

# BOETHIUS' *CONSOLATIO* AND THE THEME OF ROMAN LIBERTY

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*For Brian Stock*

BOETHIUS' *CONSOLATIO* DIVIDES INTO TWO BROAD MOVEMENTS, Books 1 through 4, and Book 5.<sup>1</sup> This is evident from the explicit introduction of Book 5 as a digression or departure from the main argument and the fact that its first poem is in elegiac couplets, as at the beginning of Book 1 and nowhere else.<sup>2</sup> In each of the two sections "Boethius"<sup>3</sup> is given a prose chapter (1.4, 5.3) followed by a poem in acatalectic anapestic dimeters (1.m5, 5.m3) in which to speak on his own. The prose chapters have the same function in respect to the separate portions of the *Consolatio* in which they appear, and that is to allow "Boethius" to articulate the dilemma which will motivate subsequent discussion. There is a thematic interconnection between the chapters, in that each shows "Boethius" as being preoccupied with<sup>4</sup> the question of *libertas*. But whereas in 1.4 he is concerned

<sup>1</sup>Quotations of the Latin text of the *Consolatio* derive from Moerschini 2000 (but adopting *gaudet* at 1.m5.41, quoted below, 353); translations of the *Consolatio* derive from Walsh 1999 and those of the *In Peri Hermeneias librum* from Blank and Kretzmann 1998, in both cases with my modifications. Versions of this paper were presented at Gothenburg University in November of 2001 and at Fu Jen Catholic University (Taipei) in December of 2002, and I would like to thank my hosts, especially Professors M. Wistrand and C. Thomsen-Thörnqvist (Gothenburg), for their kind hospitality. I have benefited from the criticisms and suggestions of two anonymous readers and am especially indebted to Daniela Klein for shedding unexpected light on the *Rätsel der Freiheit*.

<sup>2</sup>5.1.5 (*a propositi nostri tramite . . . aversa . . . deviiis*); cf. Gruber 1978: 379, *ad loc.* 1. It is not the case that "[o]nly the opening poem . . . is in the elegiac metre," *pace* Claassen 1999: 244; cf. Gruber 1978: 16a (inset table) and Magee 2003a: 151 on the distribution of metres. Scheible (1972: 157, n. 2) and O'Daly (1991: 174, n. 229) note that the parallel between 1.m1 and 5.m1 is confined to the metre; but even a formal reminder by way of the repeated metre was sufficient for Boethius to have made his point.

<sup>3</sup>I use quotation marks for Boethius the prisoner of the *mise-en-scène* as opposed to Boethius the author and narrator: 1.m1.1–2 (*qui quondam . . . peregi . . . cogor*) I take to be the former and 1.1.1 (*Haec dum mecum tacitus ipse reputarem*) the latter. Philosophia speaks first at 1.1.8 (*Quis, inquit . . . permisit*), and by 1.3.3 (*Et: Quid, inquam, tu . . . venisti?*) the dialogue is underway. As to the poetry, the simile split between 1.m3.3 and 1.3.1 (*ut cum . . . Haud aliter*) is a unique instance in the voice of the narrator; "Boethius" delivers only 1.m1, 1.m5, and 5.m3, and Philosophia the rest (2.m2 is perhaps ambiguous owing to the personification). Like Boethius' own first *Isagoge* commentary, and indeed Dexippus' *Categories* commentary, the *Consolatio* is what Cicero might have styled a "Peripatetic" dialogue (*Att.* 13.19.4) in that the author appears as interlocutor; but, as has often been observed, the dialogue gradually dissolves into a kind of *soliloquy*, soul "conversing with itself" (Pl. *Theaet.* 189e–190a). Cf. further Magee 2003a: 147–150, with n. 11. Lerer (1985: 123 and 229–231), however, sees the eventual silence of "Boethius" as a matter of acquiescence. The gradual evaporation of the dialogue form in Boethius' first *Isagoge* commentary is to be explained on quite different grounds: the conceit was brittle and artificial from the start, and Boethius simply lost interest in it.

<sup>4</sup>Or, complaining about: 1.5.1 (*questibus*), 5.4.1 (*querela*).

primarily with the facts pertaining to his public life and imprisonment, in 5.3 he is struggling with a great logical and metaphysical problem. We can hardly fail to notice the difference: in Book 5 *libertas* is no longer under threat from tyrants and Fortune, but from divine providence itself. It would seem worth considering how this transformation is brought about and what it suggests for the structure and argument of the *Consolatio*.

# I. 1.4–1.M5 AND 5.3–5.M3: *LIBERTAS*

The ostensible aim of 1.4 is to set the facts straight for posterity, to record the series of injustices which have been wrought against “Boethius.”<sup>5</sup> The whole chapter projects a Ciceronian tone, “Boethius” pleading his case before neither judge nor jury in an unrestrained *copia verborum*.<sup>6</sup> He is at pains to stress the failure of the senate, the very body whose independence he fought to protect.<sup>7</sup> Hence beneath the rhetorical sophistication there broods a political obsession which might best be described as Tacitean: the Roman curia, cowed into submission by an autocrat and muzzled by its own subservience. Of the three charges levelled against “Boethius” the first two ring changes on themes which are only too familiar from the *Annals*: *maiestas* trials worked up on the basis of falsified *delationes* and the erosion of senatorial *libertas*.<sup>8</sup> The contrasts are stark throughout and evoke an ancient Roman theme: on one side a *rex*, *Palatini*,<sup>9</sup> *aulici*, *delatores*, and a *crimen maiestatis*; on the other *patres*, *consulares*, the *senatus*, and *libertas Romana*. But political chaos is not the sole worry. “Boethius” says that he entered political life in pursuit of the ideal, as preached to him by Philosophia (Plato), of philosopher-kings.<sup>10</sup> And so the third charge laid against him becomes in effect an accusation of guilt by association: the *delatores* called it *sacrilegium* and *maleficium*, but they really meant *philosophia*.<sup>11</sup> “Boethius,” alone and dejected, thus launches into his poem (1.M5). For twenty-four verses he celebrates the order of the universe, then for twenty-four more he complains about Fortune, tyranny, and the chaos of human affairs. How, he wonders, are we to explain the dichotomy? God may be in his heaven, but all is not right with the world.

By 5.3 his thinking has changed. “Boethius” seeks a way past the dilemma apparently posed by *providentia* and *libertas arbitrii*. If divine providence means

<sup>5</sup> 1.4.25. On 1.M5 and 5.M3, see Magee 2003a: 153–155 and 165–168; on the historical background more generally, Chadwick 1981: 1–68 and Moorhead 1992: 219–235.

<sup>6</sup> 1.4.26 and 36. Cf. Gruber 1978: 113, *ad loc.* 1.4, also with 153, *ad loc.* 2: “Die von der *elocutio* geforderten *virtutes dicendi* (*perspicuitas, ornatus, aptum dicendi genus*) sind gewahrt, wir finden den Stil des *genus grande*.”

<sup>7</sup> 1.4.31–32.

<sup>8</sup> 1.4.20–32. Cf., for example, Tac. *Ann.* 4.32–35.

<sup>9</sup> 1.4.13 (*Palatinae canes*). Unless under the influence of the neighboring *opes*, the reading *Palatinae* would appear to be intended; it is at any rate *difficilior* than the somewhat banal *Palatini* of mss *K, W, Mn* (etc.).

<sup>10</sup> 1.4.5–9.

<sup>11</sup> 1.4.37–42.

certain knowledge not only of all that we do but of all that we plan or will, then what we plan, will, or do must inevitably happen precisely as foreseen, lest providence turn out to be mere opinion—*quod de deo credere nefas*.<sup>12</sup> At stake are our systems of reward and punishment, our very concepts of virtue and vice, and prayer.<sup>13</sup> For why should we be rewarded or punished for what we do of necessity? What point is there in deliberating about right and wrong if we are not free to determine our course of action? And why should we seek divine guidance if we are barred from deliberation? In his poem (5.m3) "Boethius" goes on to ask how God can possibly tolerate Truth's being at odds with itself (1–5), which then leads to the question of what it means both to know and not to know something (6–31). The search for truth is an intermediate stage between knowledge and ignorance; we must summon the universal (*summa*) from within and apply it to the particulars (*singula, partes*) of our experience.

## II. ROMAN PHILOSOPHERS IN POLITICS: THE PROBLEM OF TYRANNY

The accusations laid against "Boethius" evoke two sides of his persona, the Roman senator and the scholar steeped in the traditions of Greek philosophy and science.<sup>14</sup> What unites them is the ideal of the philosopher-king, and a profound sense of disillusionment is evident in both respects. Is *this*, "Boethius" wonders, the reward for a life devoted to philosophy and the state? Philosophia, in anticipation of the complaint, has already reprimanded him for self-absorption (1.3.9):

*Quodsi nec Anaxagorae fugam nec Socratis venenum nec Zenonis tormenta, quoniam sunt peregrina, novisti, at Canios, at Senecas, at Soranos, quorum nec pervetusta nec incelebris memoria est, scire potuisti.*

Perhaps you have not learnt of the flight of Anaxagoras, of the poison forced on Socrates, of the torturing of Zeno, for these took place abroad; but at any rate you have been able to acquaint yourself with such figures as Canius, Seneca, and Soranus, for the tradition about them is still fresh and famous.

Her words are carefully chosen, the double tricolon (split by rhetorical antithesis) implying that for every persecuted Greek philosopher Rome has at least one example of her own to offer.<sup>15</sup> At least one, for although she actually names only Canus ("Canius") Iulius, Seneca, and Barea Soranus, three persecuted Stoics under Gaius and Nero, the generalizing plurals which she uses clearly conjure up the Flavian and possibly even later persecutions. The tyrannic cruelty is no doubt real, but "Boethius" will not be allowed—especially not among the Romans—to pretend that his suffering is unparalleled.

<sup>12</sup> 5.3.1–6.

<sup>13</sup> 5.3.29–36 and 5.6.44–47.

<sup>14</sup> 1.4.2–4 and 10–15; cf. 1.1.10, 1.m.2.6–23, 2.3.7–8; *In Aristotelis Categorias*, PL 64, col. 201b.

<sup>15</sup> The technique of balancing Greek and Roman *exempla* in this way is in evidence also at 2.2.11–12 and 2.6.10–11. Cf. Sen. Ep. 104.27–29 (Socrates, Cato), and below, 351, n. 18 and 352, n. 23.

Now not all have, like Socrates, attained the crown of a martyr's death.<sup>16</sup> There are in fact distinctions to be made among those who have suffered in Philosophia's name. It has been wrongly assumed, for example, that the Epicureans and Stoics are her *familiares*—wrongly, in that the hellenistic διαδοχή to Socrates and Plato amounted to a kind of philosophical rape (1.3.7–8):

*Cuius hereditatem cum deinceps Epicureum vulgus ac Stoicum ceterique pro sua quisque parte raptum ire molirentur meque reclamantem renitentemque velut in partem praedae traherent, vestem quam meis texueram manibus disciderunt abreptisque ab ea panniculis totam me sibi cecississe credentes abiere. In quibus quoniam quaedam nostri habitus vestigia videbantur, meos esse familiares imprudentia rata<sup>17</sup> nonnullos eorum profanae multitudinis errore pervertit.*

Thereafter the mobs of Epicureans, Stoics, and the other schools each did their best to plunder his inheritance. As part of their loot they dragged me off, in spite of my protestations and resistance; they ripped apart the gown that I had woven with my own hands, and they departed bearing the ragged pieces which they had torn from it. They imagined that all of me had passed into their hands; and because they bore traces of my clothing about them, foolish men regarded them as my intimates, and more than one of them were brought to ruin through being misled by the uninitiated.

The Stoics and Epicureans rank as a mere *vulgus*, forming a stark contrast with Plato, Aristotle, and Euripides, who are all described as members of Philosophia's fold.<sup>18</sup> The Epicureans, as she will explain, play to popular tastes by offering up *voluptas* as the *summum bonum*, while the Stoics deprive us of the higher cognitive faculties.<sup>19</sup> Boethius must have meant what he has Philosophia say on the subject, for there is more of the same to be found in his commentaries: the Epicureans obtusely neglect logic and abandon the world to blind chance, while the Stoics rob us of what is ἐφ' ἡμῖν and subject the world to unrelenting necessity.<sup>20</sup>

In light of the evident antipathy towards Stoicism in particular it is tempting to explain Philosophia's talk about Canus, Soranus, and Seneca as an essentially

<sup>16</sup> Cf. 1.3.6: *victoriam mortis . . . promeruit*; 4.3.5: *sapienti . . . corona non decedit*; 4.m7.31: *caelum meruit*; and see further Magee 1988: 81.

<sup>17</sup> Bieler's punctuation.

<sup>18</sup> 1.3.6, 3.7.6, 3.9.32, 4.2.45, 5.1.12. Cf. 1.1.10 (Eleatics, Academics); 1.3.9 (Zeno); 3.12.37 (Parmenides); below, 362, n. 66. It is interesting to observe that *familiaris* appears elsewhere in the *Consolatio*, and in connection with Epicurus (1.4.30, unnamed), Seneca (3.5.10, in relation to Nero), and Lucan (4.6.33). That Euripides and Lucan (note again the balance between Greek and Roman) should figure thus is unsurprising in a prosimetric work which has Philosophia as its main poet (cf. 1.1.11 and 3.m11.15). Euripides was said to have associated with Socrates, Plato, and other philosophers (e.g., Diog. Laert. *Vitae* 2.18, 3.6), while Lucan's connections with Cornutus and Seneca would have been a well-known part of the Roman tradition.

<sup>19</sup> 3.2.7 and 12 (cf. 3.7); 5.m4.

<sup>20</sup> Brandt 1906: 138,13; Meiser 1880: 239,25; In *Ciceronis topica*, PL 64, col. 1146c–d; below, 360, n. 52. The question of Boethius' knowledge of Stoic and Epicurean philosophy is complex and would require a separate monograph. It must suffice here to point out that on these points at least his interpretation, although superficial and reductionist, reveals what *he* considers to be the necessary point of attack. These remarks hold also for what is said in section IV of this paper.

trivial rhetorical gesture: Boethius spent his scholarly life translating Greek philosophy for Romans and so, in pondering the long history of condemned philosophers, inevitably thought in terms of Roman as well as Greek examples.<sup>21</sup> And to whom among the Romans was he to turn rather than to the Stoics, who provided an apposite point of comparison with his own misfortune by bringing the old *rex-senatus* antithesis into sharp relief? But in the final analysis (the explanation continues), their philosophy was flawed, which explains why Soranus immediately disappears from the *Consolatio* while Canus resurfaces only for a minor anecdote. The martyred Roman Stoics function as good moral *exempla* within the restricted context of the first book, but they play no vital philosophical role in the work as a whole.

But such a line of interpretation, although true to some extent, is ultimately unsatisfying. It fails above all to account for the prominence of Seneca, who survives well into Book 3, where Philosophia ruminates on the implications of his *dignitas* and suicide.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, of the six philosophers named at 1.3.9 Socrates and Seneca clearly stand out in the *Consolatio*, and what in the end sets Seneca apart even from Socrates is in fact the theme of Roman senatorials under the threat of political despotism, which at least at the outset is for "Boethius" the most pressing concern.<sup>23</sup> Like both Nero and Theoderic, Seneca has a significant part to play in the *Consolatio*, but precisely what part is not immediately apparent.

The roles assigned to Nero and Theoderic are at least superficially fairly easy to assess: each provides an inroad into the problem of tyranny. Theoderic is never named, but he is most certainly the *rex* mentioned by "Boethius" in 1.4. He goes hand in hand with the upheavals of Fortune,<sup>24</sup> as again in 1.m5 (28–41):

*Nam cur tantas lubrica versat  
Fortuna vices? premit insontes  
debita sceleris noxia poena,  
at perversi resident celso  
mores solio sanctaque calcant  
iniusta vice colla nocentes.*

...

*Sed cum libuit viribus uti,*

<sup>21</sup> Cf. above, 350, n. 15 and 351, n. 18; below, n. 23.

<sup>22</sup> 3.5.10–11. Her two Nero poems serve as indirect reminders of him as well (2.m6; 3.m4). Cf. below, 363, n. 67; and further, Courcelle 1967: 347–353; Scheible 1972: 64–67 and 87–88; and O'Daly 1991: 74–103.

<sup>23</sup> Like Soranus, Anaxagoras is immediately let go and, like Canus, Zeno returns only for a minor anecdote (1.4.27, 2.6.8—note the similarity). The famous "Socratic Paradoxes," on the other hand, are essential background to Book 4 (note 4.2.45, *illam Platonis . . . sententiam*); Seneca will be discussed below. (Significantly, Cicero stands apart in the handling of ancient philosophical *exempla* [2.7.8, 5.4.1]; cf. Syme 1939: 318: "any . . . cult of Cicero was an irony.") On Seneca's death and Socrates, see Griffin 1976: 367–369; on Boethius' death and Socrates, Magee 2003a: 149; and on the tradition of the so-called "Stoic Opposition" more generally, Brunt 1975 and MacMullen 1966: 1–94.

<sup>24</sup> *Rex*: 1.4.12, 17, and 32; *Fortuna*: 1.4.19, 35, and 43–44. Cf. 1.m4.3 and 11 (*fortunamque . . . tyrannos*); and for Fortune as a symbol of political tyranny, Sall. *Cat.* 2.5, 10.1; Tac. *Ann.* 4.1.1.

*quos innumeri metuunt populi  
summos gaudet subdere reges.*

Else, why does slippery Fortune range,  
Encompassing such violent change?  
Harsh pains, owed villainy as its due,  
Instead the innocent pursue.  
With wicked ways ensconced on high,  
We blameless souls unjustly lie,  
Our necks pressed down by guilty men

...  
Yet once [Fortune] decides upon [her] goal,  
It is [her] pleasure to control  
Great kings, whom countless nations dread.

The whole treatment is pathetic and deeply unphilosophical, "Boethius" being reduced to issuing idle threats: sooner or later Theoderic too will fall prey to Fortune's whims. Philosophia will make the necessary correction in perspective later.<sup>25</sup>

Nero's function is to occasion a more distanced or objective mode of analysis, and what Philosophia is after in particular is the *cause* of tyranny. This is evident from 2.m6, in which Nero is depicted as ruling the world whilst being dominated by his own *rabies*. In 3.m4 we see him defiling the senate by means of his patronage, which then leads to consideration of Seneca's fate and of the ἀκράτεια question more generally.<sup>26</sup> The moral is drawn in 3.m5: sovereignty over the whole world but not over one's own passions is the mark of impotence, not power. The passions lie at the centre of Philosophia's concern precisely because they are what enslave "Boethius"<sup>27</sup> and must therefore be brought under the control of reason (1.m4.13–18):

*nec speres aliquid nec extimescas:  
exarmaveris impotentis iram;  
at quisquis trepidus pavet vel optat,  
quod non sit stabilis suique iuris,  
abiecit clipeum locoque motus  
necitit qua valeat trahi catenam.*

Renounce all fear and expectation:  
You will strip intemperate anger of all its weapons.  
But he who all atremble is fearful or desirous,  
Through lack of inward staunchness or self-mastery,  
Has thrown away his shield and deserted his station.  
He forges the chains which confine his shackled progress.

<sup>25</sup> 4.m1.29–30; cf. 1.m4.11–12, 2.m1.3; 2.2.11–12, 2.6.10, 3.5.6.

<sup>26</sup> 3.5.

<sup>27</sup> 1.1.8–9.

Echoes of Stoic doctrine can be heard in the *statio* metaphor (17), the self-sufficiency theme (16), and the reference to hope and fear (13), two items in the canonical list of cardinal passions.<sup>28</sup> All four passions are in fact on prominent display in the conclusion to Book 1 (m7.25–31):

*gaudia pelle,  
pelle timorem  
spemque fugato  
nec dolor adsit.  
Nubila mens est  
vinctaque frenis  
haec ubi regnant.*

Forgo empty joys,  
Dismiss every fear,  
Renounce idle hope,  
Let grief come not near.  
The mind is befogged,  
Imprisoned in chains,  
When [passions like] these  
Wield tyrannical reins.

Although both of these poems are offered as exhortations to a defense, fashioned after the Stoic doctrine of ἀπάθεια, against the vicissitudes of fortune and tyranny, the binding metaphors which they employ indicate that the real issue is not fortune or tyranny as such, but *the soul*. The final poem on tyranny arises out of a discussion of the Platonic paradox that only the wise do what they will.<sup>29</sup> Nero is conspicuously absent, and the atmosphere is not at all the same (4.m2.5–10):

*... iam videbit intus artas dominos ferre catenas;  
hinc enim libido versat avidis corda venenis,  
hinc flagellat ira mentem fluctus turbida tollens,  
maeror aut captos fatigat aut spes lubrica torquet.  
Ergo cum caput tot unum cernas ferre tyrannos,  
non facit quod optat ipse, dominis pressus iniquis.*

... He'll then see the lords shackled by close chains within:  
Appetite with its poisonous greed excites their hearts;  
Wild spirit whips up storm-waves in their minds;  
Grief plagues these captives, slippery hope torments.  
The king you see by many tyrants possessed,  
His aims frustrated, by harsh masters pressed.

Rather than preaching on ἀπάθεια as a defence against the incursions of Fortune and tyranny, Philosophia is now stripping the veil from the inner ἀκράτεια

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Scheible 1972: 45 (for [*Tusc.*] 4.15 read 4.6.13–4.7.14).

<sup>29</sup> 4.2.45.

of the tyrannous nature; and alongside *maeror* and *spes* now appear *libido* and *ira*, suggesting not the Stoic classification of passions, but the Platonic tripartite soul.<sup>30</sup> The shift in emphasis has been exquisitely managed: first Theoderic as seen from “Boethius” embittered perspective; then Philosophia on Nero and Stoic ἀπάθεια; and finally Philosophia on a Platonic view of impotence and the soul. *Ab exterioribus ad interiora, ab inferioribus ad superiora*.<sup>31</sup> if enslavement originates from *within* the soul, then freedom must ultimately spring from there as well.

The analogy seems obvious enough: as Nero was to Seneca, so is Theoderic to “Boethius.” Far more suggestive, however, is its corollary: as Nero is to Theoderic,<sup>32</sup> so is Seneca to “Boethius.” Now, philosophically speaking one of the most potent Senecan moments in the *Consolatio* is perhaps also one of the least immediately apparent ones. 1.m5 does not, indeed, actually mention Seneca, but it nevertheless draws inspiration from him. Particularly important to the main argument are the lines in which “Boethius” expresses his perplexity over divine neglect of human affairs (1.m5.25–33):

*Omnia certo fine gubernans  
hominum solos respuis actus  
merito rector cohibere modo.  
Nam cur tantas lubrica versat  
Fortuna vices? premit insontes  
debita sceleri noxia poena,  
at perversi resident celso  
mores solio sanctaque calcant  
iniusta vice colla nocentes.*

All things you govern with fixed norm,  
But human acts you do not school,  
Or guide and bind within just rule.  
Else, why does slippery Fortune range,  
Encompassing such violent change?  
Harsh pains, owed villainy as its due,  
Instead the innocent pursue.  
With wicked ways ensconced on high,  
We blameless souls unjustly lie,  
Our necks pressed down by guilty men.

<sup>30</sup> Note in this connection the Latin terminology used by Cicero (*Tusc.* 1.10.20), Apuleius (*De Plat.* 1.18), Calcidius (*In Tim.* chs. 139–140 [180,1–15 Wa.], 182–183 [209,20–210,12], 187 [212,10–18], 223 [238,11–12], 229 [244,13–14]), and Macrobius (*In somn. Sc.* 1.6.42). Cf. Pl. *Rep.* 439d–e, 441a, *Tim.* 70a, *Phdr.* 246a; Arist. *De an.* 432a25–26.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Aug. *De trin.* 14.3.5, with Moreschini 2000: 167.1.

<sup>32</sup> Nero *rex*: 3.5.1 and 9 (implicitly); Theoderic *rex*: 1.4.12, 17, and 32, 1.m5.41 (implicitly). *Tyrannus* is reserved for poetry (1.m4.11, 4.m1.30, 4.m2.9) and Greek anecdotes (2.6.8, 3.5.6); cf. Magee 2003a: 154, n. 25. In his *Categories* commentary Boethius refers to Anastasius as *Imperator* (PL 64, col. 264a), in connection with which cf. Jones 1964: 321, with n. 2.



The Senecan mood of indignation proves for him irresistible (*Phaedra* 972–979):

*sed cur idem qui tanta regis,  
sub quo vasti pondera mundi  
librata suos ducunt orbes,  
hominum nimium securus abes,  
non sollicitus prodesse bonis,  
nocuisse malis?  
Res humanas ordine nullo  
Fortuna regit . . .*

But why do you, the very one who rules this great edifice, / under whose guidance the bodies of the vast universe / run their circuits in balanced equipoise— / why do you stand aloof, untroubled so for men, / unconcerned to aid the good and punish the wicked? / *Fortune* rules human affairs, / without order . . .

Philosophia instantly grasps the problem. “Boethius” can think only in terms of two competing kinds of rule, celestial kingship and terrestrial tyranny, and he therefore splits the universe between independent forces of order and chaos.<sup>33</sup> In failing to see the binding unity of things he has forsaken both *patria* and *libertas* (1.5.4–5):

*Si enim cuius oriundo sis patriae reminiscare, non uti Atheniensium quondam multitudinis imperio regitur, sed εἰς κοῖρανός ἐστιν, εἰς βασιλεὺς, qui frequentia civium, non depulsione laetetur, cuius agi frenis atque obtemperare iustitiae summa libertas est. An ignoras illam tuae civitatis antiquissimam legem, qua sanctum est ei ius exsulare non esse quisquis in ea sedem fundare maluerit? Nam qui vallo eius ac munimine continetur, nullus metus est ne exsul esse mereatur; at quisquis inhabitare eam velle desierit pariter desinit etiam mereri.*

Reflect on the fatherland from which you are sprung. It is not governed by the rule of the masses like the Athens of old, but “There is but one lord and one king,” and he prefers his citizens to throng around him rather than to be in exile. To be guided by his reins, to obey his just commands is perfect freedom. You must surely be acquainted with the most ancient law of your city, which ordains that one who opts to make his home there cannot lawfully be banished from it? For if a person resides within the protection of its rampart, he need never fear sentence of banishment; but once he ceases to desire a home there, he likewise ceases to deserve it.

He must therefore recall that his true fatherland is governed, not by any political authority, but by the transcendent *rex et dominus*, the *fons et origo*;<sup>34</sup> he must recall that it is in fact a *monarchy*, the City of God<sup>35</sup> which holds the only real promise of *libertas*. By the end of 4.m6 Philosophia will have taken Seneca–“Boethius” in hand by completely revamping 1.m5. She will borrow the meter, number of

<sup>33</sup> The solution to the *unde mala* problem (cf. 1.4.30) will entail the Neoplatonic doctrine that evil is non-existence, nothing (3.12.29, 4.2.39, 4.3.15).

<sup>34</sup> 4.m6.36 (possibly an echo of the Homer paraphrased at 1.5.4).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Marc. Aur. *Med.* 4.23.3, with the remarks at the end of this paper.

verses, and series of motifs from 1.m5, but will obliterate the divide which it forces between the celestial ("divine") and terrestrial ("human") spheres.<sup>36</sup>

### III. PHILOSOPHICAL THERAPY

In probing for the causes of "Boethius'" malaise Philosophia shows complete disregard for the political concerns manifested by him in 1.4 and 1.m5. She has nothing at all to say about Theoderic, the curia, or *delatores*. The diagnosis comes in four stages:<sup>37</sup>

- (a) *Is the universe ruled by reason or by chance?* "Boethius" is certain that it is the former, which he calls God. But that much was already clear from the first half of his poem;<sup>38</sup> hence Philosophia must search more deeply for the root of the problem.
- (b) *What are the gubernacula by which it is ruled?* "Boethius" is mystified by the question, and so Philosophia claims to have found the source of his belief in the predominance of Fortune.
- (c) *What is the finis for which every nature strives?* "Boethius" can recall only that God is the origin, as in his response to (a); Philosophia has now ascertained the cause of his belief that the wicked are powerful and happy.
- (d) *What does it mean to be human?* Unmindful of the immortality of his own soul, "Boethius" answers with a definition better suited to the context of his logical commentaries: "rational mortal animal." There is the cause of his illness: having forgotten himself thus,<sup>39</sup> he thinks of himself as in exile.

This line of questioning is kept clearly in view, answers to (b) and (c) in fact being reached already by the end of Book 3. The universal *finis* and the *gubernacula* by which the world is divinely managed are one and the same thing: the Good.<sup>40</sup>

The conclusion is undoubtedly true, but "Boethius" remains dissatisfied and so poses at the beginning of Book 4 a question concerning its implications: *Why then, in a world which is universally motivated by desire for the Good, do the wicked prosper and the virtuous suffer?*<sup>41</sup> This brings the discussion directly back to the question posed by him at 1.4.30:

<sup>36</sup> Magee 2003a: 155–162.

<sup>37</sup> 1.6.3–20.

<sup>38</sup> 1.m5.1–24.

<sup>39</sup> 1.6.18; cf. 1.2.5.

<sup>40</sup> 3.11.40–41 and 3.12.2–14. No treatment is called for in the case of (a), while (d) has occasioned questions concerning the transmitted text (Tränkle 1977: 152–153). But although it is true that (d) is not answered in the way that (b) and (c) are, it is unnecessary to conclude that the text was left unfinished by Boethius. For the answer to the question is in fact assumed from an early point in the dialogue (2.4.28): *et quoniam tu idem es cui persuasum atque insitum permultis demonstrationibus scio mentes hominum nullo modo esse mortales* (etc.); cf. 2.5.25–26, 2.7.22, 3.12.1, 5.2.8; Gruber 1978: 156, *ad loc.* 15.

<sup>41</sup> 4.1.3–5; cf. 4.5.4–5.

*Vnde haud iniuria tuorum quidam familiarium quaesivit: "si quidem deus," inquit, "est, unde mala? bona vero unde, si non est?"*

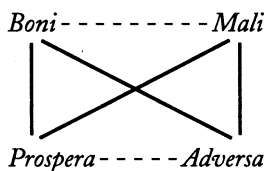
There is certainly justice in the question posed by one of your intimates: "If God indeed does exist, what is the source of evil? But if he does not exist, what is the source of good?"

and again at 1.m5.28–29:

*Nam cur tantas lubrica versat  
Fortuna vices?*

Else, why does slippery Fortune range,  
Encompassing such violent change?

Book 4 thus marks a return to the concerns of Books 1 and 2, and so *fortuna* reemerges in chapters 5 and 7—although only as a final concession to the *sermo communis*.<sup>42</sup> The task now is to disentangle the apparent confusion in the distribution of lots, and the argument evolves out of an implied square of opposition:<sup>43</sup>



What Philosophia must show is that the diagonal pairs are symptomatic of the same providential governance as the vertical ones. Hence whether virtue is rewarded by prosperity (*iusta remuneratio*) or tested by adversity (*utilis exercitatio*), and whether vice is corrected by prosperity (*utilis correctio*) or punished by adversity (*iusta poena*), every lot is fated or providentially ordained.<sup>44</sup> The culminating point is reached in 4.6, where the *series fati* is adduced in explanation of all that happens in heaven and on earth (18–19):

*Ea series caelum ac sidera movet, elementa in se invicem temperat et alterna commutatione transformat, eadem nascentia occidentiaque omnia per similes fetuum seminumque renovat progressus. Haec actus etiam fortunasque hominum<sup>45</sup> indissolubili causarum connexione constringit; quae cum ab immobilis providentiae proficiscatur exordiis, ipsas quoque immutabiles esse necesse est.*

<sup>42</sup> 4.5.2: *fortuna populari*; 4.7.6–7: *hominum sermo communis* . . . *vulgi sermonibus*; 4.7.12–14: *populus putat* . . . *opinionem populi sequentes*; cf. 4.7.16: *tametsi nemo audeat confiteri*. The "diatribe" style and *sermo communis* are most obviously in evidence in Book 2. Note, for example, 2.1.9: *o homo*; 2.1.19: *omnium mortalium stolidissime*; 2.2.2: *homo*; 2.4.22: *o mortales*; 2.6.4 = 3.3.1: *o terrena animalia*. The words *paulo ante* (4.7.5) refer back to 2.8 (hence *mirum*, 2), not to 4.4 (10–12), *pace* Gruber 1978: 370, *ad loc.* 5 (Magee 2003b: 362–363). Cf. more generally, Klingner 1921: 12–16; Gruber 1978: 167, *ad loc.* 9 and 170, *ad loc.* 19.

<sup>43</sup> 4.6.23–49 and 4.7.3.

<sup>44</sup> 4.6.30–31.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. 1.m5.26 and 29.

This chain [of Fate] moves the heavens and the stars, intermingles the elements and transforms them by their interchange; it also renews all things which come to be and pass away, by the generation of like offspring and seeds. Further, it constrains the actions and fortunes of men by an unbreakable interlinking of causes, and since this interlinking takes its origin from unchanging Providence, the causes themselves must likewise be unchangeable.

On such a view freedom can be defined only in terms of the soul's capacity to ascend beyond the reaches of time and fate to eternal providence,<sup>46</sup> and the ascent amounts, paradoxically, to a form of *submission* to the divine yoke.<sup>47</sup> The conclusion to Book 4 is most revealing: Fortune, her wheel replaced by the *orbis fati*,<sup>48</sup> takes her final bow. There is no longer any place for what she represents.

#### IV. STOIC FATALISM

But "Boethius" is again dissatisfied and so poses at the beginning of Book 5 the question which triggers the concluding "digression": *Does a providentially ordered universe leave any room for chance?*<sup>49</sup> Having staked his initial claim on the certainty that the world simply cannot be ruled by chance,<sup>50</sup> he now finds himself facing an unforeseen difficulty. What is left of freedom if indeed fate "constrains the actions and fortunes of men" by an inexorable series of causes (4.6.19) and the soul in contemplation of the divine is, like the celestial bodies, actually brought "under the reins" of providence (1.5.4)? It is remarkable that in 5.3 he never mentions the Stoics, but that they are on his mind there can be no doubt. Immediately after 5.3 Philosophia makes oblique reference to works in which he has previously tried to sort out the free-will dilemma.<sup>51</sup> She has in mind the *De interpretatione* commentaries, especially the second, in which the famous sea-battle problem gives rise to what could almost be described as an independent treatise on the subject. The exegesis of Aristotle's chapter is anachronistically prefaced by a lengthy discussion of the two main hellenistic schools. The Epicureans, says

<sup>46</sup> 4.6.14–16. The idea is that fortune is ultimately a consequence of choice (4.7.22): *In vestra enim situm manu qualem vobis fortunam formare malitis*. Note the contrast with Sen. *Clem.* 1.1.2: *qualem . . . sortem . . . in mea manu positum*. Cf. Boeth. *Cons.* 1.2.3, 2.1.16–18, 2.4.18.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. 1.5.4: Paul *Rom.* 6.22 (freedom from sin = enslavement to God).

<sup>48</sup> 4.6.15; cf. 2.2.9.

<sup>49</sup> 5.1.1–3.

<sup>50</sup> 1.6.3–4; cf. 1.6.20, 3.12.4. The philosophical justification for Boethius' making such a sharp distinction between his own position and Stoic fatalism is an issue into which I do not enter here, partly because it hangs on the question of Boethius' *construal* of the Stoic doctrine (cf. above, 351, n. 20). Not all critics have been satisfied with Philosophia's defence of freedom, and "Boethius," as an anonymous reviewer remarks, "has to allow that nothing is under human control except for the movements of our minds." But then so much depends on how we interpret "nothing . . . except for." The aim here is in any case exegetical clarity, which, although modest, is nevertheless necessary before deciding whether or not Boethius' position is philosophically defensible.

<sup>51</sup> 5.4.1.

Boethius, leave the world to chance, while the Stoics shackle it with necessity. The Stoics are his main concern:

*Stoici autem omnia necessitatibus dantes converso quodam ordine liberum voluntatis arbitrium custodire conantur. dicunt enim naturaliter quidem animam habere quandam voluntatem ad quam propria natura ipsius voluntatis impellitur, et sicut in corporibus inanimatis quaedam naturaliter gravia feruntur ad terram levia sursum meant, et haec natura fieri nullus dubitet, ita quoque in hominibus et in ceteris animalibus voluntatem quidem naturalem esse cunctis; et quidquid fit a nobis secundum voluntatem [quae] in nobis naturaliter esse autumant, illud tamen addunt, quod ea velimus quae providentiae illius necessitas imperavit, ut sit quidem nobis voluntas concessa naturaliter et id quod facimus voluntate faciamus, quae scilicet in nobis est, ipsam tamen voluntatem illius providentiae necessitate constringi. ita fieri quidem omnia ex necessitate, quod voluntas ipsa naturalis necessitatem sequatur, fieri etiam quae facimus ex nobis, quod ipsa voluntas ex nobis est et secundum animalis naturam.*<sup>52</sup>

The Stoics, however, who give all things over to necessity, try to preserve free choice of the will by a kind of converse argument. For they say that the soul does indeed have a certain will naturally, one to which the *nature* proper to the will itself is impelled. And just as among inanimate bodies certain heavy ones naturally move down towards earth [while] light ones pass upwards, and no one doubts that these things happen by nature, so also in all men and other animals [they say] there is indeed a natural will; and they maintain that whatever is done *by us* in accordance with the will is naturally *in our control* [*in nobis* = ἐφ' ἡμῖν]. They add, however, that we will the things that the necessity of that providence has commanded. Thus will has indeed been granted to us naturally, and what we do we do by means of the will, which is of course in our control, but the necessity of that providence constrains the will itself. Thus all things happen *of necessity*, since the natural will itself follows necessity, [and] even the things we do *of ourselves* happen [of necessity], since the will itself is of ourselves and in accordance with the nature of an animate being.

Boethius' refutation of this doctrine springs from a strict differentiation of *voluntas* and *arbitrium* (*iudicium*). Spontaneous reflexes of pursuit and avoidance (*voluntas*) cannot be taken as indications of the capacity for free choice, since they are observable even in beasts, which are incapable of controlling their fears and appetites.<sup>53</sup> *Voluntas* is rather an offshoot of what is received by the lower cognitive faculties of *sensus* and *imaginatio*, over which we, like beasts, exercise no control at all. *Arbitrium* and *iudicium*, by contrast, stem from *ratio*:

*quotienscumque enim imaginationes quaedam concurrunt animo et voluntatem irritant, eas ratio perpendit et de his iudicat, et quod ei melius videtur, cum arbitrio perpenderit et iudicatione collegerit, facit. atque ideo quaedam dulcia et speciem utilitatis monstrantia spernimus, quaedam amara licet nolentes tamen fortiter sustinemus; adeo non in voluntate sed in iudicatione voluntatis liberum constat arbitrium, et non in imaginatione sed in ipsius imaginationis perpensione consistit.*<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Meiser 1880: 195.10–196.3 (my emendation at 195.20–21, which in Meiser's edition reads *quae in nobis naturalis est, autumant*).

<sup>53</sup> Meiser 1880: 196.3–13.

<sup>54</sup> Meiser 1880: 196.15–24.

For whenever certain images form in the mind and stir the will, reason weighs them and judges regarding them, and then, when it has weighed in deliberation and considered in judgement, it does what it deems better. And for that reason we forgo some things that are sweet and give the appearance of usefulness, [while] others that are bitter we bravely endure even though we do not desire them [as being bitter]. To that extent free choice corresponds not to the will but to the *judgement* of the will, and it consists not in imagination but in the weighing of [what is in] that same imagination.

Being human entails rationality; but rationality entails the capacity for free choice; being human therefore entails the capacity for free choice.<sup>55</sup> Now, this is in fact closely related to the line of argument which Philosophia pursues in the *Consolatio*. In 5.m4 she explicitly taxes the Stoics with limiting the operations of the human soul to mere passive reception of *sensus* and *imagines* (1–9):

*Quondam Porticus attulit  
obscuris nimium senes,  
qui sensus et imagines  
e corporibus extimis  
credant mentibus imprimi,  
ut quondam celeri stilo  
mos est aequore paginae  
quae nullas habeat notas  
pressas figere litteras.*

Men past of doctrine dark and dense  
The Porch did once provide,  
To hold that images of sense  
Issue from things outside,  
Then are implanted in the mind;  
As with swift strokes of pen  
Are letters to smooth page consigned,  
Which bears no marks till then.

Her refutation stresses the importance of *iudicium*. If there were no *actus mentis iudicantis*,<sup>56</sup> then human beings would be constrained to the limitations of *imaginatio*. They would in fact behave as beasts do, invariably pursuing apparent pleasures and avoiding apparent pains.<sup>57</sup> And yet we see that human beings sometimes act against their instincts and *imagines*, and that because of *ratio*, which the Stoic theory undercuts.

#### V. ROMA NOBILIS OR CIVITAS AETERNA?

Philosophia's initial criticism of the Stoics (1.3.7) at last gains some philosophical content, and a surprising reversal emerges. The philosophical champions of

<sup>55</sup> Meiser 1880: 196.24–197.4.

<sup>56</sup> 5.4.39, 5.m4.26–27, and 5.5.1. On 5.m4, see O'Daly 1993.

<sup>57</sup> 5.5.3–4; cf. 2.1.15.

political freedom under the old Roman principate are in fact our nemesis in the struggle to preserve free choice of the will. The change entails parallel and related developments on two fronts.

First, there is the radical revaluation of *libertas*. "Boethius," who was initially disturbed by worries about Fortune, despotism, and *libertas Romana*, is in the end concerned to know whether providence leaves any room for chance and *libertas arbitrii*. Anyone who has read the *Consolatio* more than once will instantly recognize the pointed irony of the moment when he puts to Philosophia the question what liberty remains to be hoped for once that of the Roman curia has been lost.<sup>58</sup> The path leading to a deeper understanding of freedom is for him long and labyrinthine,<sup>59</sup> and the Stoics will not survive the journey (2.m7.16): *quid Brutus aut rigidus Cato?*

Second, there is the *patria* motif. In the course of reforming his understanding of *libertas* "Boethius" simultaneously witnesses the whole of the Roman world which once gave definition to his political and social life dissolving into a mere point in space and time.<sup>60</sup> He—at first reluctantly—bids it farewell, gradually turning his attention instead in the direction of another homeland. For as long as he is "in Rome" Philosophia will speak to him "as a Roman," but already by 2.5 she is beginning systematically to dismantle a set of beliefs about the goods whose loss he laments as constituting the measure of his unhappiness.<sup>61</sup> He pines for his lost *existimatio* and *dignitas*;<sup>62</sup> she counters with a devastating assault, mounted in two coordinated phases, on *divitiae*, *dignitas*, *potentia*, *fama*, and *voluptas*.<sup>63</sup> The plan is to expose these "false" or imperfect goods, thereby bringing the "true" and perfect ones into view, and the effect is to reduce the infinite multiplicity of merely apparent ends to the one transcendent Good.<sup>64</sup> Plato heralds the crucial turning-point in the argument;<sup>65</sup> his *Timaeus*, *Meno*, *Phaedrus*, and *Gorgias*<sup>66</sup> will

<sup>58</sup> 1.4.26–27.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. 3.12.30: *inextricabilem labyrinthum rationibus texens*.

<sup>60</sup> 2.7.3–18.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. 2.1.2.

<sup>62</sup> 1.4.43–46.

<sup>63</sup> *Divitiae* (2.5, 3.3); *dignitas* (2.6, 3.4); *potentia* (2.6, 3.5); *fama* (2.7, 3.6), *voluptas* (3.7). Each round of attack is ushered in by a reference to the administering of stronger therapies (2.5.1, 3.1.2), the second being carefully framed by long-range rhetorical chiasmus (so also Marenbon 2003: 199, n. 12):

3.1.5–7: *veram . . . felicitatem . . . verae . . . beatitudinis*;

3.m1.11–13: *falsa . . . bona . . . vera*;

3.2.2–3: *calle . . . bonorum omnium congregatione*;

3.8.12: *omnium bonorum congregatione . . . calles*;

3.m8.21–22: *falsa . . . vera . . . bona*;

3.9.1: *mendacis . . . felicitatis . . . vera*.

<sup>64</sup> 3.1.7 and 3.10.1; cf. 3.2.12 and 3.9.27.

<sup>65</sup> 3.9.32–33.

<sup>66</sup> 3.m9, 3.m11, 4.m1, and 4.4 respectively. Aristotle's *Physics* and *De interpretatione* emerge in 5.1 and 6, but Plato will have the last word (5.6.6–14). Cf. above, 351, n. 18.

gradually eclipse Seneca and indeed the whole “diatribe” style that sets the tone for Books 1 through the first half of 3.<sup>67</sup> After Plato there can be no return to the dualism of Seneca’s choral ode (*Phaedra* 972–979), since “Boethius” must be brought back to the understanding that there is but one king to rule over the eternal *patria* (1.5.4).

Marcus Aurelius once wrote that as Antoninus he claimed as his city and fatherland Rome but that as a man he claimed the world.<sup>68</sup> What Philosophia envisions for “Boethius,” however, is something quite different from Stoic cosmopolitanism: his journey will be a Neoplatonic νόστος or ἐπιστροφή back to the homeland of Soul, Mind, and the Good.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Cf. above, 358, n. 42; Chadwick 1981: 228–234. Of course, Seneca’s poetic influence continues past 3.m9, after his significance as a symbol of the Stoic tradition proper has faded. On the poetic influence, see further Scheible 1972: 118–121, 152–156; Lerer 1985: 160–164, 191–201, 237–253; and O’Daly 1991: 190–199, 222–232.

<sup>68</sup> *Med.* 6.44.6; cf. Sen. *Tranq. an.* 4.4: *patriamque nobis mundum professi sumus*; *Ep.* 28.4: *patria mea totus hic mundus est*.

<sup>69</sup> 1.5.5, 3.2.13, 4.1.9, 4.m1.25, 5.1.4; cf. 2.4.17; Magee 2003a: 162–165; and more generally, Schmidt-Kohl 1965: 9–11.



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