Boethius' Philosophiae consolatio
The Intersection of Literary Form and Philosophical Content

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> [I]n a great work of art . . . the connexion between the form and the
> content is so vital that the two may be said to be ultimately identical.
> —H. D. F. Kitto

Among the many interpretive challenges posed by Boethius' *Consolatio* is
one of readerships, which have varied widely over the fifteen centuries since
the date of its composition. Translated into and/or commented on in Latin,
western European vernaculars, and Greek from the later ancient and early
medieval periods on, it inspired literary, philosophical, visual, and musical
developments in such remote quarters as Calabria, the British Isles, and
Byzantium. The observation holds for its modern interpreters as well. Art
historians are drawn to the miniatures transmitted in its medieval manu-
scripts, musicologists to the neumes preserved with its poetry, historians to
its evidence for the process that led to Boethius' death, and so on. But no
matter what the time or place, the interpretive challenge most consistently
posed by the *Consolatio* is one that separates two readerships in particular:
literary scholars who gravitate toward the poetry and general imagery
especially of Books I–II and historians of philosophy who are in pursuit of
the arguments and conclusions especially of Books III–V.

The aim of the present investigation is to narrow the gap between the
two by bringing the philosophical weight carried by the work's more
"literary" sections, and the literary significance of its more transparently
philosophical ones, into sharper focus. To that end, the often-debated
question of literary genre is restricted to what ought to be regarded by all as
uncontroversial, namely, that the *Consolatio* is a combination of two
literary forms, the "prosimetrum," consisting of alternating poetry and
prose, and philosophical dialogue; protreptic, "diatribe," allegory, and so
on will be set aside for purposes of this study. With this come two further
assumptions. First, that the prosimetric form in itself entails no fixed

expectations about *content*, more precisely, that the problems Boethius confronts in the *Consolatio* reflect his own concerns rather than thematic constraints laid by the literary tradition as such. And second, that although Boethius' handling of the dialogue form is indebted to Cicero and Augustine as well as Plato (Magee 2014, 25–6), the mise-en-scène of the *Consolatio* draws its inspiration directly from the latter's *Crito* and *Phaedo*. For with the opening narrative words, Boethius describes himself as falling into a dream in which Philosophia[1] appears to him, the Latin of which echoes very precisely the Greek of Plato's description in the *Crito* of a dream vision in which a female figure appears to Socrates while imprisoned and awaiting death:

- I.1.1: *mihi . . . visa est mulier reverendi admodum vultus, etc.* (before me ... there appeared a woman of most venerable countenance, etc.);
- 44a: ἐδόκει τίς μοι γυνή . . . καλὴ καὶ εὐειδής, κτλ. (there appeared before me a woman ... noble and beautiful, etc.).[2]

As to the *Phaedo*, Plato's other prison dialogue, we need only to recall the dreams that bade Socrates to make music and sing joyously on the eve of death to sense what is very likely to have motivated the poetry of Boethius' own deeply Platonic swan song (see *Phaedo* 60c–61b, 84e–85b). A final prefatory note: Any exploration of the relationship between the literary form and philosophical content of the *Consolatio* must rest on the certainty that the text handed down to us is complete and intact if it is to avoid idle speculation in a vacuum of nonexistents. Since it has been argued, however, that our transmitted text of the dialogue is incomplete, it will be necessary to clear that ground before proceeding to our main investigation.

1.1 Is the *Consolatio* Complete?

In 1977 Hermann Tränkle undertook to demonstrate that the *Consolatio* was left unfinished at the point of Boethius' death. His conclusion arises from three main arguments, each of which will be reviewed separately below.

1.1.1 An Unfinished Peroration?

Underlying Tränkle's analysis is a general observation concerning the effect of the circumstances of composition on the final text of the *Consolatio*.

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[1] In what follows, the capitalized Philosophia, whether roman or italicized for emphasis, serves to distinguish the interlocutor from the general notion of philosophy.

[2] Cf. Cicero, *De divinatione* I.52: *vidisse se in somnis pulchritudine eximia feminam*; Calcidius, *In Platonis Timaeum* §254: *visa est mihi quaedam . . . mulier eximia venustate*; Gruber 2006, 63.

On the understanding that Boethius wrote the work under extraordinary pressure, Tränkle diagnosed what he perceived to be incomplete or imperfect passages as reflecting a hurried process of composition. He adduced the concluding lines as a case in point (V.6.47–8), surmising that with sufficient time Boethius would have supplemented Philosophia's exhortation with a final word delivered by himself as interlocutor since his is the fate around which the dialogue revolves.

That the *Consolatio* was composed under extreme duress will be readily granted by all but those who regard its mise-en-scène as a piece of historical fiction.[3] At two points toward the end of the dialogue Philosophia remarks on the urgency of the situation (IV.6.5, V.1.4–5), and although each comment has its particular function in the immediate dramatic context, there is no reason to dismiss either as not also reflecting the surrounding circumstances as Boethius himself perceived them. With this much Tränkle undoubtedly would have agreed, but he took the further step of arguing from external circumstances to text in interpreting the disappearance of dialogue after V.4.1 as symptomatic of the pressures of time. Colloquy in fact gives way to soliloquy already with V.3–m3, both of which are delivered by "Boethius"[4] alone;[5] immediately after the *Tum illa ... inquit* at V.4.1 the new pattern is set, with Philosophia proceeding on her own from then on.[6] We do not know, and Boethius presumably did not know, how much time was required or would be available for composition of the *Consolatio*, but any conclusion to the effect that external circumstances alone prevented him from keeping dialogue running after V.4.1 ultimately reduces only to the assumption that dialogue *should* have continued thereafter. But Boethius himself, as we will see, provides the clue to his silence as both interlocutor and narrator after V.4.1, and it has nothing to do with hurried circumstances of composition. Similarly, Tränkle's conviction that Boethius' intention was to bring himself back for a final word, possibly even one of thanks,[7] is equally vulnerable to charges of question-begging, and not least in its potential for breeding ungrounded speculation about the intervention of later

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[3] As in the case of Reiss 1981, on which see Shanzer 1984, 353–5.

[4] In what follows, "Boethius" serves to distinguish the interlocutor from the author and narrator Boethius.

[5] See below, page 21–2.

[6] V.4.8–10: *minime ... inquires*; V.4.16: *minime*; V.4.21: *inquis*; V.6.19: *minime*; V.6.25–6: *si dicas ... respondebo*; V.6.37–40: *inquies ... respondebo ... inquies ... minime*; cf. Lerer 1985, 228–30; Gruber 2006, 387, 400.

[7] Gegenschatz and Gigon 1998, 367.

editors.[8] We need only to reflect on the precision with which Philosophia responds at V.6.44–8 to the worries articulated by "Boethius" at V.3.27–36 – leaving none unanswered and harkening directly back to the moral dilemma that motivates the *Consolatio* from I.4.28–30 on – to understand that the existing conclusion is not the product of a clumsy editor but rather Boethius himself.

1.1.2 A Poem to Complete Book V?

Tränkle further maintained that Boethius could not have intended the fifth book or the *Consolatio* as a whole to end with prose rather than poetry. In support of this view he assumed that Book V was intended to follow the formal pattern of the three "main" Books (II–IV), each of which begins with prose and ends with poetry; declared Book I an outlier by virtue of its *beginning* with poetry; and adduced Martianus Capella's *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, which both begins and ends with poetry, as a relevant generic comparator.

Quite apart from the improbability that Boethius felt himself bound by any aspect of Martianus' handling of the prosimetric form (assuming he knew the *De nuptiis*),[9] the structure of the *Consolatio* patently undercuts this argument. For that structure appears very deliberately wrought, with Book I beginning and ending with poetry but Book V beginning and ending with *prose*, both acting as counterweights held in equilibrium by the formal neutrality of Books II–IV and so producing an unbroken sequence of alternating poetry and prose throughout.[10] On internal grounds as well there is good reason to respect the integrity of the transmitted text, whose formal equilibrium underscores one of the most alluring, if also challenging, aspects of the *Consolatio*, namely, the delicate tension it sustains between the competing calls of more traditionally poetic and the "Platonic" or philosophical Muses.[11] It is of fundamental importance, of course, to understand how poetry interacts with prose in advancing the philosophical aims of the *Consolatio*, but to postulate a missing poem based on a fixed presupposition about how the work was meant to end is to overlook its carefully balanced structure and beg the question in the process.

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[8] Gegenschatz and Gigon 1998, 305, 367–8. That either Symmachus or later Cassiodorus, each of whom attended to the text of the *Consolatio* after Boethius' death, is to be blamed for a patched-together conclusion seems quite impossible.

[9] On which, see Gruber 2006, 17.

[10] Unlike Martianus' *De nuptiis*, in which back-to-back poems straddle Books II–III and V–VI (the break between Books VIII–IX is uncertain due to the lacuna at VIII.887).

[11] I.1.7–11: *poeticas Musas ... meisque ... Musis*; I.5.10: *Musae saevientis*; III.m11.15: *Platonis Musa*.

1.1.3   An Unwritten Sixth Book?

At I.6.3–16 Philosophia poses four questions for purposes of diagnosing "Boethius'" malaise: (1) Is the world governed by chance (*temerariis … fortuitisque casibus*) or reason? (2) By what mechanisms is it driven? (3) What is the end toward which all things naturally strive? (4) Is "Boethius" able to recall what it means for him to be a human being? "Boethius" answers (1) correctly, affirming that the world is governed by God and in no way by chance (*fortuita temeritate*) (cf. III.12.4–8). He is at a loss for responses to (2) and (3), however, and answers (4) only incompletely, citing the traditional definition "rational mortal animal," thereby disregarding the immortality of the human soul, his own included. Answers to questions (2) and (3) are reached and explicitly flagged at III.12.2–3 and III.11.40–1, respectively, but since (4) is not similarly answered, Tränkle conjectured – with an eye also to Philosophia's postponement of the question of the punishments of the afterlife at IV.4.23 – a sixth book that remained unwritten due to the "diversion" (V.1.5) occasioned by the problems treated in Book V.

   Does Book V represent a thematic diversion from the general plan of the *Consolatio*, or is it its culmination? It begins with "Boethius'" interruption of Philosophia's train of thought[12] with a question about chance (V.1.3), which, although emphatically ruled out by him as a universal governing principle at I.6.4, now leaves him in the face of a dilemma according to which fate determines human actions and fortunes (IV.6.19) and fortune itself is nothing more than a misconstrual of fate (IV.7.6–16). Philosophia in turn observes that the question, although important, leads away from their discussion, which "Boethius" counters with the assurance that it will nevertheless be foundational for what is to follow (V.1.5–7). What must be emphasized here is that Philosophia's concern is not that the subject of free will and divine foreknowledge deviates from plan – that, presumably, is just what she was contemplating prior to the interruption – but that the question about *chance* will slow down the discussion when both time and energy are limited. "Boethius" raises the concern, however, because, with fortune out of the way since IV.7, some notion of chance is needed as a bridge to the treatment of free will, which promptly takes over at V.2.2. Moreover, it was *Philosophia* who pitted reason against chance – not fortune – in her diagnosis of his malaise at I.6.3.[13] The digression, in other words, is

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[12] V.1.1: *ad alia quaedam tractanda atque expedienda*; cf. Tränkle 1977, 153.

[13] Cf. "Boethius'" reminder at V.1.2 of Philosophia's having previously pointed out that providence, fate, *chance*, cognition, predestination, and free will – essentially, the range of subjects treated in Book V – form a complex matrix of philosophical concerns (IV.6.4, cf. IV.5.5–6).

both brief, extending only from V.1.8 to V.m1.12, and handled in a manner redolent of the many passages in Plato's dialogues that are similarly made to imitate the spontaneous flow of conversation.[14] The same dramatic technique is employed, moreover, at IV.1.1, where "Boethius" interrupts Philosophia's train of thought to ask about the moral implications of metaphysical conclusions reached at the end of Book III. How, he proceeds to ask as though in a moment of sudden afterthought, can evil exist and go unpunished in a world where everything is motivated and driven only by the good? And with that, the course is charted for Book IV. Hence Book V, although staged as a digression, is not a deviation from plan but serves to bring the moral concerns voiced by "Boethius" in Books I and IV to a head.

As to the interlocking questions of the soul's immortality and afterlife, the first is in fact treated repeatedly and from different perspectives throughout. It is symptomatic of "Boethius'" illness, as Philosophia observes at I.6.17, that he has temporarily forgotten what he really is (*quid ipse sis nosse desisti*), by which she means an *immortal* rational animal. Her course of therapy for this involves a gradual process of recovery in the first stage of which the Q.E.D. is introduced as a proposition that "Boethius" has previously accepted on the basis of multiple proofs and may therefore adopt now as axiomatic to the argument to hand (II.4.28). Shortly thereafter, with the first application of stronger dialectical remedies (II.5.1), self-knowledge and the lack thereof are made to explain the human condition of alternately rising above and descending below the level of beasts (II.5.29),[15] a passing observation that is developed in Philosophia's subsequent demonstration that the human soul is deified by its attainment of happiness (III.10.22–6, IV.3.8–10) but made beastly by its rejection of the good (IV.3.11–21, IV.4.1), which in turn leads to her broader conclusion that human beings *become what they think* (IV.4.28–31).[16] The soul, as she further notes, confusedly recalls truths that were known prior to its descent first into body and then into moral error (III.m11.9–16, V.2.8–9, V.m3.25–31), but by redirecting its gaze with the aid of divine grace (V.3.34) may ascend back to the higher realities (IV.1.9–m1.18, V.m5.12–15).

And as to the question of the soul's afterlife, Philosophia puts off "Boethius" twice, first at IV.4.2, in response to his wish that the wicked were prevented altogether from wrongdoing, and then at IV.4.23, after he seeks assurance that they will pay for it in death. Both concerns are

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[14] Cf. Plato, *Republic* III.394d; *Theaetetus* 172d; *Laws* II.667a.
[15] An anthropological detail adumbrated by the description of Philosophia's stature, which at one moment is of human dimensions but at the next penetrates into the heavens (I.1.1–2).
[16] Cf. 1IS 9.2–6.

anticipated at IV.1.3 and prepare the way now for IV.6, in which Philosophia explains first that no human being, good or evil, is free to act beyond the bounds of fate and providence (IV.6.7–22), then speculates about the providential administration of lots while observing the limits of human reasoning and refraining from references to the afterlife (IV.6.23–56).[17] With the latter, she is responding at one level to "Boethius'" own prayer at I.m5.42–8 that the celestial order be made to rectify the tyrannous injustices here *on earth*.[18] Quite apart from the diegetic context, however, Boethius also knew that on reaching the limits of rational speculation about such matters it would be impossible to follow the path of Plato's eschatological myths without a concomitant commitment to the transmigration of souls, and that the basis for an alternative to the latter was to be found in Augustine.[19] He therefore had Philosophia go only so far as to affirm that the punishments of the afterlife are unending, otherwise leaving her to concentrate on the transient conditions of *this life*:

> The wicked . . . will be free of [their villainy] sooner than you perhaps wish, or they think they will be. For within the very brief limits of life nothing is so late in coming that the mind, especially given its immortality, considers it long to wait for. Often their great hope and the height of their evil machinations is suddenly and unexpectedly dashed by reaching its end, which indeed imposes a limit on their misery. For if villainy makes people miserable, then one must inevitably be more miserable the longer he persists in villainy. And I would judge them supremely unhappy if death, at least, did not finally put an end to their wrongdoing; for if our conclusions concerning the misfortune attending depravity have proved true, then it is clear that a wretchedness that has been shown to be eternal is *infinite*.[20]

> Carebunt, inquit, ocius quam vel tu forsitan velis vel illi sese aestiment esse carituros; neque enim est aliquid in tam brevibus vitae metis ita serum quod exspectare longum immortalis praesertim animus putet. Quorum magna spes et excelsa facinorum machina repentino atque insperato saepe fine destruitur. Quod quidem illis miseriae modum statuit: nam si nequitia miseros facit, miserior sit necesse est diuturnior nequam. Quos infelicissimos esse iudicarem, si non eorum malitiam saltem mors extrema finiret: etenim si de pravitatis infortunio vera conclusimus, infinitam liquet esse miseriam quam esse constat aeternam. (IV.4.7–9)

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[17] On the limits of human reasoning, see IV.6.32, IV.6.53–4, cf. V.5.12, V.6.25; OT I.*praef*.21–3, Loeb p. 4; I.6.364–5, Loeb p. 30; Plato, *Phaedo* 114d.
[18] Echoing the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:10); cf. I.5.10; OT V.8.765–8, Loeb p. 128.
[19] Augustine, *De genesi ad litteram* VII.10.15; *De civitate Dei* IX.23; *Enarrationes in Psalmos* XLIX.2, LII.6; *Tractatus in Iohannis Evangelium* XLVIII.9.
[20] Translations in this chapter are my own.

The punishment suffered by the wicked in death, in other words, is the misery they experienced in life as magnified by its infinite duration.[21]

1.2   III.m9: The Formal Turning Point

Tränkle's arguments fail at the levels of both philosophical content and literary form. They fail at the level of philosophical content, in that an account of the human soul and its immortality is in fact developed in considerable detail over the course of II.4.28–V.2.9, and they fail at the level of literary form, in that the postulation of a sixth book whose purpose was to demonstrate the soul's immortality ignores the carefully orchestrated formal equilibrium of Books I and V vis-à-vis Books II–IV. Moreover, the fade to soliloquy after V.4.1 underscores the notion of philosophy as a process of internal dialogue and is by no means the unintended consequence of a hurried process of composition, as will become clear presently. A year after Tränkle's article appeared, Joachim Gruber ([1978] 2006, 20–1) revealed a pattern in the distribution of repeated metrical forms that, if published earlier, would undoubtedly have compelled Tränkle to think twice about his supposition of an unwritten sixth book. Seventeen of the *Consolatio*'s thirty-nine poems, as Gruber noted, are in meters that are employed more than once, and fifteen of those seventeen are distributed according to a complex but clearly symmetrical pattern:

I.m1: elegiac couplets
    I.m5: anapaestic dimeters (acatalectic)
        I.m6: glyconics
            II.m1: choliambs
                II.m6: Sapphic hendacasyllables
        II.m8: glyconics
    III.m2: anapaestic dimeters (acatalectic)
—————————————————[III.m9]—————————————————
            III.m11: choliambs
        III.m12: glyconics
        IV.m3: glyconics
    IV.m6: anapaestic dimeters (acatalectic)
            IV.m7: Sapphic hendecasyllables
V.m1: elegiac couplets
    V.m3: anapaestic dimeters (acatalectic)
        V.m4: glyconics.

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[21] Cf. IV.3.11–12: *de malorum … inseparabili poena.*

The entire structure revolves around III.m9, a hymn to the Creator and poetic paraphrase of Plato, *Timaeus* 29a–42d, which, as Philosophia is made to observe, marks a new beginning (*exordium*) for the dialogue (III.9.32–3).[22] Four of the five repeated metrical types in play straddle III.m9, while the fifth (glyconics) is evenly distributed at the rate of one poem per book. The two outliers to this pattern are II.m5 and III.m5, both in paroemiacs and placed in an organizational pattern that governs a series of philosophical themes which are treated in parallel in the second half of Book II and first half of Book III:

	Book II	Book III
Wealth	II.5–**m5**	III.3–m3
Rank	II.6–m6	III.4–m4
Power	II.6–m6	III.5–**m5**
Fame	II.7–m7	III.6–m6
Pleasure	–	III.7–m7

The two series together form an extended analysis of the misery occasioned by these "false" goods for those who mistake them for "true" ones. Each stage is announced as an application of stronger remedies (II.5.1, III.1.2–3), with the second ending shortly before the central turning point of the dialogue (III.m9).[23] The meter of II.m5 and III.m5 serves as a formal binding element between the two series, one that is reinforced by the glyconics which conclude Books II and III with their echoing beatitudes (II.m8.28, III.m12.1–3) and shared theme of love (II.m8.15, II.m8.29, III.m12.48).

1.3   III.m9: The Philosophical Turning Point

Gruber's discovery is indispensable for an understanding of the general architecture and aims of the *Consolatio*, for it opens up possibilities for deeper investigation of Boethius' organization of *philosophical* material along identical lines. This is evident above all from two pairs of passages that mirror one another at equal remove from III.m9, I.4–m5 and V.3–m3, and II.1–2 and IV.6–7.

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[22] Cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 27c.
[23] The first series is ushered in by the first properly dialectical reasoning of the dialogue (II.4.23–9), while the second prepares for the reduction of the five "false" goods to happiness (III.9.27) and, ultimately, the good (III.11.38). Cf. Marenbon 2003a, 104–8.

1.3.1 I.4–m5, V.3–m3: "Boethius" Speaks, Poetic "Call and Response"

Both sections, prose and poetry, are given exclusively to "Boethius," as occurs nowhere else in the *Consolatio*.[24] In each of the two prose sections (I.4, V.3) "Boethius" airs a concern about freedom, first at the level of the state (I.4.26; *libertatem . . . Romanam*) then at the level of the human soul (V.3.3; *libertatis arbitrium*). Each section in itself is aporetic, and together they represent a heightening in philosophical perspective, with Rome itself vanishing into a mere point in space and time along the way (II.7.8–9; see Magee 2005, 362). The two associated poems are in the same anapaestic meter, and each reveals a dualism in "Boethius'" view of divine governance. The first pits God against Fortuna:[25]

> . . . nothing evades Your ancient law
> or abandons the work proper to its station.
> Human acts alone you decline to restrain
> within just limits in ruling and governing
> everything according to its fixed end.
> For what else explains slippery Fortuna's
> stirring up of such enormous vicissitudes?

> . . . nihil antiqua lege solutum
> linquit propriae stationis opus.
> Omnia certo fine gubernans
> hominum solos respuis actus
> merito rector cohibere modo.
> Nam cur tantas lubrica versat
> Fortuna vices? (I.m5.23–9)

And the second, divine foresight against human free will (cf. Magee 2003, 153–5):

> What discordant cause undermines
> the bonds between things? What God
> has ordained conflicts so great between two truths
> that, though separately and individually self-consistent,
> they refuse to be blended and yoked?

> Quaenam discors foedera rerum
> causa resolvit? Quis tanta deus
> veris statuit bella duobus

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[24] Philosophia speaks only at I.4.1 and V.3.2.

[25] In what follows, the capitalized "Fortuna," whether roman or italicized for emphasis, serves to distinguish the Roman deity (personified in II.2–m2) from more abstract notions of fortune.

> ut quae carptim singula constent
> eadem nolint mixta iugari? (V.m3.1–5)

As with the prose passages, the point once again is to chart "Boethius'" progress with what is essentially a single concern, the world divided against itself, as viewed from a lower and then higher philosophical perspective. "Boethius" concludes V.m3 with the observation that the search for truth involves a mental disposition or *habitus* (ἕξις) which is situated between knowledge and ignorance:

> Is anyone, then, who inquires after truth
> in a neutral state? For he neither fully knows
> nor yet is entirely ignorant of things,
> but in summoning up the whole retained
> in memory he consults the impressions deep within
> so as to be able to combine forgotten parts
> with those that have been preserved.

> Igitur quisquis vera requirit
> neutro est habitu?[26] nam neque novit
> nec penitus tamen omnia nescit
> sed quam retinens meminit summam
> consulit alte visa retractans,
> ut servatis queat oblitas
> addere partes. (V.m3.25–31)

The obvious intertext or *subintellegendum* here is Plato, *Symposium* 204a–b, on Eros as a lover of wisdom, or *philosopher* (φιλόσοφος), caught between ignorance and wisdom.[27] With these closing lines, "Boethius" in effect assumes Philosophia's role and in so doing reveals what was implicit from the start, that the *Consolatio* is a dialogue in which the soul ultimately engages in philosophy through conversation with itself.[28] *That* is the reason for Boethius' disappearance as interlocutor after V. m3.31 and as narrator after V.4.1.

The same pattern of poetic call and response obtains at two other points in the *Consolatio*, I.m1–m2 and I.m5–IV.m6, where however *Philosophia* is now the respondent. The first pair, I.m1 and I.m2, produces an antiphonal effect before dialogue between the two interlocutors has begun:[29]

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[26] Moreschini's punctuation has been modified in consideration of the series of rhetorical questions – the internal dialogue – around which the poem revolves, and to draw out the moment of discovery signaled by *nam*.

[27] Scheible 1972, 163; Magee 2003, 154–5, 165–8.

[28] Plato, *Theaetetus* 189e–90a; cf. Augustine, *Soliloquies* I.1.1.   [29] Dialogue commences at I.3.3.

- *quondam (olim) ... nunc* (I.m1.1, 7–8; I.m2.6, 24): Each poem revolves around the theme of what "Boethius" once was but has now become.
- *heu ... cogor ... Eheu* (I.m1.2, 15); *Heu ... cogitur, heu* (I.m2.1, 27): Each laments his current state.
- *effecto corpore* (I.m1.12); *effeto lumine mentis* (I.m2.24): Where "Boethius" bemoans his physical decline, Philosophia instead pinpoints his mental affliction.

Philosophia takes "Boethius'" poetic complaint in hand and supplies the necessary philosophical corrective by prioritizing mind over body.[30] The second pair of poems, I.m5 and IV.m6, is even more tightly bound together, for each poem is in anapaestic dimeters, consists of forty-eight verses, and in its first section adopts the same order of overlapping astronomical and meteorological motifs:

	I.M5	IV.M6
Celestial "law"	1–4	1–5
Sun, Moon	5–9	6–7
Evening, Morning star	10–13	13–15
Seasons	14–24	25–29

In their second sections, however, they diverge significantly, for where "Boethius" decries the mercurial abuses of Fortuna and tyrants (I. m5.25–41), thereby driving a wedge between the sublunary and celestial domains, Philosophia instead turns to Aristotle's *De generatione et corruptione* for an account of the *binding* effects of celestial and meteorological change on the sublunary realm (IV.m6.19–33), a point to which we will return presently.

1.3.2   II.1–2, IV.6–7: Fortune, Fate, Providence

Working our way in now from Books I and V to Books II and IV, a structural and thematic symmetry analogous to that which binds I.4–m5 and V.3–m3 emerges. The passages at issue here are II.1–2 and IV.6–7, two pairs of thematically interconnected prose sections positioned at equal remove from III.m9. The philosophical concerns now are fortune (I.1–2,

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[30] Cf. I.5.6; Scheible 1972, 29; Gruber 2006, 81–2.

IV.7) and fate and providence (IV.6). Fortune, as both an abstract force of nature and the Roman deity, has figured prominently in book I[31] but is subjected to more focused scrutiny in Book II, especially II.2–m2, in which the personified goddess rebukes "Boethius" for his complaints about the rules of her "game" (II.2.9; *hunc continuum ludum ludimus*) despite having freely entered into it (II.1.18; *Fortunae te regendum dedisti*) and reaped its benefits for so long. But, she explains, her wheel has turned, and he must now accept the consequences with equanimity (II.1.16–19, II.2.9–10). Beneath the surface of this literary figure lurks a moral dilemma that functions as the philosophical mainspring of the whole dialogue. It is expressed by "Boethius" in terms that are reducible to a square of opposition between good and evil, on one side, and reward and punishment (or prosperity and adversity), on the other. What he seeks in his agonizing over fortune is in essence a theodicy, an answer to the question of why evil is rewarded and good punished in a world that is held to be governed by an omniscient, omnipotent, and good God (cf. IV.1.5). The complaint is articulated first at I.4.28–30, with "Boethius'" perplexity over the origins of evil (*unde mala?*); it makes several further appearances in Book I, disappears completely from Books II–III, then resurfaces in Books IV–V.[32] With each occurrence the contrarieties – good/evil, reward/punishment – are unmediated and articulated in the starkest of terms (Magee 2014, 14–16). The personification and general style of Book II harken back to a popular sermonizing tradition that is sometimes labeled, perhaps misleadingly, as "diatribe" but is securely associated with the ancient Stoics and Cynics. Philosophia herself describes it as a form of rhetorical persuasion (II.1.8) and throughout Book II upbraids "Boethius" with stern rhetorical apostrophes – *o homo! o mortales!* – that are among its stylistic hallmarks.[33] No attempt is made in Book II to exonerate God from the world's evils; for the moment, Philosophia is intent instead on leading "Boethius" to acceptance of the superficially paradoxical conclusion that adverse fortunes are actually more beneficial than propitious ones (II.8.2–3).

At IV.6.15–19 Philosophia replaces the figure of Fortuna's wheel (II.1.19, II.2.9) with that of concentrically revolving spheres of fate that bind everything – human acts *and fortunes* included (IV.6.19; *actus etiam fortunasque hominum*) – together in an indissoluble chain of causation.

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[31] See I.m1.17, I.m4.3, I.4.2, I.4.19, I.4.43–4, I.m5.29, I.m5.45, I.5.10, I.6.3–4, I.6.19.

[32] See I.4.34, I.4.46, I.m5.28–36, IV.1.3–5, IV.5.3–6, IV.6.32–49, IV.7.3, V.3.29–32, V.6.44–7.

[33] II.1.9, II.1.19, II.2.2, II.4.22, II.6.4, cf. III.3.1; Klingner 1921, 12–23; Gruber 2006, 172.

In IV.7 she revisits the paradox raised by Fortuna at II.8.2–3 with the observation that every fortune is *good* (IV.7.2) and echoes Fortuna's words at II.1.16–18 with the claim that every fortune is *freely chosen* (IV.7.22; *In vestra . . . situm manu qualem vobis fortunam formare malitis*). Throughout IV.7, moreover, she employs verbal cues that signal her reversion to the ancient sermonizing style of Book II – but now for the sole purpose of dispensing with fortune once and for all.[34] The stylistic concession and general theme of IV.7 respond to a lingering concern previously raised by "Boethius" at IV.5.2, namely, that there must be something to popular conceptions of fortune (*in hac ipsa fortuna populari*), since even the wise would choose freedom over exile, wealth over poverty, honor over ignominy, and so on. Most importantly, at IV.7.3 Philosophia, to counterbalance her provisional speculation about the providential distribution of lots at IV.6.32–49, offers a diaeresis that unambiguously makes the point that fortune, like fate itself, is a system of merited rewards and punishments and as such is neither capricious nor fickle:

> Fortunes
>> Gentle
>>> Just reward of the good
>>> Beneficial correction of the wicked
>> Harsh
>>> Just punishment of the wicked
>>> Beneficial training of the good.

1.4   III.9: Plato and Aristotle

The formal organization and philosophical themes of Books I and V and of Books II and IV, as we can now see, involve a chiastic structure that maps directly onto the system of repeated verse forms revolving around III.m9:

I.4–m5: "Boethius'" first dilemma: political freedom versus the chaos of fortune;
    II.1–2: Fortuna's "game" and wheel;
————————————————**[III.m9]**————————————————
    IV.6–7: the orbs of fate and disappearance of Fortuna;
V.3–m3: "Boethius'" second dilemma: free will versus divine foreknowledge.

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[34] IV.7.6–7: *sermo communis . . . vulgi sermonibus*; IV.7.11–12: *vulgus . . . populus*; IV.7.14: *opinionem populi . . . valde inopinabile*; IV.7.16: *tametsi nemo audeat confiteri.*

Book III.m9 sits at the very center of the *Consolatio*,[35] is its only poem exclusively in dactylic hexameters, and at *its* center contains verses that paraphrase Plato, *Timaeus* 34b–37c, on the divine construction of the World Soul from Being and the Same and Other, blended and formed into two concentric spheres spinning in counter-rotation:

> Constructing Soul of a threefold nature and causing it to move
> everything from the center, you distribute it throughout
>   the [world's] harmoniously proportioned members;
> once cut, and destined to revolve back upon itself in
>   a movement concentrated in two spheres,
> it circles around the mind deep within,
> causing the heavens to revolve with it.

> Tu triplicis mediam naturae cuncta moventem
> conectens animam per consona membra resolvis;
> quae cum secta duos motum glomeravit in orbes,
> in semet reditura meat mentemque profundam
> circuit et simili convertit imagine caelum. (III.m9.13–17)

Book III.m9, in other words, is in a sense the "mind" around which the whole of the *Consolatio* revolves. At the same time, it is the first in a series of poems that at measured intervals target central Platonic doctrines:

- III.m9 paraphrases Plato's account of time, the four elements (world body), the World Soul, and individual souls in the *Timaeus* (29a–42d). Among its modifications to Plato's doctrine is the location of the Forms within the mind (*mundum mente gerens*) of what consequently emerges as a divine Creator rather than Craftsman. The poem also celebrates the order and goodness of the world, and petitions divine support for the mind's ascent out of darkness.
- III.m11 invokes "Plato's muse" (*Platonis Musa*) on the doctrine of anamnesis in the *Meno* (80c–86b) and *Phaedo* (72e–76a). Flanked by the prose sections in which "Boethius" regains knowledge of the world's universal end and governing mechanisms (III.11.40–1, III.12.2–3), it documents his recovery from the lethargy diagnosed by Philosophia at the start as a malaise of self-oblivion (I.2.5; *lethargum patitur . . . Sui paulisper oblitus est*). The theme of recollection is flagged as a central concern already at III.2.13.[36]
- IV.m1 draws inspiration from the celebrated image in Plato's *Phaedrus* (246a–d) of the soul growing wings and taking flight through the

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[35] Gruber 2006, 232, 275.   [36] Cf. I.6.18, V.m3.20–31; Klingner 1921, 38.

heavens. It refashions the Platonic myth in leaving the soul to gaze calmly down upon the tyranny below without falling and entering into cycles of rebirth (*Phaedrus* 246d–49d).

The prose sections immediately following IV.m1 then tackle the famous paradoxes of Plato's *Gorgias*:

- IV.2: that the good are powerful and the wicked powerless (*Gorgias* 466b–68e)
- IV.4: that the wicked are happier when punished than when unpunished, and that they are unhappier than their victims (*Gorgias* 469b–79d).[37]

Plato is named at nearly every turn (III.9.32, III.m11.15, III.12.1, IV.2.45), and although he has been operating behind the scenes from the beginning, furnishing the basics of the mise-en-scène,[38] an often-quoted dictum about philosopher kings (I.4.5),[39] a model for the personi-fication of Fortuna (II.2–m2),[40] and so on, it is with III.m9 that he is first engaged in a more overtly philosophical manner. His *Timaeus* in particular not only marks the philosophical turning point of the *Consolatio* but also brings it to a close (V.6.9–14).[41]

Aristotle too maintains a presence throughout. Book III.3–7, on the different "false" goods discussed above, is framed by echoing phrases that target a popular notion of happiness as the complete accumulation of bodily and external goods:

- III.2.2–3: *Omnis mortalium cura ... diverso quidem calle procedit sed ad unum tamen beatitudinis finem nititur pervenire.... Liquet igitur esse beatitudinem statum bonorum omnium congregatione perfectum* (Every concern harbored by mortals proceeds along a manifold path but nevertheless strives to reach the sole end of happiness.... It is clear, therefore, that happiness is a state rendered complete by the accumulation of all goods);
- III.8.12: *haec ... bona ... nec omnium bonorum congregatione perfecta sunt, ea nec ad beatitudinem quasi quidam calles ferunt nec beatos ipsa perficiunt* (these "goods" ... are not rendered complete by the accumulation of *all* goods, nor do they lead, as though paths of some

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[37] Magee 2014.   [38] See above, page 13.
[39] Plato, *Republic* V.473c–d, VI.487e, VI.499b–c, VII.540d, etc.
[40] Plato, *Crito* 50a–54d; cf. Magee 2016, 9.   [41] See below, note 49.

sort, to happiness or of their own accord confer complete happiness upon people).[42]

The emphasis on accumulation reflects a later Peripatetic tradition probably associated with Critolaus, but the array of goods actually subjected to scrutiny and criticism in Books II–III clearly recalls Aristotle himself.[43] At III.8.10 Aristotle's *Protrepticus* is mined for a comment on the deceptive effect of surface appearances,[44] and at III.10.36–40 his notion of final causality (*Cuius . . . causâ*) is applied to the conclusion that external and bodily goods are means rather than ends in themselves.[45] It is in Book V, however, that Aristotle is pressed into more robust philosophical service: V.1.11–19 leads the way with his definition of chance occurrences;[46] V.3–4 famously build on his account of future contingents and the logical necessity binding facts and assertoric statements about them;[47] V. m4.26–5.1 invoke his "agent intellect" (*efficiens . . . causa . . . animique agentis*) to counter the Stoic theory of cognition;[48] and V.6.6 references his account of the perpetuity of the world before turning, finally, to Plato on the question of time and eternity (V.6.9–14).[49]

Among Boethius' unfulfilled plans was a harmonization of the doctrines of Plato and Aristotle (2IN 80.1–6). Whether he intended to achieve it through commentary on their works or in a separate monograph, as in the case of Porphyry, is unknown,[50] but the figure of Philosophia's gown is a clear indication of his abiding commitment to the view that Plato and Aristotle together represent a single philosophical system. At I.1.5 and I.3.7 the gown is described as having been rent by the Epicurean and Stoic "mob" (*Epicureum vulgus ac Stoicum*), a detail that evokes Numenius'

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[42] The full framing involves a chiastic series of echoes:

> III.1.5–7: *veram . . . felicitatem . . . verae beatitudinis*;
> III.m1.11–13: *falsa . . . bona . . . vera*;
> III.2.2–3: *diverso . . . calle . . . bonorum omnium congregatione*;
> III.8.12: *omnium bonorum congregatione . . . calles*;
> III.m8.21–2: *falsa . . . vera . . . bona*;
> III.9.1: *mendacis . . . felicitatis . . . vera*.

[43] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.4.1095a18–24; *Rhetoric* I.5.1360b4–62a12; Inwood 2014, 54–8, on Critolaus.
[44] Aristotle, *Protrepticus* fr. 10a Ross.
[45] Aristotle, *Physics* II.3.194b32–5; *Metaphysics* V.2.1013a32–5; cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* I.2.1094a18–22, I.7.1097a18–22; Plato, *Gorgias* 467c–d.
[46] Aristotle, *Physics* II.4.195b30–5.197a35; *Metaphysics* V.30.1025a14–30.
[47] Aristotle, *De interpretatione* 9.18a28–19b4. Boethius' commentaries furnish important insights into his treatment of the problem in *Consolatio* V (1IN 103.25–126.21; 2IN 185.17–250.16).
[48] Aristotle, *De anima* III.5.430a12: τὸ αἴτιον καὶ ποιητικόν.
[49] Aristotle, *De caelo* II.1.283b26–84a11; Plato, *Timaeus* 28b–29a, 37c–38c.
[50] There is no such attempt in the extant commentaries.

invocation (fr. 24.71–3 des Places) of the dismemberment of Pentheus as a figure for the fragmentation of philosophical sects after Plato. At the same time, the image anticipates a general conclusion that is drawn immediately before the philosophical turning point of the *Consolatio*: human error, as Philosophia explains at III.9.4 and 16, arises from the fragmenting of that which is whole and unified. Like the Hellenistic schools who stole pieces of her gown, each falsely believing that they had the whole of it, the human mind, she now stresses, errs in seeing parts where there is only an indivisible whole. Plato and Aristotle are the only philosophers whom Philosophia unqualifiedly claims for herself, and they, as we have seen, become the driving force from III.m9 on.[51] A pair of poetic passages clearly shows Boethius forging alignment between the two philosophers. The first is III.m9.10–12:

> You bind the elements in numbered proportion, so that
> cold combines with hot and dry with moist, and to prevent fire
>   from flying away due its greater purity
> and earth from being dragged down and submerged due to its weight.

> Tu numeris elementa ligas, ut frigora flammis,
> arida conveniant liquidis, ne purior ignis
> evolet aut mersas deducant pondera terras.

Here Philosophia paraphrases *Timaeus* 31b–32c, on the mathematical proportions that bind fire and earth by means of air and water. Of the elements, fire and earth alone are named, with air and water being intimated only indirectly and, indeed, obscurely (*frigora flammis*, *arida . . . liquidis*). The second passage is IV.m6.19–24:

> Concord blends the elements
> in balanced measure, so that moisture
> by turns gives way to the dryness it struggles against
> and coldness makes compact with heat,
> while floating fire thrusts its way on high
> and earth sinks down heavy under its weight.

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[51] I.3.6: *nostri Platonis*; III.9.32: *Platoni . . . nostro*; V.1.12: *Aristoteles meus*. Socrates figures as Plato's teacher (I.3.6, I.3.9), and Parmenides as a representative of the Eleatic(-Academic) tradition in which "Boethius" was schooled (I.1.10, III.12.37). Cicero is handled neutrally (II.7.8, V.4.1), while Seneca is visible in the first half of the dialogue but fades away in the second (I.3.9, III.5.10–11). Philosophia also identifies with two poets, Euripides (III.7.6; *Euripidis mei*), possibly due to an ancient tradition associating him with Socrates and Plato (Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum* II.18, III.6), and Lucan (IV.6.33; *familiaris noster Lucanus*), probably due to his connection with Seneca. Stoics and Epicureans are implicitly ruled out as her *familiares* at I.3.7–8 (*tuorum quidam familiarium*; I.4.30 eludes precise identification).

> Haec concordia temperat aequis
> elementa modis, ut pugnantia
> vicibus cedant humida siccis
> iungantque fidem frigora flammis,
> pendulus ignis surgat in altum
> terraeque graves pondere sidant.

Once again fire and earth are named, whereas air and water are obliquely hinted at, and in nearly identical periphrases (*humida siccis … frigora flammis*). The periphrases, combined with the meteorological and seasonal motifs that follow them (IV.m6.25–9), target Aristotle's *De generatione et corruptione*, which is all but named further along (IV.m6.30–32; *alit ac profert … condit et aufert*).[52] Aristotle's account of the elements is based on a material substrate and cyclical process of coming and going between two pairs of opposed qualities, hot/cold and moist/dry: as the dryness of fire becomes moist, air emerges; as the warmth of air cools, water emerges, and so on. Plato's, by contrast, is based on the interaction in a matrix or "receptacle" between the geometrical solids associated with each of the four elements: pyramid (fire), octahedron (air), icosahedron (water), cube (earth) (Plato, *Timaeus* 55d–57c). Aristotle's doctrine is obviously linked with Plato's insofar as it arose out of his extensive *criticisms* of it (Cherniss 1944, 88–92, 158–60), but it appears from the two passages above, in the first of which *frigora flammis, arida … liquidis* is quite out of place, that in their separate theories Boethius viewed either Aristotle as advancing the work of his teacher Plato or, less probably, Plato as anticipating the work of his student Aristotle. Either way, we can be certain that he viewed Plato and Aristotle as a bulwark against Hellenistic alternatives and as restoring the unity of Philosophia's gown.

1.5   Wheels, Orbs, a Ring Structure

The circle or sphere is the fundamental symbol of the *Consolatio*. It appears first with the figure of Fortuna's wheel (II.1.19, II.2.9); is subsequently applied in connection with the procession and return of individual souls (III. m2.34–8), the World Soul (III.m9.13–17), and the concentric spinning orbs of fate (IV.6.15); and, finally, to illustrate the four ascending modes of cognition (V.4.26). At the end of Book III "Boethius" himself is made to wonder about the symbol, asking whether with her arguments Philosophia has been playing with him, leading him in and out of the same passageways in an inescapable labyrinth, or fashioning a wondrous orb of divine simplicity (III.12.30; *divinae simplicitatis orbem*). To which she replies:

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[52] Aristotle, *De generatione et corruptione* II.2.329b7–4.332a3; cf. Magee 2003, 155–62.

We are playing no game at all . . . by the grace of God, to whom we prayed a while ago,[53] we have achieved the greatest of all our tasks. For such is the form of the divine substance that it itself neither slips away into nor receives anything external to itself[54] but, as Parmenides describes it,[55] "on all sides [complete,] like the mass of a well-rounded sphere" turns the moving sphere of the universe while itself maintaining its own immobility. That our arguments too have not been sought from without but were situated within the ambit of the subject matter we were treating should not surprise you, for you have learned on Plato's authority that our language should be akin to the things it expresses.[56]

Minime . . . ludimus remque omnium maximam dei munere, quem dudum deprecabamur, exegimus. Ea est enim divinae forma substantiae, ut neque in externa dilabatur nec in se externum aliquid ipsa suscipiat, sed, sicut de ea Parmenides ait, πάντοθεν, εὐκύκλου σφαίρης ἐναλίγκιον ὄγκῳ, rerum orbem mobilem rotat dum se immobilem ipsa conservat. Quodsi rationes quoque non extra petitas sed intra rei quam tractabamus ambitum colloca-tas agitavimus, nihil est quod admirere, cum Platone sanciente didiceris cognatos, de quibus loquuntur, rebus oportere esse sermones. (III.12.36–8)

With this, the general literary strategy of the *Consolatio* is laid bare and its architecture explained. As in the case of an illness that is treated with stronger therapies as the patient progresses, the core philosophical ques-tions of the *Consolatio* are made to cycle back for higher-order analysis as "Boethius" regains strength; the illness remains the same, but the treat-ment evolves. The strategy is implicitly spelled out philosophically, more-over, with the epistemological doctrine laid out at V.4.24–39, according to which one and the same object is grasped at higher levels by the four ascending cognitive faculties of sense-perception, imagination, reason, and intelligence (cf. 2IS 136.2–38.3). It is in precisely this way that "Boethius" is depicted as analyzing the same problems from higher perspectives as the dialogue progresses, seeing a metaphysically nuanced sense of freedom where he previously saw only a political one, and fate and providence where he previously saw only fortune. Boethius left nothing to chance with the *Consolatio*, whose literary structure in retrospect seems an inevitable consequence of the historical circumstances under which it was written, circumstances that demanded an intimate but at the same time unusually compressed, and indeed esoteric, mode of expression.[57]

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[53] III.m9.   [54] Cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 33a–34b.   [55] Parmenides, 28B 8.43 Diels-Kranz.
[56] Plato, *Timaeus* 29b–d; cf. Klingner 1921, 73–4.
[57] Cf. Magee 2003, 169; OT I.praef.11–21, Loeb p. 4; III.7–14, Loeb p. 38; V.praef.20–42, Loeb pp. 74–6.