

Stoicism as Anesthesia: Philosophy’s “Gentler Remedies” in Boethius’s *Consolation*

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ABSTRACT: Boethius first identifies Philosophy in the *Consolation* as his *medica*, his “healer” or “physician.” Over the course of the dialogue Philosophy exercises her medical art systematically. In the second book Philosophy first gives Boethius “gentler remedies” that are preparatory for the “sharper medicines” that she administers later. This article shows that, philosophically speaking, Philosophy’s “gentler remedies” amount to persuading Boethius toward Stoicism, which functions as an anesthetic for the more invasive philosophical surgery that she performs afterwards. Seeing this, however, requires understanding how Philosophy draws out Boethius’s spiritedness in the first book and how in the second book she sublimates it into an intellectual and volitional apathy toward the things of fortune, i.e., into a Stoic attitude toward that which is other. Significantly, though, the Stoicism to which Philosophy leads Boethius is of a mitigated sort, inasmuch as friendship is not included among the things of fortune to which Boethius is anesthetized, an exception that opens up Boethius to genuine wonder and, consequently, to genuine philosophizing.

Non clamabit neque accipiet personam;
Nec audietur foris vox eius;
Calamum quassatum non conteret,
Et linum fumigans non extinguet;
In veritate educet iudicium.
Non erit tristis neque turbulentus,
Donec ponat in terra iudicium;
Et legem eius insulae expectabunt.

(*Isaiah 42:2–4 [Vulg.]*)

IN JUST THIS WAY, when the clouds of sadness dissipated, I drank in heaven and recovered my mind in order to recognize the face of my healer” (I, 3.1–3).¹ Thus Boethius first identifies the mysterious woman who appears to him in prison—not as *Philosophia*, “Philosophy,” but as his *medica*, his “healer” or “physician.” In fact, this medical motif is introduced in the *Consolation* by Philosophy herself. Prior to this scene of recognition, Philosophy dismisses the poetic Muses who are inspiring

¹All translations of passages from the *Consolation* are mine, based on the Latin text in *De consolazione philosophiae*, ed. C. Moreschini (Munich/Leipzig: K. G. Saur, 2000). Book, section, and line numbers of this edition are provided in parentheses. For general discussions of the *Consolation* in the context of Boethius’s life and works, see E. Reiss, *Boethius* (Boston MA: Twayne, 1982), especially pp. 80–161, and H. Chadwick, *Boethius: The Consolations of Music, Logic, Theology, and Philosophy* (Oxford UK: Clarendon Press, 1981).

him to write self-pitying dirges by asserting, “It is time for medicine rather than complaint” (I, 2.1). Once Boethius acknowledges Philosophy as his physician, she gets to work by encouraging him to share his pain with her so that she can carry out the first step of her art, a diagnosis. Following doctor’s orders, Boethius uncovers his wound by recounting the history of injustices he has suffered. After listening to his spirited narrative, Philosophy probes more aggressively, interrogating Boethius about the nature of man, God, and the purpose of things. In the midst of this exchange, Boethius declares that he is a “rational, mortal animal, and nothing more” (I, 6.34–35), and in this declaration Philosophy discovers the key to her final diagnosis. “I now know . . . the highest cause of your sickness,” she says. “You have ceased to know what you yourself are” (I, 6.36–38).

Boethius’s forgetfulness of his true self is no trivial illness, and so there will be no quick cure. Instead, Philosophy must treat him in stages. As she says:

Because a great tumult of emotions broods over you and because pain, anger, and grief draw you apart in diverse ways, you are now of a mind that stronger remedies do not yet touch you. And thus we will use gentler remedies for a short while, so that those things that have become hardened into a tumor while these troubles were affecting you may by a more coaxing touch become softened to receive the power of sharper medicine. (I, 5.36–39; cf. I, 6.53–59)

Philosophy delays the sharper medicine until the third book. There she leads Boethius to see what he really is, namely, a being who is potentially divine by participation. This paper, however, focuses on the “gentler remedies” administered in the second book. In medical terms, I argue, these gentler remedies amount to anesthesia, for in that book Philosophy numbs Boethius to the apparent goods and evils of fortune so that thereafter she can penetrate him more deeply and remove the cause of infection. In philosophical terms, these gentler remedies amount to persuading Boethius toward Stoicism, which is the limited worldview arising within the horizon of man understood as “a rational, mortal animal and nothing more.” Despite recognizing the inadequacy of Stoicism earlier (I, 3.20–25), Philosophy nonetheless employs a mitigated form of it as a stage in her treatment of Boethius, because thereby he can be anesthetized for a more invasive surgery.²

To be sure, I am not the first to consider the progressive structure of Philosophy’s treatment of Boethius in the *Consolation*. Numerous interpreters, in fact, have delineated this structure over the course of the entire dialogue.³ Among them there

²The idea that Philosophy leads Boethius toward Stoicism despite knowing its limitations fits with the general interpretation of the *Consolation* presented in D. Duclow, “Perspective and Therapy in Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*,” *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 4 (1979): 334–43, which he describes as follows: “The *Consolation* provides a paradigm for this healing search for meaning. For Boethius suggests that healing comes with insight, and that insight is attained by progressing through a series of perspectives. Hence two key issues in the *Consolation*’s quest for meaning are therapy and perspective” (p. 335). As I try to show here, then, Stoicism is one of the “perspectives” through which Boethius progresses in his healing process.

³Detailed explications along these lines can be found in the following: E. Scarry, “The Well-Rounded Sphere: The Metaphysical Structure of *The Consolation of Philosophy*” in E. Scarry, *Resisting Representation* (Oxford UK: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994), pp. 143–80, which appeared first in *Essays in the Numerical*

is general agreement that the hierarchy of cognitive powers laid out in the final book (V, 4.27–39), from *sensus* to *imaginatio* to *ratio* to *intelligentia*, is crucial for articulating this structure. There is not general agreement, however, about exactly which cognitive powers correspond with which books of the *Consolation*. In addition—and more fundamentally—there does not appear to be agreement about what it means to say that a given book corresponds with a given cognitive power. Does it mean, for example, that the language of that book uses imagery that appeals to that power?⁴ Or that the mode of argument suits that power?⁵ Or that the presentation in that book aligns itself with a mathematical science that resolves to that power?⁶ Or does the correspondence involve a congeries of such connections?

In this paper I delineate the progress that Boethius makes in the first two books of the *Consolation* with a view to broadening how one might think about any such correspondences between, say, a cognitive power and a particular book of the *Consolation*. The second book is particularly apt for doing this. For there is general agreement that in this book Philosophy deals with Boethius primarily on the level of *imaginatio*, and yet close analysis of the progress Boethius makes in this same book shows that Philosophy initiates in him a cognitive ascent that involves in sequence his senses, his opinions, and his reason. The correspondence of a cognitive power with a given book, therefore, cannot mean that Boethius's other powers are not also being healed in some fashion in that same book. Rather, I maintain, the correspondence has to do chiefly with how in a given book Philosophy disposes Boethius both cognitively and appetitively⁷ so that he can deal with objects of a certain kind in a way that contributes to his full recovery of mind and evokes in him a desire for what it truly good.⁸

Criticism of Medieval Literature, ed. C. Eckhardt (Lewisburg PA: Bucknell Univ. Press, 1980), pp. 91–140; T. Curley, "How to Read the *Consolation of Philosophy*," *Interpretation* 14 (1986): 211–63; R. McMahon, *Understanding the Medieval Meditative Ascent: Augustine, Anselm, Boethius, and Dante* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic Univ. of America Press, 2006), pp. 211–66; and M. Fournier, "Boethius and the *Consolation of the Quadrivium*," *Medievalia et Humanistica: Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Culture* 34 (2008): 1–21. In light of these various accounts of the structure of the *Consolation*, it may be best to recognize that the work contains different and overlapping structures involving not only the hierarchy of cognitive powers, but also the hierarchy of mathematical sciences and the diversity of philosophical worldviews. For more on the different kinds of structure one might find in the *Consolation*, see Curley, "How to Read the *Consolation of Philosophy*," pp. 214–21.

⁴McMahon, *Understanding the Medieval Meditative Ascent*, pp. 214–22.

⁵Scarry, "The Well-Rounded Sphere," pp. 155–67.

⁶Fournier, "Boethius and the *Consolation of the Quadrivium*," passim.

⁷As McMahon notes, Philosophy's healing of Boethius—which he sums up as getting him to "recollect himself"—has both an intellectual and a moral dimension. This seems right to me. See *Understanding the Medieval Ascent*, pp. 236–38. Thus, when I speak of Boethius's healing "in philosophical terms" as being toward "Stoicism," I mean this in a way that refers not just to an intellectual stage of healing, but to a moral one as well—taking philosophy, then, to refer not merely to an intellectual discipline, but to a way of life. For evidence of the influence of the Stoics on Boethius in the second book of the *Consolation*, see J. Magee, "The Good and morality: *Consolatio* 2–4" in *The Cambridge Companion to Boethius*, ed. J. Marenbon (Cambridge UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009), pp. 181–206. Also, J. Relihan makes some intriguing general comparisons between the second and third books of the *Consolation* and the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius. See *The Prisoner's Philosophy: Life and Death in Boethius's Consolation* (Notre Dame IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2007), pp. 69–74.

⁸In light of these comments, then, I find Fournier's analysis of the order of the books in terms of the quadrivium very helpful, especially in light of his more general opening comments; see "Boethius and the

In the second book the objects in question are the things of fortune that Boethius imagines to be genuine goods and evils. A brief look at the first book coupled with a detailed analysis of the second reveals how Philosophy coaxes Boethius to become Stoical with regard to such objects, while a glimpse ahead to subsequent books suggests how Boethius's new stance toward the things of fortune primes him for further philosophical development. This paper, therefore, is divided into three parts. In the first part I paint a picture of Boethius's condition before Philosophy administers the gentler remedies, focusing chiefly on two allusions—one to Homer's *Iliad* and another to Plato's *Republic*—in order to indicate how spiritedness comes to animate Boethius's attitude toward his unfortunate situation. In the second part of the paper I delineate the steps in the second book whereby Philosophy persuades Boethius toward a mitigated form of Stoicism that capitalizes on his newly-acquired spirited disposition. At this point in the paper, however, I offer a brief interlude by jumping ahead thirteen centuries in order to present Hegel's account of the nature and principles of Stoicism in his *Philosophy of History* and *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel not only elucidates Stoicism as a philosophical worldview but also situates it within a context of philosophical development. Hegel's historically-oriented account of Stoicism, therefore, can shed light on the philosophical progress Boethius makes over the course of the second book. Thus, in light of Hegel's account, I articulate the stages of Boethius's progress toward Stoicism. In the third part of the paper I suggest how Boethius's new stance toward the apparent goods and evils of fortune lends itself to his full recovery. I focus on the important sense in which Philosophy persuades him toward a *mitigated* Stoicism, inasmuch as friendship is never reckoned as a thing of fortune to which he must be anesthetized—a deliberate exception that is crucial for Philosophy's subsequent treatment.⁹ Finally, I conclude the paper with

Consolation of the Quadrivium," pp. 1–4. His analysis makes possible a more profound account of what it means for the books to correspond to the different levels of cognition, especially if one sees the mathematical sciences as dispositive not only cognitively, but also appetitively in some way. In addition, Fournier's analysis introduces a rich way of thinking about the ascent that takes place over the course of the books of the *Consolation* in light of the progress in the quadrivial arts (astronomy, music, geometry, arithmetic), among which there is clearly a nested structure of dependency coupled with a patent hierarchy. Such analogous thinking helps to clarify the meaning of Boethius's own assertion that "the higher power of comprehending embraces the lower, whereas the lower in no way rises to the higher" (V, 4.89–91).

⁹I have found it worthwhile to focus on the second book of the *Consolation* for a number of reasons, but one of them is perhaps worth sharing with those who teach philosophy to undergraduates. It has been my experience when teaching a work by a Stoic (say, Epictetus's *Handbook*) that many students are attracted to the worldview presented therein, whereas few are simply turned off by it—which has not been my experience, for example, with Epicurean works (say, Lucretius's *On the Nature of Things*). Undoubtedly there are many factors at work, some of which may have to do with the kinds of students I have taught. But perhaps there is a more general reason having to do with the youthfulness of undergraduates, inasmuch it is during the college years, generally speaking, that students advance from adolescence to young adulthood—or, as Shakespeare puts it, that human "players" on the world's stage advance from "lovers" to "soldiers" (*As You Like It*, II.7.139–66). Perhaps, then, the independence and aggressiveness that such an advance demands makes Stoicism appealing. Consequently, fruitfully cultivating aspects of a Stoic attitude may be crucial for an undergraduate's overall moral and intellectual development, i.e., philosophical development. Adopting a Stoic attitude may turn out, then, to be crucial at specific times in life—and perhaps especially during the transition from adolescence into young adulthood. Such "moments" of Stoicism may be instrumental in shaping both one's appetites and one's consciousness appropriately toward a fuller receptiveness to reality.

a brief reflection on the necessity of this mitigated form of Stoicism as a stage in Philosophy's treatment of Boethius.

I. *CALAMUM QUASSATUM NON CONTERET* . . . (ISAIAH 42:3 [VULG.])

In order to depict Boethius's condition prior to receiving Philosophy's gentler remedies, I explore in this section two allusions made in the first book, one to the *Iliad* and another to the *Republic*. These allusions point to a change in Boethius over the course of this book, a change from having an indulgent, concupiscible attitude toward his unfortunate situation to having a spirited, irascible one—to having, in fact, a particular kind of spirited attitude that, based on the allusion to the *Republic*, can be called "canine spiritedness." This attitude, in turn, provides an appropriate seed-bed for the mitigated Stoicism toward which Philosophy guides him in the next book.

To begin, then, consider Boethius's attitude toward his situation embodied in the verses with which the *Consolation* opens:

I, who in my prime once made songs with zeal,
 am, alas!, forced, in tears, to begin mournful measures.
 Behold, the wounded Muses dictate to me what should be written,
 and their dirges moisten my face with genuine tears.
 Them, at least, no terror could overcome, such that,
 as our companions, they would not follow the journey through.
 These, who were once the glory of my happy and green youth,
 now bring solace to my fate in mournful old age. (I, m1.1–8)

Here Boethius expresses not only sadness about his painful situation, but also, intriguingly, a level of contentedness. Yes, we human beings—odd animals that we are—can become friends with pain and wallow in it. As Boethius indicates, the poetic Muses "bring solace [*solantur*]" to his fate in mournful old age. His use of the verb *solari* (and not *consolari*) suggests that the relief he experiences is individualized, even selfish; it is not *with* another, not *consolation*.¹⁰ In the opening scene, therefore, Boethius is being isolated, not consoled, by these Muses.¹¹ The

If so, then Philosophy's use of gentler remedies in the second book may help one make sense of why this is so and how it can be done. In fact, as I will try to present it here, her gentler remedies in the *Consolation* suggest that a Stoic attitude toward reality may in certain cases be an indispensable stage prior to experiencing the wonder that underlies genuine philosophical inquiry. If this is true, and if one desires to progress philosophically, then adopting a Stoic attitude at appropriate times may be necessary for rekindling one's search for wisdom (similar, perhaps, to how fasting can reawaken one's ability to taste flavors). Hence, the second book of the *Consolation*, in the way it presents Philosophy as a teacher, may offer guidance to other teachers with regard to bringing about and utilizing these crucial Stoic moments.

¹⁰In fact, interestingly, *consolari* or a variant of it is used only once in the work, at III, 3.47 (not counting the title of the work, of course).

¹¹Fournier helpfully points out the following: "The first poem the Prisoner addresses to himself," whereas his next poem is "addressed to the 'maker of the circle (*orbis*) of the stars'" ("Boethius and the Consolation of the Quadrivium," p. 6). This is additional evidence that when the work opens, Boethius's condition is one of isolation and self-centeredness.

relief that he experiences consists in an indulgent, concupiscible attitude toward his pain that promotes self-pity as well as passivity toward his unfortunate situation.¹² It is a solace quite different from the more demanding sort that Philosophy will ultimately offer.

Unsurprisingly, then, Philosophy dismisses the poetic Muses as soon as she arrives on the scene. “These are the ones,” she declares, “who suppress the fruits of reason’s abundant field by means of the unfruitful thorns of emotions and who do not free men’s minds from sickness, but make them accustomed to it” (I, 1.30–33). In earlier days, Philosophy recalls, Boethius himself reaped the fruits of reason by seeking the causes of things, both in the heavens above and here below (I, m2). Why, then, Philosophy asks, has he cast aside the *arma*, the weapons, with which she equipped him in his youth (I, 2.4–6)? Her mentioning weapons is the first indication of the turn in Boethius’s condition that Philosophy aims to bring about, namely, a turn from an indulgent, concupiscible attitude toward his unfortunate situation to a spirited, irascible one. This new attitude arises while Boethius is uncovering his wound to Philosophy by narrating the history of injustices that led to his imprisonment, which is recounted in the fourth section, the longest section of the first book. The particulars of this historical narrative are clear enough. Here, then, I focus on two crucial allusions made in the text, one just before the narrative and one immediately following it, because they illuminate Boethius’s attitudinal turn.

The first allusion is to the *Iliad*, and it occurs at the beginning of the fourth section when Philosophy invites Boethius to share his pain with her. “Why do you weep?” she asks. “Why do you flow with tears? ‘Speak out; hide not what is in your mind’ [*Iliad*, I.363]. If you are looking for the work of a healer, you must uncover your wound” (I, 4.2–4). The imperative here, “Speak out; hide not what is in your mind,” is spoken by Philosophy in Greek,¹³ not Latin, and Philosophy is using the same words uttered by Thetis, Achilles’s goddess-mother, when she arrives to console her son in the first book of the *Iliad*. A reader familiar with the *Iliad* would recall the context of Thetis’s words to Achilles. Achilles has withdrawn from his companion soldiers—like Boethius, he is isolated—and sits on the beach of Troy, staring out toward the infinite sea and shedding tears, because his beloved Briseis has just been appropriated by Agamemnon. Thetis then comes to her son. “Speak out; hide not what

¹²As S. Lerer points out, Boethius’s passivity is also emphasized in this opening poem inasmuch as this prodigious reader and writer is being dictated *to* by the poetic Muses. As Lerer rightly notes: “Reduced to a scribe, [Boethius’s] role is passive, and the prisoner expresses a loss of moral and literary direction. . . . [These opening lines] lament the writer’s inability to continue the progress through higher genres and, more directly, to continue the literary career at all. Read in the context of the Boethian persona developed in his earlier works, these lines describe a life lived through texts coming to a silent end.” *Boethius and Dialogue: Literary Method in The Consolation of Philosophy* (Princeton NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1985), pp. 96–97.

¹³It reads: “Ἐξαύδα, μὴ κεῖθε νόω” (I, 4.2–3). Besides two proverbial phrases—ὄνος λύρας (“the donkey [listening] to the lyre” [I, 4.2]) and ἔπου θεῶ / (“follow God” [I, 4.134])—only the *Iliad* is quoted directly in Greek in the first book. In addition to the passage being examined here, see also the quotation at I, 5.11, where the words of Odysseus (εἷς κόϊρανός ἔστω, εἷς βασιλεύς [“let there be one lord, one king”]) [*Iliad*, II.204–5]) are alluded to (although Philosophy says it declaratively [“there is {ἔστω} one lord, one king”])—a passage also quoted by Aristotle at the end of his discussion of God in Book 12 of the *Metaphysics* (1076a4). Owing to the obvious martial character of the *Iliad*, these two Greek quotations may also point to the transition toward a spirited attitude taking place in Boethius.

is in your mind," she invites Achilles, and in response he narrates the injustices that he and his fellow Greeks have suffered at the hands of Agamemnon, the presumed commander of the Greek forces. After hearing her son's narrative, Thetis herself sheds tears. Then, affirming his pain even more, she departs to implore Zeus to act on Achilles's behalf. Significantly, however, Achilles himself no longer weeps; he is described as "having become angered at heart [χωόμενον κατὰ θυμὸν] for the well-girdled woman / taken away by force against his will" (*Iliad*, I.429–30).

Why is the reader alerted to this scene from the *Iliad* at this point in the *Consolation*?¹⁴ The reason, I believe, is to call attention to the change of attitude in Achilles that comes from his sharing his pain with Thetis, for he transitions from passive self-pity to active self-justification. To be sure, a self-justifying narrative may be no less self-focused than a self-pitying dirge; indeed, it could even be more so. It is, nonetheless, more rational. For unlike a dirge, an act of self-justification does not merely express one's own feeling of pain with a view to indulging in it; rather, it objectifies and publicizes one's pain, thus bringing it to the level of communicability and rationality. Here (I, 4) in response to Philosophy—like Achilles in response to his mother—Boethius offers a speech, a *logos*, an account of his pain, that sparks his spiritedness and gives rise to self-justified anger. Thus his attitude toward his unfortunate situation shifts from the concupiscible realm to the irascible, and thus closer to the rational.

Another crucial allusion, this time to the *Republic*, comes at the beginning of section five, the section immediately following Boethius's self-justifying narrative. This allusion specifies the kind of spiritedness that has come to animate Boethius. In the narrative itself Boethius alludes a few times to the *Republic*, including one explicit allusion to the idea of a philosopher-king, a role that he was attempting to imitate by means of his own political life. In fact, according to Boethius's narrative, his very attempt to be upright in politics brings about his downfall and imprisonment. In a sense, then, Plato's notion of a philosopher-king both informs and fuels Boethius's spirited narrative, inasmuch as the high expectations that Boethius brought to politics

¹⁴When I ask this question and others like it, I am wondering about the intentions of Boethius the author of the *Consolation*, not Boethius the character in it. McMahon is right to emphasize this distinction between the "two Boethiuses." See *Understanding the Medieval Meditative Ascent*, pp. 211–13. As McMahon sees it, Boethius the author is recollecting his conversation with Philosophy, and by doing so in an ordered and self-aware way, he exhibits his internalization of Philosophy's teaching, although he still recounts it according to the way it gradually developed over the course of their conversation. As McMahon says: "In the course of *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Boethius the prisoner receives the teaching that enables him to become Boethius the author of the work we have read. But he becomes the author not only by having a great memory, but also by meditating on his experience with Philosophy as a whole and thereby grasping its structure and meanings" (p. 213). Consider also Duclow's description of the "two Boethiuses": "the persona of 'Boethius' is the creation of the historical Boethius, who also directs the play of perspectives and their progressive integration. In this respect, the author Boethius contains all the perspectives of the *Consolation* within himself. His perspective is thus that of the all seeing 'intelligence' which rules the entire work" ("Perspective and Therapy in Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*," p. 341). Adding a further layer to this, Curley argues persuasively for "three Boethiuses": the author, the narrator, and the character ("How to Read Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*," pp. 223–43). Discussing the advantages of this interpretation, however, would take us too far afield, and for the purposes of this paper a distinction between the author and the character suffices.

in light of this Platonic notion set him up for the pain he is currently experiencing. Hence, upon finishing his narrative in section four and then reciting a poem (which will be examined just below), Boethius says, “When I *barked out* these things in prolonged pain, Philosophy [stood there] with a calm countenance, moved in no way by my complaints” (I, 5.1–2, emphasis added). An attentive reader is struck by the odd verb that Boethius uses here: *delatravi*, “I barked out.” Given that the *Republic* hovers over Boethius’s entire speech,¹⁵ it seems not unreasonable to take his use of this rare verb as pointing toward passages in the *Republic* in which dogs are employed as images. Considering a passage from the *Republic* illuminates the significance of such an allusion.

The first major use of dogs in the *Republic* occurs in the second book. There Socrates is identifying the requisite features of guardians. Above all, he says, guardians must be ready for war; indeed, that is why they were introduced in the first place (see 373d–374e). With regard to their physical condition, therefore, they must have sharp senses, speed, and strength. In their souls they must have θυμός, spiritedness, which “makes every soul fearless and invincible in the face of everything” (375b).¹⁶ The guardians, however, should not exercise universal aggression; rather, “they must be gentle toward their own and cruel to enemies” (375c), a characteristic found in “the disposition of noble dogs,” who are “as gentle as can be with their familiars and people they know and the opposite with those they don’t know” (375e). In the disposition of noble dogs, moreover, Socrates discerns an incipient philosophic trait. Such a dog distinguishes people it encounters on the basis of knowledge, namely, on whether it knows them or not (376b). Hence guardians, who must possess this canine spiritedness, must also be lovers of learning. Consequently, as Socrates hastily infers, they must be philosophic (376b–c).

If Boethius’s barking alludes to Plato’s account of dogs in the *Republic*, as I think it does, then one recognizes that his self-justifying narrative (I, 5) and the poem that follows it (I, 5m) are driven by canine spiritedness. Indeed, Boethius does not lash out at the world in general. Rather, he narrows his scope and mounts a self-defense, a defense of his life, his actions, his principles. To be sure, such self-focused spiritedness does not always lead to good results. Later in the *Republic*, for instance, Socrates says that a shepherd may rear dogs so poorly that they “undertake to do harm to the sheep and instead of dogs become like wolves” (416a), thereby

¹⁵Besides citing Plato by name early on at I, 4.16 in connection with the notion of a philosopher-king, Boethius also refers to Socrates later in his speech (“ . . . Socratico decreto . . .,” I, 4.77) in connection with the injunction to tell the truth and not to lie, usually taken to be a reference to either *Republic*, 485c, or *Theaetetus*, 151d. In light of these allusions to Plato as well as the fact that *delatrare* is a rare verb, I will maintain that Boethius’s “I barked out” at I, 5.1 points the reader naturally to Plato’s use of dogs in the *Republic*. McMahon notices *delatravi* as well, but takes it to mean “nearly meaningless sounds” and to be evidence that book one joins book two at the level of sensation. See *Understanding the Medieval Meditative Ascent*, p. 222. It seems to me, however, that such a reading is inaccurate. To be sure, Boethius’s narrative is filled with emotion, but it is wrong to think it is irrational. Rather, as I am interpreting it, it is a spirited *apologia* that indicates an ascent in Boethius’s attitude toward his condition, inasmuch as spiritedness is closer to rationality than is concupiscence.

¹⁶Translations of passages from the *Republic* are from *The Republic of Plato*, trans. A. Bloom, 2nd edition (New York NY: Basic Books, 1968).

utilizing their spiritedness destructively for their own purposes. Also, the spiritedness that drives Achilles's self-justifying speech, which is received by Thetis with sympathy and tears, leads ultimately to epically violent consequences. Fortunately for Boethius, Philosophy does not so receive his spirited account of injustices done against him. Recall what he says: "When I had barked out these things in prolonged pain, Philosophy [stood there] with a calm countenance, moved in no way by my complaints" (I, 5.1–2). Just after this, moreover, Philosophy, the unmoved and skilled physician, carries out her diagnosis of Boethius in order to heal him. As a consequence, the effect of Boethius's spiritedness, although not so epic as that of Achilles, is nonetheless more humane.

Before moving to the second part of this paper, it will be helpful to explore canine spiritedness further. Besides allowing for an examination of the poem that follows Boethius's self-justifying narrative, it will also bring to light a connection between canine spiritedness and the notion of justice. Such a connection is important, for it reveals how canine spiritedness determines one's stance toward others, and an attitudinal change toward that which is other turns out to be an important facet of Boethius's philosophical development in the second book.

Consider, then, the following passage in the *Republic* in which Socrates describes a situation much like Boethius's own:

And what about when a man believes he's being done injustice? Doesn't his spirit [$\theta\upsilon\mu\acute{o}\varsigma$] in this case boil and become harsh and form an alliance for battle with what seems just; and, even if it suffers in hunger, cold, and everything of the sort, doesn't it stand firm and conquer, and not cease from its noble efforts before it has succeeded, or death intervenes, or before it becomes gentle, having been called in by the speech within it like a dog by a herdsman? (IV, 440c–d)

Here Socrates connects spiritedness with, as he puts it, "what seems just," a connection present in the *Consolation* itself. For in the poem that follows Boethius's spirited speech he entreats "the maker of the star-bearing orb" (I, 5m.1) to bring law to bear on the realm of human action in the same way that his binding ancient law orders the heavens above. Boethius sings:

Nothing bound by ancient law
leaves the work of its proper station.
Governing all things by a fixed end,
you, who rule deservedly, now refuse
to constrain only the acts of men.
For why does slippery fortune
turn so many times? The guiltless pay
the injurious penalties owed to crime,
while perverse customs sit down on a lofty throne;
and, by an unjust turn, criminals
trample holy necks under foot. (I, 5m.23–33)

Coming on the heels of Boethius's self-justifying narrative, this poem accentuates the intentionality of his canine spiritedness toward justice—or, as Socrates might say, toward “what seems just.”

The “seemingness” of this justice is rooted in the stance toward otherness that underlies it. As was indicated above, canine spiritedness is hostile toward the alien, toward what is other. And a system of human justice modeled after the lawfulness of the heavens would enshrine such a spirited attitude in the human heart. For, according to the description of the heavens in Boethius's poem, law is an external source of order that binds or compels the bodies directed by it. In such a system there is no intrinsic relationality or community among the bodies so ordered, but only an extrinsic one. When animated by such a spirited attitude, one's encounter with what is other is disposed not toward love, friendship, and community, but toward competition and hostility.

The calm and unmoved countenance with which Philosophy receives Boethius's speech and poem suggests that she perceives this problematic stance toward what is other in Boethius's spirited attitude. Thus she fittingly responds to him as follows:

You have not been expelled from your homeland, but you have wandered from it. . . . For if you recollect the homeland from which you sprang, it is not ruled by the command of the multitude, as Athens once was; rather, “there is one ruler, one king” [*Iliad*, II.204–05],¹⁷ who is gladdened by the full gathering of citizens, not by their expulsion. . . . Indeed, are you unaware of that most ancient law of your city, whereby there is a sacred right not to be exiled for anyone who has preferred to establish his seat in it? (I, 5.9–17)

The fundamental intentionality of the most ancient law of this city—Boethius's *patris*—is toward love, friendship, and community, not competition and hostility. It aims at gathering together, not expelling. Philosophy discerns that Boethius's soul lacks such an attitude toward what is other and needs to recover it. Owing to his spirited exertions, however, Boethius has caused his painful wounds to swell, and so the profundity of this ancient law is unable to touch him within. First, then, he must be anesthetized.

II. . . . *ET LINUM FUMIGANS NON EXTINGUET* (ISAIAH 42:3 [VULG.])

In this second section I delineate the steps in the second book by which Philosophy moves Boethius toward a mitigated Stoicism that capitalizes on his canine spiritedness. At first glance it may seem odd to think of Stoicism as growing out of such spiritedness, because the Stoic is often depicted as apathetic to the pains or pleasures he encounters, whereas one animated by canine spiritedness relates in extreme ways to what he encounters—defending what is his own and showing hostility toward what is other. As I hope to show, however, Stoicism builds on such spiritedness not by working it out on the level of emotion but by elevating it to the level of rationality and thought. It does so, on the one hand, by universalizing the realm of otherness

¹⁷As mentioned above, these words spoken in Greek by Philosophy are the words of Odysseus who, inspired by Athena, is trying to keep the Greeks from getting on their ships and abandoning the Trojan War. He is trying to reestablish a community that is being broken up by those who are following self-interest alone.

to include everything that can be encountered intellectually and, on the other, by sublimating emotional hostility into volitional apathy.

But before turning to these matters, let us first consider Hegel's account of the nature and principles of Stoicism. Hegel articulates his understanding of Stoicism within a narrative of philosophical development, and so such an account can illuminate Boethius's philosophical progress. Consider, then, Hegel's description in the *Philosophy of History* of the rise of Stoicism during the time of the Roman emperors, an apolitical era owing to the tyranny the emperors exercised. During this period, Hegel says, Roman citizens yielded themselves to fate and began to strive for "a perfect indifference to life—an indifference which they sought either in freedom of thought or in directly sensuous enjoyment."¹⁸ Some sought freedom of thought in philosophy, among whom were the Stoics, who aimed at "rendering the soul absolutely indifferent to everything which the real world had to offer."¹⁹ Consequently, they "produced in man a self-reliant immobility as the result of Thought, i.e., of the activity which produces the Universal. . . . But the inward reconciliation by means of philosophy was itself only an abstract one—in the pure principle of personality; for Thought, which, as perfectly refined, made itself its own object, and thus harmonized itself, was entirely destitute of a real object."²⁰ According to this account, then, the progression of consciousness that results in Stoicism has four steps: first, resignation to fate; second, indifference sought in freedom of thought, which on a practical level means indifference toward what the real world offers; third, a self-reliant immobility resulting from thought; and fourth, thought harmonized with itself but destitute of real objects.

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel articulates Stoicism as a moment or manifestation of consciousness in a less historically-oriented and more principled way. In this account Stoicism follows upon the famed struggle of self-consciousnesses from which lordship and bondage arise. The bondsman is a self-consciousness striving for freedom, understood as being-for-self. Owing to his bondage, however, he cannot achieve "real-life" freedom, and so he must seek freedom in thought alone. Hegel writes:

In thinking I *am free*, because I am not in an *other*, but remain simply and solely in communion with myself, and the object, which is for me the *essential* being, is in undivided unity my being-for-myself; and my activity in conceptual thinking is a movement within myself. . . . This freedom of self-consciousness when it appeared as a conscious manifestation in the history of Spirit has, as we know, been called Stoicism. Its principle is that consciousness is a being that *thinks*, and that consciousness holds something to be essentially important, or true and good only in so far as it *thinks* it to be such. . . . What alone has importance is the difference posited by *thought*, or the difference which from the very first is not distinct from myself. . . . [W]hether on the throne or in chains, in the utter dependence of its individual existence, its aim is to be free, and to maintain that

¹⁸G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York NY: Dover, 1956), Part III: The Roman World, Section III, Chapter I: Rome Under the Emperors, p. 317. Those who sought indifference "in directly sensuous enjoyment" were, of course, the Epicureans.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 318.

²⁰Ibid.

lifeless indifference which steadfastly withdraws from the bustle of existence, alike from being active as passive, into the simple essentiality of thought. . . . Freedom in thought has only *pure thought* as its truth, a truth lacking the fullness of life. Hence freedom in thought, too, is only the Notion of freedom, not the living reality of freedom itself. . . . To the question: *What* is good and true, it again gave for answer the contentless thought: The True and the Good shall consist in reasonableness. But this self-identity of thought is again only the pure form in which nothing is determined.²¹

In this less concrete but more definitive account of Stoicism, Hegel begins with a bound consciousness who considers freedom to be opposed to otherness, since freedom is being-for-self. Consequently, this consciousness must seek freedom in thought itself, since its living reality is to exist for another. As a result, the significance and value of things—their truth and goodness—begins to find its source in thought itself. Bereft of real objects, therefore, this consciousness resigns itself and becomes indifferent, thereby achieving freedom or being-for-self, though only in the self-consistency of thought and not in actual living.

As I hope becomes clear in what follows, Hegel's account of Stoicism resonates well with Philosophy's gentler remedies in the second book, and so this Hegelian interlude can help the reader of the *Consolation* understand better Boethius's pathway toward Stoicism. It suggests, for instance, how a certain disposition toward otherness experienced initially on an emotional level can be raised to the level of reason or consciousness owing to constraints put on one's actual living. In turn, that disposition can ramify into a philosophical outlook regarding the nature of being itself. This is what happens to Boethius in the second book of the *Consolation*. His canine spiritedness, which involves an emotional hostility toward what is other, is raised to the level of a rational approach to reality itself. In moving Boethius toward such an outlook, therefore, Philosophy anesthetizes him to the goods and evils of this world, thereby making him Stoical.

In the remainder of this section, I focus on three "notions"²² that Philosophy impresses upon Boethius in succession over the course of this second book.²³ The

²¹G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford UK: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), §§197–200 (pp. 120–22).

²²I use "notions" here in the broadest sense. "Positions" or "stances" in some ways better captures what I am speaking about, although either would be awkward in English. As becomes clear in my analysis, "notions" should not be taken as corresponding necessarily to an intellectual capacity. This is because Philosophy is not always operating at the level of thought or reason as such in book two, but moves toward doing so gradually. In other words, she is getting Boethius to be positioned or to stand in relation to reality in certain ways, emotionally and rationally, morally and intellectually, and I use "notions" to refer to these new positions or stances that Boethius learns, the consequences of which he implicitly unpacks and accepts. As McMahon sees it, in the second book Boethius is moving from his forgetfulness of self to self-possession, which he sees as progress toward the full recovery of mind that takes place in the later books. See *Understanding the Medieval Meditative Ascent*, pp. 236–45. This captures well the "moral" development that takes place in Boethius in book two, one that is complemented, I think, by an "intellectual" development, i.e., a development of his conscious awareness of other things, of how he "sees" reality. This is in part what I am trying to capture by saying that Boethius is progressing toward Stoicism, which involves both a moral and an intellectual component.

²³My breakdown of book two into three "notions" fits fairly well the contours of McMahon's description of the tripartite structure of books two to four of the *Consolation*: "The first prose section functions as a

three notions are the following: first, human nature is powerless and possessionless in a world characterized by fortune; second, the goodness or badness of each thing that comes from fortune consists in its being deemed to be such; and third, nothing that comes from fortune should be thought to be intrinsically good. Philosophy's anesthetizing gentler remedies consist, then, in impressing these notions upon Boethius successively over the course of this book and establishing in him, as Hegel would describe it, a "lifeless indifference which steadfastly withdraws from the bustle of existence . . . into the simple essentiality of thought."²⁴

A. First Notion: *Human nature is powerless and possessionless in a world characterized by fortune.*

Philosophy begins by addressing Boethius thus: "If I have thoroughly recognized the state and causes of your sickness, you have melted with longing and desire for your prior fortune" (II, 1.2–4). At the very outset of this book Philosophy introduces *Fortuna* (Fortune), who is personified as a female prodigy whose many-shaped disguises Philosophy understands (II, 1.5–6) and who has not changed her nature in Boethius's case. "Rather," Philosophy tells him, "regarding you she has preserved her own constancy in her very mutability" (II, 1.29–30). Moreover, because Boethius willingly enjoyed the things of fortune previously, he has no right now to complain of bad fortune. "You have given yourself to be ruled by fortune; you must comply with the customs of the lady," Philosophy asserts. "Indeed, do you endeavor to hold back the impetus of the turning wheel? Yet, you dullest of all mortals, if it begins to stand still, fortune ceases to be" (II, 1.55–59). Why is Boethius the "dullest of all mortals"? It is because, animated by canine spiritedness, he hopes for a human existence modeled upon the heavens, a human existence bound by the forceful necessity of law, a kind of "automatic" justice. That is the core of what he expressed after his self-justifying narrative in the first book. Such is not the existence of mortals, however. Boethius himself, moreover, has defined man in part by mortality, thus binding human existence essentially to the wheel of generation and corruption. How, then, can he reasonably expect a mode of existence modeled upon the necessity of heavenly motion?

Subsequently, in section two, Philosophy admonishes Boethius in the person of fortune herself: "Why, man, do you make suit against me daily with complaints?" Fortune asks Boethius. "What injury have we done to you? What goods of yours have we taken away from you?" (II, 2.2–4).²⁵ With these words Fortune begins to make her case against Boethius, who, like all mortal men, came forth naked from his mother's womb. In some fundamental sense she has bestowed all goods upon

prologue, where Philosophy declares her program for that book: the first part. In the second part, Philosophy undertakes that program. The third part involves an explicit intensification or renewal of Philosophy's action, and it occurs at roughly the half-way point in each book" (*Understanding the Medieval Meditative Ascent*, p. 224).

²⁴Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §199 (p. 121).

²⁵The change in the self-reference here from singular to plural (rendered "me" to "we" in English) may suggest the very confusion and changeableness already said to be essential to fortune. This is the level of understanding of fortune that Philosophy has reached, an ability to mimic her confused, many-in-one nature.

him. In her case against Boethius, therefore, she brings to light the utter dependency and ultimate possessionlessness of human beings. If there be any necessary laws of human existence to which Boethius wants life to adhere, dependency and possessionlessness are certainly among them. Fortune's final question points to the truth about Boethius that she sees: "Would you, nonetheless, melt away in your soul and, placed as you are within a kingdom common to all, desire to live by your own law?" (II, 2.43–45).

In these ways Philosophy impresses upon Boethius the powerlessness and possessionlessness of men in a world characterized by fortune. Speaking in medical terms again, Philosophy tells Boethius that through these words she is applying "poultices" or "compresses" (*fomenta*) to ease his pain (II, 3.9–11). As a matter of fact, Boethius is temporarily assuaged. He is pleased by the sweetness of Philosophy's words, owing to their rhetorical and musical beauty, and no doubt the dramatic presentation of fortune pleases him as well. Hence Philosophy's compresses are effective, but only superficially, because she appeals to Boethius primarily on the level of sensation. Yet these superficial anesthetics serve Philosophy's purposes, for by numbing the surface pain, they achieve the important effect of pushing Boethius inward. As he tells Philosophy, "For the wretched there is a deeper sense of evils, and so when these [words] cease to sound, inner grief weighs down the soul" (II, 3.7–9).

These compresses, therefore, allow Boethius to plunge more deeply into his soul, his consciousness, in order to experience a "deeper sense of evils," even if only temporarily. By raising no argument against Fortune's case, moreover, Boethius implicitly grants that all the things of fortune are, in fact, "other" and not his own. In addition, by acknowledging that his pain can be assuaged, he becomes aware that the hostility of canine spiritedness toward what is other is not a permanent state, even if it has not yet been raised to the level of volitional apathy. Achieving such apathy requires more penetrating anesthetics, which are administered by means of the third notion, the reasoned-out conclusion that none of the things of fortune should be thought to be intrinsically good. Before achieving that level of numbness, however, Boethius requires treatment on the level of opinion that builds on what has been achieved on the level of sensation. And so Philosophy readies another round of compresses.

B. Second Notion: *The goodness or badness of each thing that comes from fortune consists in its being deemed to be such.*

Near the beginning of section four, Philosophy indicts Boethius thus: "That you suffer the punishment of false opinion, you cannot rightly impute to things" (II, 4.6–7). Boethius's false opinion consists in the empty names that he gives to things—in particular, the empty name of "fortunate happiness" that moves him. This name is empty because it lacks a referent that is whole, unified, and enduring. "Who is possessed of a happiness so composed that he does not dispute with the quality of his state from some side?" Philosophy asks. "For the condition of human goods is an anxious thing that never comes about as a whole and never survives as everlasting" (II, 4.38–41). The best one can achieve in this life, then, is a happiness that is

partial and passing. "Therefore," Philosophy asserts, "no one easily accords with the condition of his fortune; for there is present in each case something that the inexperienced do not know and at which the experienced shudder" (II, 4.48–50).

According to Philosophy, then, if one truly expects more from fortune, and if one grasps at the same time the anxious condition of fortune's goods, fear alone can result. In order to come to grips with this fear, one must think and name things correctly. In other words, one must form the opinion that, as Philosophy tells Boethius, "nothing is miserable except when you deem it so, and, conversely, every lot is blessed by the equanimity of the one who tolerates it" (II, 4.58–59). Equipped with such a belief, which further numbs him to the things of fortune, Boethius is pushed further inward, deeper into his consciousness, a movement that Philosophy encourages:

Why, then, O mortals, do you seek outside of yourselves a happiness that is located within you? Error and ignorance confuse you. I will show you briefly the hinge of the highest happiness. Is there anything more precious to you than you yourself? Nothing, you will say. Therefore, if you will be in possession of yourself, you will possess something that you would not ever will to lose and that fortune cannot carry away. (II, 4.68–73)

By means of this second round of compresses, therefore, Philosophy impresses upon Boethius the opinion that the goodness or badness of each thing that comes from fortune consists in its being deemed to be good or bad. She does so primarily by correcting how Boethius names the things of fortune, since his appraisal of their value is governed by this naming.

At this point, then, Boethius's numbness to the things of fortune is deeper than the superficial numbness on the level of sensation that he experienced earlier when he was pleased by words spoken by Philosophy in the person of Fortune. Here Philosophy is adjusting how the things of fortune appear to Boethius and, consequently, how he names them. Hence she is working on him not at the level of sensation, but at the level of *δόξα*, opinion, by modifying the way he "takes" the things of fortune, which becomes first evident simply in the way he names such things. The numbing effect of this new opinion improves upon the temporary numbness to the things of fortune achieved earlier in the second book because it is affecting that deeper capacity of his soul that connects his sense experience of things to names. Yet this is not enough for Philosophy to perform her surgery. In order for Boethius to reach the level of numbness that Philosophy requires, she must convince him more deeply and in a more universal way, i.e., on the level of rationality, that none of the things of fortune should be named as intrinsically good.

C. Third Notion: *Nothing that comes from fortune should be thought to be intrinsically good.*

Though this third notion penetrates more deeply than the first two, it is nonetheless easier to see how Philosophy impresses it upon Boethius. In persuading Boethius toward it in sections five and six, Philosophy goes beyond playing the role of Fortune and beyond adjusting how the things of fortune appear to and are named by Boethius. She does so by offering clear arguments that can be analyzed logically. In

these sections, therefore, Philosophy reaches deeper than sensation and opinion and deals with Boethius on the level of rationality as such. Yet her dealings with Boethius on this level are limited at this point because she is working with a rationality that is bent in upon itself, inasmuch as Boethius is persuaded at this point that the value of each thing lies in how he deems or names it. One can see, then, that in leading Boethius toward Stoicism in the second book, Philosophy operates within the horizon of Boethius's definition of man as rational, mortal animal and nothing more. For the first two actions impressed upon Boethius unfold the aspect of mortality, while this third thought unfolds the aspect of rationality, albeit a rationality limited to the individual in the present life.

In sections five and six, Philosophy gives arguments that each of the things of fortune—riches, beauty, honors, power, etc.—should not be deemed good. Considering each of these arguments separately would, of course, take us too far afield. I focus, then, on a passage in section six where Philosophy presents a summarizing argument that recapitulates the basic structure common to the preceding arguments, each of which tries to show that the things of fortune do not make a man good. Philosophy reasons thus:

Now neither are riches able to extinguish insatiable avarice, nor does power make a man in control of himself whom vicious desires hold tightly with chains that cannot be loosened; and dignity conferred on the shameless does not make them dignified, but rather prolongs them as undignified and shows them to be such. Why does it come about thus? Because you rejoice to call things that stand otherwise by false names, which are easily refuted by the effect of the things themselves. And so neither those riches nor that power nor that dignity can be rightly called such. In the end, concerning all of fortune from which nothing is to be sought, one may conclude this: it is manifest that nothing of native goodness is present in it, since it does not always join itself to good things and does not make good those to whom it has been joined. (II, 6.56–69)

As the last sentence of this passage indicates, Philosophy is now reaching a universal conclusion on the basis of principled argumentation. Certainly she is appealing to Boethius on a higher level.

The logical structure of Philosophy's argument in this passage is easy to spell out. It has the form of a BARBARA syllogism that runs thus:

[*Major*] All things that do not always make good those to whom they are joined have nothing of native goodness.

[*Minor*] All things of fortune do not always make good those to whom they are joined.

[*Conclusion*] Therefore, all things of fortune have nothing of native goodness.

In fact, not only is Philosophy's use of syllogistic reasoning more evident at this point, but also the words that she chooses bespeak the fundamentally logical dimension of her approach. Consider, for example, the verb *inesse* ("to be present in"), the Latin equivalent of Aristotle's ὑπάρχειν ("to belong to"), a verb prominent in

the *Prior Analytics* and *Posterior Analytics* as a copula. Boethius was, of course, quite familiar with these works in Aristotle's *Organon*.

It is worth noting, however, that Philosophy's argument here never transcends or breaks out of the logical dimension. The truth of the conclusion that all things of fortune have nothing of native goodness derives, in fact, from thought itself. In other words, since a thing is good or bad inasmuch as it is thought to be such, the right conclusion here seems to be not that the things of fortune are not intrinsically good, but that the things of fortune should not be *thought* to be intrinsically good. Now, one might object that Philosophy does offer a reason for the conclusion grounded more in reality than in thought alone when she says that calling something good is shown to be false by the effect of the thing itself. But, one could respond, what is her criterion for not calling something good? The criterion that Philosophy offers is one of strict universality: a thing of fortune is good if and only if it *always* makes good that to which it is joined. Philosophy's conclusion is verified, then, not by actual moral experience of the things of fortune, in which one sees that things of fortune can be instrumental in both helping and harming someone, but by the universality of thought itself. It seems, then, that Hegel's description of the Stoic consciousness is apt here. "To the question: *What* is good and true," Hegel writes, "it again gave for answer the contentless thought: The True and the Good shall consist in reasonableness. But this self-identity of thought is again only the pure form in which nothing is determined."²⁶ It is to a Stoic consciousness—a rational and volitional numbness to the things of fortune—that Philosophy's gentler remedies have led Boethius over the course of the second book.

III. . . . ἀλλά εἰς ἀλήθειαν ἐξοίσει κρίσον (ISAIAH 42:3 [LXX])

In this third section of the paper, I consider briefly how Boethius's Stoicism lends itself to his full recovery. As I said above, the Stoicism to which Philosophy leads Boethius is of a mitigated sort, inasmuch as friends—those greatest of external goods, as Aristotle says (*Nicomachean Ethics*, IX.9, 1169b9)—are never explicitly included in the realm of otherness, the realm of the external things of fortune to which Philosophy numbs Boethius. The exceptional character of friendship is first indicated in section four when Philosophy shows Boethius that his lot includes things both good and bad. The good things she identifies are the care of those who took him in when his parents died, the modesty and decency of his wife, and the advantage of having sons. Each of these goods springs from a fundamental human relationship, that is, from some form of *φιλία* (friendship or love). In addition, Philosophy carves out a special place for Boethius's wife: "She lives, I say, and preserves her breath for you alone, though hating this life; and *in this one thing even I concede that your*

²⁶See n21 above. Fournier has a concise summarizing description of the change that occurs to Boethius in book two that accords well with the final, logic-based move to Stoicism that I am describing: "[Boethius's] orientation to external, false goods is overcome by looking at the supposed goods and recognizing the contradictions they contain. . . . It is demonstrated that happiness cannot consist (*constare*) of these things, and the contradictions repel the mind and effect the turn to the self as the center (*cardo*) around which happiness turns" ("Boethius and the Consolation of the Quadrivium," p. 9).

happiness is diminished: that she melts in tears with desire and pain” (II, 4.19–22, emphasis added). Philosophy’s poignant declaration suggests that Boethius’s wife in particular escapes the realm of otherness, i.e., the realm of external things that are the things of fortune. His wife’s suffering is something truly bad and not just bad because Boethius deems it such. This is why, according to Philosophy, it is reasonable and fitting that his happiness be diminished by it.

This exceptional character of friendship comes to the foreground again in section eight, the final section of the second book that transitions the reader to Boethius’s sharper medicine in the third. It is not coincidental, I think, that in this section Philosophy employs the notion of wonder for the first time in her treatment of Boethius. “I am eager to say something wonderful [*mirum*],” she tells him, “and for that reason I am scarcely able to unfold its meaning in words. For I reckon that adverse fortune is more profitable to men than prosperous fortune” (II, 8.5–8). On the surface, the wonder of Philosophy’s claim—that something adverse is more beneficial than something prosperous—seems to lie in its apparent unreasonableness, its being paradoxical, which would undoubtedly be all the more striking to a now Stoicized and more logical Boethius. Yet there is a deeper source of wonder here, and this is what makes it difficult for Philosophy to express her meaning. The deeper source lies in her reason for thinking adverse fortune more beneficial. “In the end,” she says, “happy fortune draws men out of the way by enticements, but adverse [fortune] often draws them back by a hook to return to true goods” (II, 8.15–17). Adverse fortune does this, Philosophy explains, by revealing to men who their true friends are. By drawing men away from other things of fortune that are thought to be good, adverse fortune makes possible an intellectual encounter with the reality of friendship, a “hook” by which men are drawn back to “true goods.”

In this intellectual encounter with friendship, then, men experience the wonder of φίλα, a human relationship in which the dividing barrier between what is one’s own and what is other is overcome, because one who was first encountered as other than self has become another self. The reality and goodness of friendship is able to touch Boethius’s intelligence to some degree now that he has moved deeper within himself and grown apathetic toward what is other. Recollecting friendship allows him to see how the self on which he is so focused actually extends and is joined to what is other; the self exists in communion with another self, the friend. Fittingly, then, Philosophy concludes the second book not with a poem in which she extols the ancient law of necessity that compels heavenly motion but does not compel human action, as Boethius did in the first book, but one that extols love, *amor*, which holds things together, ruling the earth, the sea, and the heavens, and uniting by sacred bonds those men and women who are open to its impulses (II, 8m).²⁷

Subsequently, at the opening of the third book, just after Philosophy has sung this poem, we find Boethius astounded and eager to hear more. No longer do canine spiritedness or volitional apathy characterize his attitude toward reality. Rather, wonder does. Recollecting the reality of friendship helps him see that the self can

²⁷For a discussion of the place of this poem in the work and how it is overcome—or, better, deepened—in the subsequent books, see Curley, “How to Read the *Consolation of Philosophy*,” pp. 253–63.

be more than the self, and that it can extend itself and commune with what is other. Such an insight is indeed a source of wonder, involving as it does the insight that the beings that one encounters, including oneself, can *be* more than what they appear to be and thus point beyond themselves. For the one rightly disposed, moreover, this wonder-inducing insight will initiate inquiry, seeking, the pursuit of truth—in other words, genuine *philosophia*. And, in fact, Philosophy's sharper medicine in book three begins to unfold this insight that underlies Boethius's wonder, namely, his apprehension of goodness beyond being and truth beyond appearances, which was made possible by his intellectual encounter with the reality of friendship at the end of book two.

IV. . . . καρδίαν συντετριμμένην καὶ τεταπεινωμένην ὁ θεὸς οὐκ ἐξουδενώσει (PSALM 50:19 [LXX])

After progressing through Philosophy's teaching in book two along with Boethius, one may wonder whether it was really necessary that he be led toward Stoicism over the course of almost an entire book of the *Consolation* in order to experience wonder. I am inclined to think that it was. For just as earlier Boethius needed compresses applied to his wound in order to disclose his deeper sense of evils, so also he needed to be anesthetized to the things of fortune even more deeply in order to disclose an intellectual apprehension of the diffusive goodness of being—an apprehension that stimulates wonder appropriately and initiates genuine philosophical inquiry. And perhaps one can learn from this interaction between Philosophy and Boethius just how difficult it is to initiate genuine philosophical inquiry, to be struck with wonder, given how wrapped up one tends to be in oneself and the things of fortune.

In order to expand briefly on this, allow me to conclude with a passage from Hegel's *Philosophy of History*. Although it is about Rome's effect on the world, it seems to encapsulate the significance of Boethius's development in book two. Hegel says: "Through its being the aim of the [Roman] State that the social units in their moral life should be sacrificed to it, the world is sunk in melancholy: its heart is broken, and it is all over with the Natural side of Spirit, which has sunk into a feeling of unhappiness. Yet only from this feeling could arise the supersensuous, the free Spirit."²⁸ To put it in Hegelian terms, then, Philosophy's use of a mitigated Stoicism in Boethius's recovery suggest that brokenheartedness was the precondition for his experiencing wonder. In Boethius's case this seems true. Moreover, if as a Christian believer he also held firmly that the Lord spurns not the brokenhearted, then apparently he learns in prison that neither does his friend Philosophy.

²⁸Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, Part III: The Roman World, Introduction, p. 278.

