that faithless face of hers, and my bitter life drags out its [...] days.” I.4: “Is my terrible treatment at Fortune’s hands not clear?”

³ Boethius’ self-forgetfulness applies not just to *who* he is but also to *what* he is. As Blackwood (2002) 143 notes, Boethius “takes his personal fall from happiness to have exposed the fundamental disorder of human affairs.” Boethius recalls that the human being is “a mortal, rational animal” (I.6), but he has forgotten that humans are made for union with God. Boethius “who has seen into Nature’s secrets [...] lies prostrate, his mind bowed down by heavy chains [...]. With eyes cast down thus, he can see nothing but dull, brown earth” (I.2). Humans alone are prompted by their bodily nature to look upward, a sign of their capacity for understanding the world’s intelligibility (V.5). Refusing this prompting, Boethius risks becoming a “mental beast in human [form]” (IV.4).

⁴ The language Philosophy uses for “remembering” may also mean “paying heed to” (Donato [2013b] 410-411). Boethius has not simply forgotten certain

Boethius' wound, however, is deeper than mere forgetfulness, for it involves an active turn *away* from Philosophy and a mistrust of her teachings. Rather than process his fall using Philosophy's tools, Boethius flees to the "grieving Muses" who abet his despair (I.1), whom Philosophy must banish and replace in order to becalm Boethius' emotional turmoil.⁵ Philosophy has not abandoned Boethius; she always attends those who've been persecuted in her name and would never desert any "innocent man" (I.3). Instead, Boethius forsook Philosophy.⁶

Philosophy can only heal and rally Boethius if she can properly diagnose the root cause of his suffering. I argue that the root cause is what Socrates calls "misology," the hatred of reason.⁷ After reviewing Socrates' etiology of, and therapeutic response to, misology, I show that Philosophy applies Socrates' framework to treat Boethius' misery. Because Boethius' misology isn't merely a consequence of external misfortunes but involves active *choice*, we can say that Boethius'

philosophical theories but fails to pay heed to philosophy as a way of structuring his life. "Forgetting" may also mean "forgetting oneself" or "being untrue to one's nature."

⁵ In I.1-2, Boethius doesn't even recognize Philosophy and is dumbfounded by her presence. Only when Philosophy touches Boethius, using the fabric of her dress to "dry the tears" from his eyes, is he able to recognize her (I.2-3). As Donato (2013a) 471 notes, the tears represent Boethius' emotional state, and Boethius cannot recognize Philosophy until his emotions quiet down sufficiently; cf. Blackwood (2002) 147.

⁶ Boethius recalls that Philosophy taught him that "the order of the universe implied an ethical system for mankind" and to "take part in politics," but he complains that the "reward" he received for doing so was the enmity of unscrupulous men, unjust imprisonment, and an impending execution. "[T]here was no one to come to my defense" (I.4). "[I]nstead of being rewarded for my actual virtue, I am punished for imaginary crimes" (I.4).

⁷ Relihan (2007) characterizes Boethius' condition as "melancholy" and notes that late antique medical authors "often relate the depressive aspects of the disease to intellectual activity" (54). Donato (2013a) rightly argues that Boethius is better understood as a wayward philosopher succumbing to misology than as a neophyte who needs instruction for the first time, as many readers presuppose (464, 469, 475-478; see also Donato [2013b] 403-404, 408-409). Blackwood (2002) 150 agrees: "The fidelity between Boethius and *Philosophia* is the basis for her consoling of him; it is also what this consolation aims to restore to him." We cannot properly assess Philosophy's therapy unless we correctly understand what she takes herself to be treating; failure to do so, Donato (2013a) 464 explains, is the source of some recent scholars' claims that Philosophy has failed. This essay agrees with Donato's analysis but takes the misology diagnosis in a different direction.

condition is a form of despair caused by self-deception.⁸ Per Philosophy's diagnosis in I.5:

You have been banished from yourself, and one could even say that you are therefore the instrument of your own torments, for no one else could have done this to you. You seem to have forgotten what your native country is. [...] The basic law of your country is that any man who has chosen to live there cannot be banished [...]. But if anyone no longer wants to live there, then he no longer deserves to do so. (emph. added)

To heal Boethius' wound, Philosophy will first quiet his distemperate emotional reaction to his misfortune through rhetorical "anodynes." Philosophy cannot redirect the intellect until she has turned the passions (cf. *Rep.* 518b-d), which are liable to lead to tremendous intellectual mistakes when they rule the soul precisely because they are *blind* to the true nature of reality (cf. *Phdr.* 247c) and pull the soul in antipodal directions (cf. *Phdr.* 237d-238b).⁹ Second, Philosophy will apply the

⁸ I.4: "He whose heart is fickle is not his own master, has thrown away his shield, deserted his post, and he forges the links of the chain that holds him." The language of "deserting one's post" recalls Socrates' claim (*Ap.* 28d-29a) that one ought to stick to whatever post the gods have given us. As Donato (2013b) 398 notes, the goal of ancient consolatory writing "was not to offer sympathy to the grieving person but rather to show him/her that the activity of grieving is not the appropriate response to the situation." Donato argues that Boethius "considered the activity of writing the *Consolation* as a way of dealing with his tragedy" (400); the *Consolation* should not be taken as a text "written by a detached author who was reflecting on problems he had already overcome" (401); see 414-415. Relihan (2007) suggests that the text is a failed consolation insofar as it ignores key features of consolatory literature and because the prisoner manages to wrest control of the discussion, such that Philosophy "is never allowed to console *in the way that she had planned*" (15; cf. 48, 129). Since, as I'll argue, the true antagonist is not bodily death but the spiritual death caused by misology, we should expect that any consolation Philosophy provides would be directed toward the death of *reason* more than bodily death (cf. I.6), as we see Philosophy do.

⁹ "You are torn by grief and anger and self-pity, and each of these pulls you in a different direct. You are not yet ready for strong medicines, I'm afraid, so we shall begin with something milder, anodynes, so that the sore and angry places may be softened and soothed" (I.5). On the blindness of the passions and the problem of disorder in the soul in Plato, see Johnstone (2020) and Brown (2022). Donato (2013b) 419-420 details the way in which Philosophy continues to rely on imagery, mythology, and rhetorical devices that appeal to the emotions throughout the *Consolation*. The recognition that the whole soul must be turned and thus that purely theoretical arguments are necessary but insufficient for Boethius' healing

“stronger medications” that reveal Boethius’ self-deception by showcasing the genuine truth about reality’s orderliness, a truth which he already knows but refuses to accept given its apparent conflict with his experience of disorder.¹⁰ Philosophy shows Boethius that he falsely accuses reality of disorder when it is he who is disordered. Only by recognizing his own shortcomings and becoming *hopefully* open to understanding reality’s genuine order will Boethius become whole, for his well-being depends on recognizing that the world is governed by nothing less than divine reason and love (I.6, II.8).¹¹ Boethius’ cure

better accounts for Philosophy’s continual use of poetry and rhetoric than does the suggestion, made by Relihan (2007), that the *Consolation* ought to be understood as an ironic piece of Menippean Satire; cf. Donato (2013b) 420-421. Thorgeirsdotter (2020) 90 points out how recent feminist scholarship has revealed how the feminine Philosophy returns Boethius to an “embodied wisdom” that is “emotion-laden” rather than to a dualistic rejection of the body and emotions in favor of cognitive freedom: “Philosophy [...] brings together *logos* and heart, reason and emotion” (94). See also Blackwood (2002) 144 on how Philosophy seeks to “integrate the various levels of [Boethius’] personality;” cf. 146.

¹⁰ Relihan (2007) suggests that the “stronger remedy” is the hemlock by which Socrates was executed. Since Boethius doesn’t die within the text’s drama, Philosophy never managed to apply this remedy. Boethius chose to live rather than become another martyr for Philosophy (5). I argue instead that the stronger remedy involves a death-to-self accomplished by self-abandonment to providence, the very thing Philosophy does attempt to administer in showing Boethius that his good can only be found in union with God. This death-to-self, by which Boethius may undo his self-imposed exile, is, paradoxically, the condition by which one becomes one’s true self, even a god (III.10; cf. Philippians 2:5-13 and Marenbon [2003] 111). Relihan misses this point on account of an assumption (unsound on both Platonic and Christian grounds) that one must choose between transcendence and immanence (cf. 31, 38, 77). Instead of positing two opposed realms, Platonism and Christianity instead understand there to be one real (graded) order within which one can live better or worse by directing oneself to that order in different ways; cf. e.g., Plotinus, *Enneads* I.8.6.9-13 (and the use of *neuein*, “inclination,” at I.8.4.17-23) and Augustine, *City of God* XIV.4-5 (on Paul’s distinction between “carnal” and “spiritual” at, e.g., 1 Corinthians 3:3).

¹¹ See Brown (2023b) for a discussion of misology in the context of hope and despair in Plato, from which the following section draws. Philosophy does counsel Boethius to *let go of hope* in addition to grief since both can subject the mind to their rule, but Philosophy cannot mean to cast aside what theologians call “fundamental hope” (*espérance*, the hope that all will be well, that reality is providentially ordered) but instead “ordinary hopes” (*espoir*, hope for particular contingent goods), since Boethius is captive to disordered desires that overvalue the objects of ordinary hope (“you are longing for your previous good fortune;” II.1). Philosophy’s later admonition underscores this conclusion: “Lift up your

consists, then, in following the Socratic regimen outlined in the *Phaedo* and will culminate in his return to Socratic wisdom, knowing and respecting the limits of his understanding, in an abiding spirit of hope and humility (V.6).¹²

II. Misology

At the heart of the *Phaedo* lies a dramatic encounter with “misology,” the hatred of reason, an evil than which no greater can be experienced (89d), as Socrates enigmatically declares. The *Phaedo* is framed through a series of allusions to the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur.¹³ Socrates plays the role of Theseus, and, with the help of Phaedo his Ariadne, he will save the fourteen Athenian children, symbolized by the fourteen additional named men present, from the Minotaur that lurks at the heart of the dialogue’s labyrinth of arguments. At first glance, the fear of death seems to stand in for the Minotaur. Socrates’ interlocutors look to him to sing “incantations” that might quell the fear of death present in the inner child within each of their souls (77e-78a). What if, upon death, the soul should blow away like so much smoke dispersed

mind in virtue and hope” (V.6). On the distinction between *espérance* and *espoir*, see Schumacher (2003), Ch. 3; see Pieper (2012) for an overview of the Christian conception of hope.

¹² As Blackwood (2002) 145 argues, “awareness of its own inadequacy is the strange gift reason receives in the face of its beloved, the infinite good.” As Marenbon (2003) 154 notes, Philosophy is not a divinity but instead takes the perspective of the “human searcher, trying to approach the divine in diffidence of his own powers.” Philosophy is aware of her limitations (162). It is this recognition of limitation that opens the door for prayer at the center of the book (III.9) and in the concluding admonition (V.6). Though Philosophy cannot foresee whether her prayer for understanding will be efficacious, it is proper to philosophy to be open to *any* truth, even those that are revealed (see Brown [2023b]). Contrary to Relihan’s (2007) view that Boethius *rejects* Philosophy’s path in favor of Christian prayer in a kind of “deconversion” from Platonic philosophy (6), I argue that Marenbon (2003) rightly interprets the “Menippean” elements of the *Consolation*, so important to Relihan’s account, as merely an indication that Boethius the author is concerned to explore the limitations of philosophical argument (161-162), not a failure to integrate faith and reason (see 67-68, 155, 161). Marenbon rightly takes it to be proper to philosophy to recognize its limits. I add that it is also proper to philosophy to “hope” for a rational fulfillment it can’t yet imagine rather than fall back into either cynical skepticism or fideism, as Relihan (2007) seems to do (cf. 28, 36).

¹³ Brann, Kalkavage, and Salem discuss Plato’s use of the myth in their introduction to Plato (1998).

by a strong wind? After Socrates' discussion partners levy a pair of particularly potent objections to the three arguments for the soul's immortality Socrates had given, all of Socrates' companions succumb to fear and mistrust (88c); even Echecrates, the person to whom the story is being related decades later, interjects to bewail the wretched condition and dashed hopes to which he has just fallen prey (88c-d). Rather than immediately defang the objections and launch another argument for immortality, as he eventually does, Socrates pauses to address the incipient danger of misology to which his comrades (and we readers) are in danger of succumbing and to rally everyone to keep up the argument in hope of some firmer ground upon which we might face our doom. This experience of misology is the true Minotaur, the real danger.¹⁴

Misology, Socrates explains, arises like misanthropy, the hatred of human beings. When we naively trust human beings, knowing nothing of human affairs, we are liable to be hoodwinked by unscrupulous people (89d). If we are "burned" repeatedly, we might generalize, supposing that nothing trustworthy or sound is present in humanity altogether (89d-e). But misanthropy, Socrates explains, occurs not because human beings are universally bad but because of our own artlessness and ignorance about human affairs (89e-90b). Wiser people recognize that human beings are distributed like most other things: a few exceptionally good, a few exceptionally bad, and the rest ordinary and unexceptional, striving to be good but not very adept. The misanthrope overhastily generalizes, making a logical mistake in response to pain caused by a few miscreants naively trusted. The problem is not human nature but bad induction.

Misology arises under analogous circumstances: when we naively trust arguments and those arguments fail, we get "burned" by reasoning. If this happens repeatedly, we might infer that there is nothing "sound" in reasoning.¹⁵ From this failure to secure anything intelligible, we might

¹⁴ Socrates' taking hold of Phaedo's hair (89b) before addressing misology further suggests that misology is the true Minotaur. If Phaedo is Ariadne, his hair is Ariadne's thread, which guides Theseus back to safety. Socrates declares that they must both cut their hair in mourning if the argument dies here, evoking the counterfactual possibility of Theseus losing Ariadne's thread, ensuring the Minotaur's victory.

¹⁵ At *Rep.* 411c-d, Socrates suggests that misology can also arise when someone has benefited from the gymnastic education outlined in *Rep.* III without also partaking in its sibling curriculum, music. Even a soul who has a native love of

conclude that there's simply nothing intelligible to grasp. Like misanthropy, however, this conclusion relies upon a false generalization: the fact that any number of arguments have failed does not *eo ipso* indicate that there's nothing intelligible to be grasped. On the basis of the evidence, it is safer to infer that it is *we* who are unsound, not the world itself or argumentation (90e); after all, *we* are capable of becoming more thoughtful, whereas the world's intelligibility—or lack thereof—isn't going to change in response to our accusations (cf. Damascius, *In Phd. I*, §402). Accordingly, we ought to respond by investigating more carefully and renewing our quest. Indeed, we ought to be grateful even for the unsound arguments, for in coming to realize their unsoundness, we learn how to avoid a false trail; even unsound arguments are a gift when rightly received.¹⁶ To respond otherwise is to *give up* on intelligibility, the very thing we crave.

We should note that the conclusion that there is nothing intelligible, that there is no “sound” argument, is *necessarily* a false inference from this kind of evidence. Such an induction amounts to “I haven't found it; therefore, it doesn't exist.” Rather than discovering that the world lacks intelligibility, we instead *presume* it to be thus, aprioristically evacuating the world of any possible stability for our minds to grasp. Thus, misology is not simply an experience into which one falls, but something that is to some extent *willed* in response to repeated dissatisfaction. In “giving up” on the argument, we *choose* a form of intellectual hopelessness. In choosing hopelessness, we necessarily deprive ourselves of the truth which we are constituted to seek, for if we presume that nothing exists to satisfy the mind *in principle*, we will never look for, nor even be open to, reason's satiation (cf. *Men.* 80a-81e; by contrast, at *Phd.* 95a-b, Simmias rightly speaks of receiving insight “wondrously and beyond all expectation”). Given that to be human is to be the animal made for *logos*, to become *miso-logos* is to succumb to a self-hatred even deeper than misanthropy, for we hate not just other human beings but also our very essence. Misology is the ultimate self-hatred, the ultimate denial of the goodness of existence, whence it is the

learning could become misological if starved of musical culture and philosophical discussion; cf. *Laches* 188c-e. Plutarch suggests that misology can arise from allowing anger into teaching (*On Controlling Anger*, 14).

¹⁶ This is an implication of the argument concerning just deserts that takes up Book IV. See section VIII below.

greatest evil that can befall us. Reason hasn't just failed but has instead *turned against itself* in rebellion, saying "I refuse to want what I want."¹⁷

III. Rebellion

Reason's revolt against itself in misology is tantamount to a spiritual death, an evil far greater than the bodily death that is the ordinary subject of consolatory literature.¹⁸ While this spiritual death lurks at the very heart of the *Phaedo*, the dialogue's drama primarily concerns bodily death and the soul's immortality. Plato leaves it to the reader to work through the deeper concern about reason's self-destruction, to which Socrates stalwartly refuses to succumb even as his companions nearly do. The *Consolation* unfolds the kernel left by Plato within its drama.

Whereas the *Phaedo* presents misology as a danger to which primarily the neophyte, untrained in philosophical reasoning, is susceptible, the *Consolation* depicts, as we will see, a more severe strain of misology that has taken root in the heart of a trained philosopher, one nurtured by

¹⁷ Cf. Damascius, *In Phd. I*, §399: "Why is there no worse disease than 'hatred of reasoning'? – In the first place because it means that one must hate oneself, as a being naturally gifted with reason. A second consequence is hatred of truth, for it is by reasoning that we arrive at truth, the foremost of all blessings. Thirdly, a man who hates reason is inevitably a lover of unreason, which is a kind of being bestialized." See also §400: "Socrates mentions 'misanthropy' in the same breath with 'misology' because both concern the same nature, our own, and are ultimately the same." Boethius seems to follow a similar line of reasoning, presumably under the influence of a common source (Proclus' lost commentary on the *Phaedo*). See Westerink's introduction to Olympiodorus (1976) for an overview of the Greek commentary tradition on the *Phaedo*. For a Greek-adept Christian like Boethius, it may also be tempting to read *miso-logos* as *miso-Logos*, the hatred of *The Logos*, such that to hate reason is tantamount to hating the second person of the Trinity; cf. Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, Ch. 46 and *Second Apology*, Chs. 7 and 13 for an affirmation of the inverse claim (to love *logos* is to love *The Logos*). Gregory of Nazianzus, one of the few Greek Christian sources with an extant use of *misologos*, could be a referent here, and there are linguistic and thematic resonances between the *Consolation* and "On Silence at the Time of Fasting" (see *Epistles II*, 1.34.171-210, cited from Gregory of Nazianzus [1996]). Gregory refers to Envy as a *misologos* (189-192) who would be gratified if Gregory no longer spoke of *The Logos* in his attempt to restrict his tongue from vice on account of "painful illness," being "bent with old age," and beset by "a new misfortune" (175-179).

¹⁸ Within Christian thought, at least, turning against one's nature (i.e., sinning) is the way by which one loses the gift of eternal life. This possibility is arguably available to Platonism as well; cf. *Tim.* 41a-b.

Philosophy herself. To the extent that the neophyte's condition is caused by a certain naïve artlessness in argumentation, her ignorance renders her misology somewhat involuntary. Socrates also briefly considers the eristic debater who obstinately holds to a misological conclusion (i.e., that there is nothing stable for the mind to grasp; see *Phd.* 90c-91a); while the eristic's misology is more voluntary than that of the neophyte, there's still an element of involuntariness insofar as the eristic acts without understanding of the truth, for only one who understands something of the truth can be said to speak artfully (cf. *Phdr.* 262c, 266d, 268a-272a).¹⁹ In the *Consolation*, by contrast, the trained philosopher's misology comes from an active, voluntary rejection of what he *knows* to be true and good—he has exiled himself (I.5), and though this self-exile may have been occasioned by profound grief resulting from a great shock, it is irreducible thereunto. Whereas the neophyte perhaps *ought* to have learned better and thus is censurable for failing to take proper concern for her intellectual development, and whereas the eristic *ought* to know better and can be censured for her “epistemic stubbornness,”²⁰ the *Consolation's* trained philosopher *does* know better and yet allows despair to override reason's recognition of reality's true structure. The trained philosopher who falls into misology is not ignorant, nor merely obstinate, but an *apostate*. Boethius' misology is vicious insofar as it is an active, voluntary turn away from the true good in despair, a rejection of that which the erstwhile philosopher already knows.²¹

The *Consolation* portrays a more severe form of misology insofar as it entails a degree of complicity on the part of the misologue. Boethius knows how to handle arguments, and the drama of the text shows him doing so adroitly. Unlike the neophyte who gets “burned” by bad reasoning, Boethius discriminates and offers counter-arguments. Unlike the eristic, Boethius argues in good faith out of care for the truth. While Boethius' emotions following his tumble occluded his capacity for

¹⁹ The sophistic brothers of the *Euthydemus* are good examples of eristics. As Baima and Paytas (2021) argue, there's something comedic about the brothers, who are committed only to confuting their victim, regardless of the truth. Though they are clearly misologues, there's something still naïve in their style that makes them laughable.

²⁰ I borrow this phrase from Nadler and Shapiro (2021).

²¹ I here use Aristotle's analysis of action in *Nicomachean Ethics* III. Because the neophyte's misology is involuntary on account of ignorance, it is largely forgivable and not really vicious. The eristic, by contrast, is vicious insofar as obstinacy is voluntary, but a trace of involuntariness remains given her lack of understanding of the good.

listening to reason, Philosophy quickly bypasses this difficulty, and we come to the deeper issue: Boethius, it seems, has been “burned” by *good* reasoning. Though he temporarily forgets which arguments to trust, he does know them. The problem is, instead, that he can’t see how he can trust them all at the same time, especially since powerful experiences suggest that they can’t all “hang together.”²² He experiences something like Camus’ “absurd,” that disconnect between the mind’s desire for understanding and reality’s *refusal* to provide satisfaction, in the face of which “metaphysical revolt” specifically devoid of hope is the only reasonable choice.²³ It is *reality* that must ultimately be unintelligible, for right reason comes to incompatible conclusions; consistent, meaning-giving reason reveals itself as empty. Being not (yet) able to see how the trustworthy arguments are mutually consistent with each other and with his own recent experiences is the primary drama of Books IV and V.²⁴

As we will discuss below, the flaw at the heart of this deeper misogyny lies in the attempt to reduce reality’s intelligibility to the mind’s own limited grasp. The problem isn’t in the *truths* that are proposed to the mind, since these truths *are* intelligible (even if the mind may not be able to understand them exhaustively or see how they can be true simultaneously). Instead, the problem is in the mind’s inadequacy for the fullness of truth. The more deeply sick misologue becomes willful insofar as she wants reality to be intelligible on *her* terms rather than on *its own* terms—Boethius wants providence to work as *he* expects it to work (devoid of the suffering of innocents), not as it actually does (God causes the sun to rise for the good and evil alike; cf. Matt. 5:45 and Augustine, *CD* I.8). To this extent, receptive intellect is being displaced

²² See for example IV.5: “It surprises me that these things are turned upside down so that good men are oppressed by punishments that should have been given to criminals and bad men get rewards that should have gone to the virtuous. Can you explain to me how this confusion happens? I should be less puzzled if I could suppose that it was all aleatory and random. But my belief in God the ruler makes this hard to accept and deepens my confusion. God gives rewards to the just and punishments to the unjust, but he also seems to give delights to the wicked and harsh treatment to the good. Why should this be? And how is it different from pure chance?”

²³ See the brief discussion of Camus in Brown (2023b) 383-385.

²⁴ Marenbon (2003) and Relihan (2007) take Books IV and V to be digressive in character on account of their judgment that the argument is completed in Book III. By contrast, on my reading, Books IV and V showcase a *deepening* of the argument, without which the prisoner’s misogyny cannot be cured.

by unmeasured appetite: Boethius *wants* a final reconciliation that reason has not (yet) discovered.²⁵ Instead of *hoping* for such a reconciliation, the prisoner preemptively assumes its impossibility, simply because he cannot as yet see how it could happen. But one's inability to understand a reality does not determine whether that reality is, in fact, intelligible nor *eo ipso* indicate that our experiences do not point to a greater divine order.

The key point, as Philosophy reveals in her diagnosis in I.5, is that Boethius' condition is, in a significant way, a product of his own choices about how he interprets the experiences with which he has been confronted, a product, that is, of his refusal to accept that there might be a real goodness at work beyond the limits of his understanding. The solution, as we shall see, is recognizing one's limitation and accepting intelligibility from beyond those limits as a *gift*, something to be received (in Platonic idiom, "recollected") rather than won, or rather, won through cooperative reception. Philosophy will work through this point by reference to the Neoplatonic axiom that anything that is received must be received according to the mode of the recipient, not according to the mode of the thing received.²⁶ Hence, if one is

²⁵ One can't help but ask *how* the *Consolation's* trained philosopher could have fallen away so thoroughly from the truth, given that Philosophy herself trained him from an early age. Were Boethius a Stoic, this question would be unanswerable, since the Stoic sage is taken to be unshakably wise, invulnerable to vicissitudes. Boethius-the-author does portray the prisoner in somewhat Stoic terms in the opening books, but we should remember that the prisoner was an Aristotelian Platonist, not a Stoic. The Aristotelian account of human nature recognizes that even human excellence is abidingly *fragile* within our temporal lives (cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* I.10). Pace Nussbaum (2001), Plato arguably recognizes this same fragility (see *Phdr.* 249c and Brown [2023a], 415-416 for a brief explication); given that we always seek the good in all we do and yet don't have sufficient knowledge of it (*Rep.* 505a-506a), even the best of us is liable to err in judging where the good lies. *Rep.* 473a-b also notes that anything realized in deed must *necessarily* fall short of what's sayable in exact speech, such that, in the realm of action, failure is *always* a necessary possibility. Damascius, *In Phd. I*, §396 suggests that even the philosopher can fail because cognition "reacts more readily" than appetite to the true, such that it is easy for appetite to revert to the apparent good on account of its not possessing a built-in limit.

²⁶ Marenbon (2003) calls this the "Modes of Cognition" principle (134) and refers to Proclus and Ammonius, who were probably in the background to the author's use of it in the *Consolation*. See note 10, which cites Proclus as saying "the way of knowing differs according to the diversity of knowers" and "the type of

inadequate to that which must be received, one must receive it according to one's own mode in humility and do what one can to become more adequate to it, that one might receive it in a mode closer to its own. We now turn to the *Consolation's* dramatization of Philosophy's attempt to teach Boethius this lesson.

IV. Fortune

Tracking the shifting articulations of reality's order throughout the *Consolation*, we see that Philosophy diagnoses in Boethius an incipient misology centered on his misunderstanding of the role that Fortune plays in the world's governance (see II.1). Philosophy seeks to convince Boethius that his misery comes from his misunderstanding rather than from reality itself. Recognizing our lack of understanding is the necessary condition for undertaking the quest for intelligibility with an openness to new insight not yet available to us (and perhaps even beyond our current capacity).

Despite having learned of Fortune's true character and even having argued against dependence on Fortune during his "salad days," Boethius has allowed himself to be tricked by Fortune into overvaluing the contingent, partial goods that she offers rather than grounding his happiness in a firmer substance (cf. II.4).²⁷ Philosophy concedes that Boethius' "tumble" is unpleasant and "likely to produce some temporary disturbance in the mind" (II.1). Yet however unpleasant such a disturbance may be, it is not the real problem.²⁸ Boethius suffers because of his false belief that no genuine order governs human affairs (cf. I.5). Herein lies the beginnings of Boethius' misology. Boethius previously recognized philosophical claims about the basic justice of the cosmic order, but now misfortune has shaken his trust, such that he erroneously concludes that his earlier views were mistaken. Rather than retest the arguments he once found compelling in the face of this new experience, he turns to a false *logos* which, *prima facie*, better accounts

cognition is not like the thing cognized but like the cognizer." See also Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, §124 and Perl (2007) ch. 6.

²⁷ "You know what she is like [...] and] that anything you had from her hands was not worth having, and in losing those things you have lost nothing of importance. [...] recall that when you were basking in her smiles, you spoke often about her treacheries" (II.1). These remarks confirm that Boethius should be seen as a failed philosopher who needs renewal, not a neophyte.

²⁸ Cf. Donato (2013a) 471-472.

for his recent experiences: Fortune rules human affairs. Until Philosophy forces him to confront his new conviction, he neglects to consider whether his earlier understanding could accommodate his recent experiences.

Boethius accepts that there is a God, a “Starmaker, [...] at whose command the heavens spin,” and that all natural beings play their assigned roles. But, Boethius laments, this same God “endowed” human beings with a “freedom that [he] could constrain but [has] chosen not to,” thereby allowing “slippery Fortune” to play her “random games with us” (I.5). Boethius holds God responsible for creating a world in which human affairs are disordered and subject to chance. Given that God could order human affairs just as he orders the natural world, why would he allow our experience to be completely aleatory, subjected to the indifference of Fortune’s whimsical power?²⁹ Boethius likewise holds Philosophy responsible for convincing him that the order of nature “implies an ethical system for mankind” (I.4), yet nature allows the innocent to suffer and malefactors to prosper (I.5). Though Boethius acknowledges that God exists, his view is more Deist or Stoic than Judeo-Christian or Platonic. Since Boethius’ intellectual failure stems from his misunderstanding of the “governance of the world,” Philosophy must show Boethius that all things, even human affairs, are ruled not by Fortune but by divine providence, justly and lovingly.³⁰ Before she can help him recall this truth he had discarded, she must first deflate the falsehoods that have taken their place, for when correct opinions recede, false ones move in, and confusion arises (I.6).³¹

²⁹ Cf. Marenbon (2003) 101 on how, in Boethius’ view at this stage, God only acts as an efficient cause and not also a final cause for human beings; as a result, God has given us no *telos* by which we might orient our lives.

³⁰ See Walz (2018) on how Boethius-the-author utilizes aspects of Stoicism in the *Consolation* but ultimately rejects it as “partial and superficial” (415) on account of the role that love plays in human relationships and cosmic structure (422). Socrates criticizes Anaxagoras for failing to deliver on his promise of showing how Mind “puts the world in order and is responsible for all things” (*Phd.* 97c) since Anaxagoras gives a mechanistic account rather than one which locates the intelligibility of things in their *goodness*, for “the Good-and-Binding [...] truly binds and holds things together” (99c). On the connection between intelligibility and goodness in Plato, see Schindler (2008).

³¹ One might ask why Philosophy uses Fortune’s argument to motivate Boethius, given that she is convinced both that recollecting truth is the cure for Boethius’ ailment and that Fortune’s account is, at best, only partially or inadequately true. Relihan (2007) notes that the doctor/patient relationship is a common trope within

The argument of Book II starts from Boethius' presuppositions and explains how even if Boethius were right to think that Fortune causes his misery, he is wrong to accuse Fortune of malfeasance, for he should know and respect her nature. Boethius' fall does not result from a change in Fortune's attitude, for "she was always whimsical, and she remains constant to her inconstancy" (II.1); instead, he erred in relying on what's intrinsically unreliable. Fortune turns her wheel "with an indifferent hand," now elevating the low, now dashing down the high. Any who would "worship" this epitome of inconstancy must realize that doing so is self-enslavement to arbitrary power (II.1).

Arguing in Fortune's voice, Philosophy explains that Boethius falsely arrogated to himself a right to Fortune's gifts, but those gifts were always just loans (II.2). Rather than castigate her, Boethius ought to thank Fortune for the use of such gifts (II.2), for Fortune is the one with the "owner's rights" (II.2). Boethius even has reason to "hope for better things to come" on account of Fortune's "mutability" (II.2). As Fortune argues, the problem is not her whimsical nature but the greed and ingratitude of human beings, who always complain and plead for more: "Greed opens new maws" (II.2). On balance, Boethius has had it good, and the best of the goods given him—the well-being, virtuous character, and unflinching love of his family members—remain his.

Philosophy demonstrates that none of Fortune's gifts can satisfy the human heart. Each is inadequate. All are beset by profound ironies: in pursuing these gifts single-mindedly, we actually lose what they claim to offer. Doggedly pursuing these gifts is "actually insulting" to the Creator, who "appointed men to be the lords of earth" though we "contrive to reduce [ourselves] to a base dependency" (II.5). We elevate what ought to be subservient into objects of worship to which we enslave ourselves. Fortune is blameless in her inconstancy, her gifts are not truly valuable, and one is foolish to trust her for happiness. Fortune is, in fact, most valuable precisely when she shows her inconstancy, for therein can

consolatory literature (52) and refers to pseudo-Plutarch, *Ad Apollonium* 102a-103f to suggest that the "best doctors do not heal too quickly but give humors in flux a chance to settle and then apply external medications to bring things to a head; a waiting period is appropriate before approaching the bereaved." Philosophy must first give Boethius' inflamed passions some chance to "settle" before she can get to the real work of treating his intellectual malaise. Given that she will later present his intellectual difficulties in terms of a failure of adequation, she may think that working through a partial truth is the best way to bring Boethius' wayward mind from inadequacy to adequacy. As the *Phaedrus* notes, this kind of procedure is a mark of good soul-leading (cf. 271d-272b).

we see the “fragility” of a happiness based on fortuitous goods and discern which goods resist such inconstancy, such as genuine friendship (II.7).

V. Reconnection

In the final poem of Book II, however, Philosophy takes a dramatic step forward, indicating that Fortune isn't the sole dispenser of goods and evils in the realm of human affairs, as Boethius erroneously thinks; in fact, Fortune may not govern human affairs at all. Starting from Boethius' recognition of the regularity of the natural world, Philosophy subtly corrects Boethius' Deist conception of God's ordering. The “greater power” to which all of nature is subject is not mechanical necessity but instead “nothing less than love (*amor*)” (II.8). Here, Philosophy leads Boethius through the disappointment experienced by Socrates when Anaxagoras claimed that Mind causes all things only to discover that, by “Mind,” Anaxagoras really meant mindless mechanical necessity, for he neglected precisely the *good* that all things pursue in love, by which all things are directed to their proper ends (see *Phd.* 96a-99d). As Philosophy later notes, God orders all things both *out of* love (in the generosity of creation) and *by means of* love (in that all things are turned to God precisely by following their intrinsic, inexpungible desire for unity).³² But that love that rules the natural world “binds people too,” in marriage and in friendship (II.8); hence, the amatory order of nature can be present in human beings, too, *if we let it*. “How happy is mankind if the love that orders the stars above rules, too, in your hearts” (II.8). In reframing her discussion of Fortune's rule in terms of the rule of love, Philosophy reconnects the human and natural worlds that had been severed in Boethius' misology-induced false opinion (I.5), revealing that human *choice* leads to whatever disorder is present in human affairs, not some impersonal natural force like Fortune. The poem thus suggests that Fortune governs *nothing at all*, for it doesn't truly exist (cf. V.1). Boethius, of course, already knows this but fails to see how it is that God could rule us through our love when he has witnessed disorder in human affairs caused by disordered loves (cf. *amor* at II.5). But Philosophy's poem reveals not only that human affairs in general become disordered

³² See III.9: “Nothing but your love could have prompted you to bring forth the matter and forms that together make up the world,” and “[...] to see your face is our only hunger, our only thirst, for you are our beginning, our journey, and our end.”

as a result of human choice in response to *amor*, but also that Boethius' own affairs are similarly disordered as a result of human choices, those of his detractors and of Theodoric, to be sure, but also of his own misological choice to abandon what reason has taught him and instead wallow in grief.

VI. Happiness

Philosophy's rhetorical arguments concerning Fortune sufficiently quell Boethius' emotional state such that he can receive the "strong remedies" that will remind him about the truth of human nature, happiness, and the world's order. The remedies "sting a little," for they require the expurgation of falsehoods and idols in order to make room for the truth of which the soul always has a dim perception (III.1). Boethius must relearn to recognize that his desires and experiences must be oriented to the providential order, only in alignment with which will he find true satisfaction. By examining and moderating his desires, such as his seemingly intemperate desire for recognition (I.1-4), he will become able to obtain that which he truly desires, union with God. After showcasing the inadequacy of each of the partial goods in which we might erroneously seek our happiness, stumbling about "like some drunk on his way home" who "cannot remember which is the right path" (III.2; cf. III.8), Philosophy explains that "[w]hat is simple and undivided by nature human error manages to divide and distort. What is true and perfect becomes false and imperfect" (III.9). As with Fortune, it is human ignorance that leads us astray, not some imperfection in reality. Here, though, the character of human ignorance has changed: when Boethius was a slave to Fortune, he was enthralled to a *falsehood*, but now the problem comes from an *inadequacy* in his understanding. Those "wayward drunks" suffer from cleaving to a *truth* (i.e., *this* good is genuinely desirable) that is abstracted from the greater whole within which it is true.

Here, Philosophy specifies *how* we tend to go astray: *we set our bar too low*. By grasping after partial goods rather than the Good itself, we fail to gain even partial goods, for in separating them from the whole, partial goods lose their benefactive character. While many of these "wayward drunks" operate primarily from ignorance, and thus act involuntarily and to that extent forgivably, such an abstraction of the part in preference to the whole can entail a misological *contempt for reason* precisely insofar as the one who stops short at the partial good refuses

to listen to reason's promptings to seek the whole truth, for reason *always* is directed, by nature, to the whole truth (cf. *Rep.* 475b-c).³³ Philosophy already indicated the danger of grasping at the partial in place of the whole when she reveals that her dress was torn by "squabbling mobs" of Hellenistic philosophers (I.3) who each sought Philosophy but erred in upholding particular conclusions in abstraction from the Platonic synthesis. Just as earlier Platonists compared the dissolution of Platonism in the Hellenistic world to the Corybants' sundering of Pentheus' limbs,³⁴ denaturing each "limb" by abstracting it from the living whole, so Philosophy's value is lost in taking stray conclusions in abstraction from the whole. Boethius likewise does this by accepting that nature is well-ordered while rejecting Philosophy's claim that human affairs are likewise well-ordered by the same love that rules all (here, what's at stake is a Stoic account of providence versus a Platonic one, where, in Philosophy's view, the Stoics took the idea of providential order and abstracted it from Plato's understanding of the *Good* as the cause of all by claiming that externals are "indifferents" rather than "goods"). Similarly, those wayward drunks who barrel down the "false trails" (III.8) to happiness may seek some genuine part of happiness but forego the whole, thereby distorting the part. Both the Hellenistic philosophers and these drunks *presume* that they've grasped the whole good when they've barely scratched the surface. Like despair, presumption is a form of hopelessness arising from misology; it is an

³³ Cf. the introduction to Schindler (2008) for an articulation of "contempt for reason" along these lines.

³⁴ See Numenius, cited in Boys-Stones (2018), 1F: "[The Old Academics] did drop some beliefs, distorted others, and did not remain with what was originally passed down to them. They started with Plato, but sooner or later diverged from him [...]. [Plato] has been torn apart in a frenzy more crazed than any Pentheus deserved, and suffers if considered as a collection of limbs—although, taken as a whole, he never changes back and forth with respect to himself considered as a whole." Atticus also utilizes the image (Boys-Stones [2018], 1A). See Gerson (2013) 221, Dillon (1996) 361-362, and especially Boys-Stones (2018) ch. 1 for discussion of the Pentheus image. Thorgeirsdotter (2020) 87 notes that Philosophy's torn robe suggests the mob murder and dismemberment of Hypatia, "a bloody sacrifice of a womanly authority." I follow Boys-Stones' account of the post-Hellenistic Platonists' understanding of Hellenistic "dismemberment" of philosophy. The core tenet lost by these "squabblers" is that transcendent immaterial causes alone can account for the intelligibility of things. Philosophy's reframing of all things in terms of love points back to Socrates' dissatisfaction with Anaxagoras at *Phd.* 96a-99d).

unwillingness to follow reason through to its end because of a premature conviction that it has already arrived.

Perfect happiness cannot be found in partial goods but only in God, the perfect good (III.10).³⁵ Each thing pursues its good and perdures by pursuing its unity (III.11); the self-loving inclination to persist comes not from an act of will but instead as a “consequence of natural principles” and “as a gift of providence” (III.11). God providentially orders the world precisely by imbuing each thing with a nature that seeks its own well-being and thereby the common good (III.12).³⁶ Only if the universe were ordered by such a God could all of these individual beings’ pursuits of their own good coexist harmoniously (III.12). Boethius’ budding remembrance of the *ordo amoris* shows that he’s nearly ready to “return safely” to his homeland (III.12), from which he had banished himself (I.4). God “orders all things for good” and this is “the tiller and the rudder by which the universe is preserved and kept safe” (III.12; cf. *Phd.* 99c). Indeed, since God orders all things by means of their natural inclinations, we can say that there is “nothing that, in the effort to remain true to its nature, would want to try to oppose God,” and hence evil, which does try to oppose God, must be “nothing” (III.12).

The argument of Book III thus shows Boethius that the realm of human affairs is not intrinsically without order, for God orders every being—human and nonhuman—in the same way, to the same end. All things seek their own unity and thereby God, who orders all things toward himself, the universal good. Whatever disorder besets us arises not because we are somehow exempt from the Starmaker’s order, but instead because we uniquely have the freedom to choose *how* we pursue our unity. As a result, we can attempt to pursue unity in ways that actually lead to our own dissolution, as when we pursue unity under the false assumption that it is to be found in some partial good, the pursuit of which actually leads to the fracturing of desire. The problem is not in our nature but in failing to act according to our nature, to love and be loved.

³⁵ See Wiitala (2019) for a careful explication of Philosophy’s argument for the equation of God and true happiness.

³⁶ As Aquinas (2000) Ia.IIae.94.2 explains: “reason by nature understands to be good all the things for which human beings have a natural inclination, and so to be things to be actively sought, and understands contrary things as evil and to be shunned. Therefore, the ordination of our natural inclinations ordains the precepts of the natural law.”

Philosophy had earlier noted that caring more for beautiful baubles than one's own genuine well-being is "insulting to your maker" (II.5); we might here add that it is also insulting to your *reason*, for reason clearly discloses these baubles' relative lack of worth compared to that of the human beings they are meant to prettify. To persist in pursuing a misordered hierarchy of goods in the face of sound reasoning to the contrary is to become contemptuous of reasoning, accepting right reason's conclusions selectively in response to whimsical desire. Here, misology deepens from a danger into which the naïve can stumble to a vicious preference for a partial truth instead of the whole truth, by which alone we can become happy.

VII. Intrinsic Deserts

Boethius now raises a series of problems concerning God's providential governance: the disproportion between people's acts and deserts and whether providence permits freedom. As before, Boethius attributes his confusions to perceived contradictions in reality rather than to his own epistemic limitations. While Boethius no longer rejects reason's guidance, he remains wary of reason's claim to be able to "take him home" because he can't see the path. He's begun to turn away from misology but hasn't yet become hopeful. As we will see, there is greater danger here than at prior stages.

While Fortune may not govern human affairs, an apparent disproportion between human acts and their deserts remains. "Virtue pays the penalty, rather than vice" (IV.1). Philosophy counters that "it doesn't happen that way," for "the good are always powerful while the wicked are abject and weak. Vices are never unpunished and virtue is never unrewarded" (IV.1). Every act presupposes both will and ability. Book III established that all things will their own good, so if there are differences in outcomes, they must come from differences in ability (IV.2). Insofar as the good are able to be good, they are powerful, for they get what they desire, whereas the evil strive to attain the good but fail, showcasing their weakness. That evil will can accomplish something other than goodness indicates impotence (IV.2). Whence, virtue and vice are their own rewards: the virtuous obtain the good they seek by virtue, whereas the wicked fail to obtain the good they seek by following vicious whims (IV.3). Their wickedness even seems to "infect" them, whereby they become subhuman, "mental beasts in human bodies" (IV.4).

Boethius accepts that every act is its own reward but is still vexed by the apparent disproportion in extrinsic deserts, which suggest that Fortune, not God, is responsible. Even if virtue is its own reward, why should it be accompanied by poverty or oppression? Why should the vicious live in comfort? Once again, the failure lies in ignorance, not divine governance: “If the true causes of something are not understood it can *appear* to be random and confused” (IV.5; *emph. added*). Boethius suffers from his lack of understanding the true causes of extrinsic deserts.

Nevertheless, the problem of extrinsic deserts is particularly thorny, a kind of intellectual hydra (IV.6). Working out why God doles out some particular outcome would only magnify our confusion rather than resolve it, for then we’d need to consider others who committed similar acts but received different treatment. Rather than get caught up in endless decapitations, we need “intellectual fire” and a new beginning. Here, the text turns away from analyzing human desire and the nature of human acts to directly address providence itself, requiring us to transcend time.³⁷ Accordingly, the problems now raised require us to intuit something that is, strictly speaking, beyond discursive reason’s limitations. How ought reason to confront its own limitations? This question draws us into the very heart of the Minotaur’s labyrinth, for if misology comes from being burned by arguments gone sour, to what more dangerous place can we go than one where reason must try to measure up to and even exceed its own limitations? Trying to intuit something admittedly beyond reason’s limitations would seem to set us up for an even greater fall. If reason successfully reasons up to its very limits and yet remains dissatisfied, is not misology inevitable?

Boethius’ hopes for healing depend on whether a sufficiency of knowledge about the providential governance of the world can nevertheless be obtained. Notably, it is *Philosophy*, rather than Revelation, who brings Boethius to this point, even if she can’t promise anything more.³⁸ Philosophy must show that Boethius is wrong to doubt

³⁷ In this way, the *Consolation* follows the structure of the *Phaedo*, where to meet the greatest challenge to the soul’s immortality, Socrates must begin a new line of argument that moves beyond the specifics of the soul to “the cause concerning generation and destruction as a whole” (95e), resulting in the recollection of the intelligibility of things never being adequately available to us unless we see in what way things are *good* (cf. 99c, *Rep.* 505a-506a).

³⁸ Some scholars argue that the *Consolation* showcases Boethius’ end-of-life return to paganism, given its lack of explicit references to Christianity (premodern

reason's capacity even as she must remain clear-eyed about reason's limitations. Herein lies the deadliest trap in the Minotaur's lair.

VIII. Extrinsic Deserts

While Philosophy admittedly cannot adequately explain providence, she can provide Boethius enough evidence to see that providence governs all and enough of an explanation to show why a providential ordering of the universe is compatible with the apparent disproportion between people's acts and their extrinsic deserts. In this way, Philosophy can provide sufficient reason to *hope* for ultimate intelligibility, such that despairing misogyny ceases to be an inevitable conclusion.

Philosophy reaffirms that providence acts through nature ("fate;" IV.6) and the nature of each being's desire (IV.6) and that Fortune has no control over the world. "[T]he tendency that disposes all things toward the good is what directs them. Nothing happens for the sake of evil, even by the actions of the wicked themselves" (IV.6). If we find the wicked nevertheless receiving fortuitous gifts and the virtuous receiving dire penalties, we should "ask [ourselves] whether these good and bad things must necessarily be as men judge them to be" (IV.6). The fact that we value *x* or want to avoid *y* at all costs may not mean that *x* is good and that *y* is bad; it could also mean that we are confused, or that *x* and *y* have different values in different contexts. Undertaking surgery to cure a routine headache would be foolish, but undertaking surgery is not foolish for all cranial ailments. Analogously, God recognizes each

scholars also questioned Boethius' orthodoxy; see, e.g., Papahagi [2009], Ch. 2). Marenbon (2014) 241-242 gives a taxonomy of the major interpretive directions on this question. Wiitala (2019) 251-252 rightly argues that the *Consolation's* trajectory, though "not specifically Christian" is "nonetheless compatible with his Catholic Christianity" as articulated in the *Theological Tractates*. Philosophy cannot lead Boethius to the content of Christian Revelation, but she can clear away barriers and prepare Boethius for remembering Revelation, especially through her reminder that "nothing less than love" (II.8) orders all. The fact that Philosophy uses *amor* (*erōs*) rather than *caritas* (*agapē*) should not be taken as evidence of a return to pagan-Platonic thought over-and-against Christian thought since the two Christian thinkers most philosophically aligned with Boethius both argued against divorcing *erōs* and *agapē*; see Augustine, *CD* XIV.7 and Dionysius, *DN* IV.11. Similarly, Blackwood (2002) 141 points to III.9's invocation of the need for prayer, which is "recognized when reason becomes conscious of the inadequacy of its dividing activity to the end it desires. In the act of prayer, reason desires to be raised above itself by the agency of the unity it seeks."

particular situation and doles out whatever externals are needed for unity. “Providence will harass some because otherwise they might run to excess with unbroken prosperity. To others it may bring hardships in order to strengthen their minds with the qualities of piety and patience” (IV.6). Providence may grant goods to the wicked in order to remedy their weakness that further wickedness might be avoided (IV.6). Hence, “when you see something happen that is the opposite of what you might expect, it may be that you are wrong in your perceptions and that your thinking is confused, but there is order nonetheless in the way the events turn out” (IV.6). At the very least, apparently disordered events could really be directed to the good in a way we don’t yet see, and so a crack appears within the barrier despairing reason has set before itself.

Though we may not understand the particular details of providence, our prior recognition that God is Goodness necessitates that all of God’s providential acts must be ordered toward the good. The “Lord who rules all things and holds in his hands the reins that guide his whole creation” orders all things with “the bonds of love” which “hold those pieces in place, love for each other and love of the good that is their aim and only end” (IV.6). If the world is held together by such “bonds of love,” then we can say “every kind of fortune is good.” Note here that we’ve taken a dramatic step forward from the similar claim posited at the end of Book II. There, every kind of fortune was good because fortune’s gifts make our lives easier and because fortune’s ill-will reveals the contingency of such gifts, allowing us to better recognize and thus handle those gifts of fortune rightly. This is the basically Stoic approach to fortuitous goods seen in Epictetus’ advice that, at a banquet, we might partake of whatever foods pass by but we ought never try to arrest their passage, for our lot in life is not to hold on but to accept things for the way that they are (*Encheiridion* §15). But Philosophy has replaced Fortune with Providence as the cause of our thrownness. *All* things are ordered by providence, and thus all things are ordered toward the wellbeing of those who receive them. All fortune is good fortune because “fortune” is really just a misapprehension of providence, and all providential gifts are good, even those that we might not think we desire when we don’t recognize the true shape of things. The issue, then, is not whether reality is good but instead whether we understand reality rightly. The virtuous receive both “good” and “bad” gifts *as* good, as they truly are (since all that *is* is good), whereas the vicious will receive “every kind of fortune” badly (IV.7), failing to recognize gifts for what they are.

Having shown that “Fortune” is really just a misapprehension of providence’s distribution of goods, Philosophy cinches the deal by explaining that “chance,” too, doesn’t exist, except as a product of *epistemic limitations*. Fortune and chance are not constitutive features of the world but instead names we use when we fail to recognize the causal structure of the world. Hence, if we mean by chance “events produced by random motions rather than by a chain of causes,” then “chance is nothing at all” (V.1). Chance is *only* a meaningful feature of our world *if* it is a name for human ignorance of causal order, for chance, per Philosophy’s citation of Aristotle, is nothing but the surprising coincidence of two distinct causal lines, deriving from providence (V.1). As Philosophy’s poem puts it, even “slack-reined chance could be shown in the end to be wearing its own bridle of laws that all along governed its every movement” (V.1).

IX. Freedom

Boethius’ final difficulty, wherein the greatest danger lies, involves the apparent incompatibility of God’s providence with freedom of the will. This problem lies at the very center of Boethius’ intellectual tradition. Philosophy, following Proclus, takes God to know all things both “in advance” (in a sense that needs to be interrogated) and by knowing himself, in his simplicity (V.3, 6).³⁹ This premise safeguards God from being changeable by contingent things, for if his knowledge depended on contingent things or future events, he would be subject to them. But taking God’s knowledge of contingent things to be derived from his self-knowledge seems to imply that there is, in fact, no room for the spontaneity required by human freedom, and thus human freedom *is* incompatible with divine providence. Likewise, if God knows all things “in advance,” does his knowledge not necessitate future events to occur as God knows them? Philosophy will tackle the problem of God’s knowledge of future events directly; her response to the related but distinct worry that God’s knowledge is determinable by created things *qua* created is less explicit.⁴⁰

³⁹ Cf. Marenbon (2007) 134 for references to Proclus and others in that tradition.

⁴⁰ Marenbon (2007) distinguishes the “Problem of Prescience” from the “Problem of Providence” (see 126) and concludes that while divine prescience *is* compatible with human freedom, the greater providential view is not, for if God knows all by knowing himself, then things external to God cannot have the spontaneity to affect God’s knowing (see 143-145). Marenbon argues that the conclusion of the *Consolation* is thereby vitiated, leaving “the reader puzzled and dissatisfied” (145).

Against Boethius' hesitation, Philosophy claims that human freedom must be a reality, for rationality depends on freedom, since each of our actions presuppose a faculty of judgment that chooses between competing options. We cannot understand the differences to be found in human acts without presupposing such a freedom, which is present in human beings in proportion to their ordination to and by divine love. Those who align themselves with providence are freest, while those who allow themselves to fall prey to vice suffer the "ultimate enslavement" wherein they "no longer exercise their powers of reason" (V.2). Philosophy's comment here is illuminative of our overarching thesis: "They have brought this upon themselves, and are therefore *captives of their exercise of their innate freedom*. But still, providence looks after them from eternity" (V.2; *emph. added*). Disorder in human affairs comes from nothing except the ignorant abuse of our freedom.⁴¹

Nevertheless, Boethius remains unconvinced. How could divine foreknowledge not confer necessity on future events without compromising the certainty of God's knowledge? And if there is no freedom, as divine foreknowledge seems to imply, is God not unjust? If there's "only a jumble of rewards," aren't we back under Fortune's whimsical power? Divine foreknowledge would also compromise the *commercium divinum*, for our prayers and supplications would be in vain (V.3). As Boethius' poem laments, "What God would set such *incompatible* truths loose?" (*emph. added*). Despite his progress, Boethius founders on a dangerous precipice.

Philosophy's response appeals to the Socratic principle she's used throughout: rather than assume that reality is unsound, let's check

Arguably, Marenbon's analysis of the Procline view fails to recognize that a created being's freedom is not set over-and-against God's; cf., e.g., Perl (2007) 42, 61 for an exposition of this point in Dionysius. Aquinas would argue that human freedom is not incompatible with God's knowledge of all things through his own self-knowledge because God knows how radical his own gift of being is, such that it gives things their own intelligibility and agency, even freedom. It is more charitable to read Philosophy's account as insufficiently worked out (as compared, e.g., to Aquinas') than to think that Philosophy failed to recognize she blew up her entire argument in the very last section of the *Consolation*, as Marenbon claims.

⁴¹ Though there's not space to adequately discuss the point, we should not take Philosophy to mean that all misfortune is self-caused. The evil acts of other human beings, including historically remote ones, lead to disorder in the human world as such. Philosophy's goal is not to blame the victim but instead to help the victim determine to what extent he is complicit in his own suffering, regardless of what situation he finds himself facing.

whether we have been unsound in our thinking. The “reason that the problem is difficult,” she explains, “is that the operation of reason in the human mind cannot approach the workings of the mind of God” (V.4). Here, Philosophy introduces a new principle, implicit all along, that diagnoses Boethius’ misunderstanding, namely, the (Neo)platonist axiom that whatever is received is received according to the mode of the recipient.⁴² Boethius mistakenly “assume[s] that the limit of [his] knowledge depends on the capacity to be known of the objects of knowledge. But this is wrong. Things that are known are not comprehended according to how knowable they are by nature but rather according to the ability to know of those who are doing the knowing” (V.4). Rather than reduce the intelligibility of the world to the categories of the knowing subject, we ought to elevate the categories of the knowing subject so that they become adequate to the intelligibility of the world. To insist on the world being intelligible *on our terms* is a misological act of presumption,⁴³ whereas to recognize that we are not (*yet*) made of a firm enough substance to see the world on its own terms is a *philological* act of humility.

Our lack of understanding something does not *eo ipso* indicate that it is unintelligible. It may be instead that we are not yet adequate to the thing at hand, just as an amateur wine-drinker cannot yet discern the various notes that a sommelier claims to experience. Rather than condemn the sommelier for hifalutin gustatory chicanery, we might instead learn to drink more discerningly under the sommelier’s tutelage. As Philosophy explains, “all ways of knowing use their own capacity and capability rather than depending on the object that is being known,” but “the higher powers of comprehension embrace and include those that are lower, while the lower do not rise to the higher” (V.4). Recognition of this truth about the nature of cognition is vital for curing misology.⁴⁴ Just as reason, which can cognize the universal, corrects the senses, which are stuck in particularities, so divine intuitive intellect can correct reason’s misapprehension of providence. Discursive reason is a temporal act (dis-cursive = “running-through”) and thus cannot cognize anything except in temporal terms; it likewise tends to mistakenly

⁴² See also Blackwood (2002) 142-143.

⁴³ Cf. Schindler (2008), Introduction.

⁴⁴ As Blackwood (2002) 146 puts it, “It is the presence of the lower in the higher that makes the prisoner’s ascent possible.” Cf. Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, §18. See Perl (2007) Ch. 6 for the Platonic metaphysical and epistemological background for Philosophy’s view.

cognize what's simple as instead complex, introducing (rational) distinctions that are not truly present in the thing (cf. III.9). If divine intuitive intellect can comprehend all of time at once, simply, it can see something intrinsically unavailable to discursive reason *as* discursive reason, just as discursive reason can see something intrinsically unavailable to sensation *as* sensation. What sensation takes to be "nothing at all" (the universal), reason discloses; analogously, what to reason is a stumbling block (divine foreknowledge, how God knows particular created things), intuitive intellect discloses. *If* reason could be elevated to participate in divine knowledge, it would understand how even indefinite, contingent things can nevertheless be known by God without thereby conferring necessity upon them (V.5). Boethius fails, then, in trying to understand the divine intellect according to the mode of discursive reason, a failure analogous to an animal rejecting the reality of universals because sensation is unable to detect them.

Philosophy's axiom about knowing according to the mode of the knower also opens a new path forward. While human reason cannot know as God knows, human reason can know something about God's nature, and that knowledge is sufficient to address reason's problem. Since all knowing happens according to the knower's mode, we need only consider what God's mode of knowing "looks like." Eternity is "the whole, simultaneous, perfect possession of limitless life" (V.6), not mere perpetuation throughout time.⁴⁵ Since God is eternal, his mode of knowing must befit an eternal being and hence must have a perfect possession of whatever it apprehends, embracing the whole of time simultaneously as a unity. God's eternity thus rules out, in advance, a conception of his foreknowledge as being a knowing-in-advance, a *pre*-vision (*prae-videntia*), for this would imply a non-simultaneity in God's intuition. Instead, his knowing must be a knowing-all-in-an-instant, a *pro*-vision (*pro-videntia*), a seeing all things face-to-face (*pro*), simultaneously. Just as our apprehension of what's *be-fore* us, i.e., in front of us, does not confer necessity, neither does God's apprehension of what's *be-fore* him (i.e., all things) confer necessity. Hence, God's foreknowledge doesn't necessitate our actions, and free will is preserved.⁴⁶ Hence, Philosophy admonishes: "you must avoid

⁴⁵ "God should not be thought of as older than the created world but different in his grasp of time and in the immediacy of his being" (V.6). "God is eternal but the world is perpetual" (V.6).

⁴⁶ Likewise, insofar as eternity embraces time (such that it is more proper to think of time as *within* eternity than as a separate reality set against eternity), God's self-

wickedness and pursue the good. Lift up your mind in virtue and hope and, in humility, offer your prayers to the Lord.” Having resolved Boethius’ impasse, Philosophy shows that God’s providential order is just, for deserts are given meritoriously and the *commercium divinum* is preserved.

Whatever the reasons, Boethius the author leaves us without any indication of Boethius the character’s response to Philosophy’s argument.⁴⁷ Has he been healed? Does his healing consist in a becalming of his wayward reason that he might instead partake of that divine insight that is offered to him in love? We cannot know. But what we can say is that in providing Boethius with this axiom about how knowledge is received, she has given Boethius *the* fundamental tool for curing his misology. If misology comes about from a refusal to recognize that it is my own understanding that isn’t up to the task rather than that reality itself is broken, the cure comes in recognizing that all things understand according to their own mode rather than the mode of what’s to be understood; hence, if some aspect of reality appears unintelligible, this points to a failure in the recipient, not a flaw in reality. Instead of blaming reality for our lack of understanding, we must recognize that it is we who are not yet sound, and we must strive to make our own mode of receiving adequate to receive all of what reality has to offer. Doing so is the very nature of learning, an adequation of the learner’s viewpoint to the thing to be known, so that the thing to be known may be known on its own terms, insofar as this is possible. Some of what’s available to be known may be inaccessible to discursive reason’s grasp, such as the particulars of God’s providential order, but we cannot thereby infer from this that there is no providential order, but only that we aren’t up to the task of understanding it fully without some kind of divine aid. Accordingly, what Philosophy teaches us is to always remain open to insight, even when we hit our limits, for we will never see what is there to be seen if we refuse to look. Rather than look upon the world in confused despair, we must look upon it in hope and

knowledge includes within it temporal events. Since God *is* the reality that underlies all created things, God’s self-knowledge includes a knowledge of things as they act in time. Hence, God’s knowing creaturely beings through his own self-knowledge is not necessarily incompatible with creaturely beings having freedom, as Marenbon claims, though working this out is beyond the scope of this paper.

⁴⁷ Shanzer (1984) 364-366 suggests that the *Consolation’s* conclusion imitates Socrates’ last days.

humility, in the recognition that all things are ordered by “nothing less than love.”⁴⁸

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