

## ABSTRACT

Memory's Consolation: Right Remembrance in Boethius

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The impetus for my thesis is the psychological predicament injustice creates, namely, the paralyzing effect of suffering. As presented in Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, I examine how the resolution to this problem hinges upon memory as it actively works to reorder our conception of seemingly arbitrary circumstances. Over the course of the *Consolation*, the process of remembering rightly moves Boethius from a state of despairing passion toward reasoned consolation, even as his outward condition remains essentially the same. Without denying the reality of suffering, right remembrance in Boethius offers a framework for honest reflection in reconciling the good with the painful. Right remembrance thus becomes not only a theoretical means of achieving peace and happiness for Boethius alone, but also more poignantly functions as a practical, timeless means of living well amidst troubled circumstances.

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MEMORY'S CONSOLATION:  
RIGHT REMEMBRANCE IN BOETHIUS

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*gratias tibi ago*

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## DEDICATION

*hic et coniugii sacrum  
castis nectit amoribus,  
hic fidis etiam sua  
dictat iura sodalibus.*

*O felix hominum genus,  
si uestros animos amor  
quo caelum regitur regat!*

(*Cons.* II.m.8)

To my mother, father, and sister,  
  
from whom I first understood  
the power of Love to  
rule the limits of starry sky  
and the mysteries of the human heart.

## INTRODUCTION

Some works of literature blaze across the history of Western civilization; others capture the spirit of the age in which they were composed. Some texts radically influence surrounding authors for centuries. Still others fade into relative obscurity. To Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* one may ascribe all of these qualities. A glorious synthesis of classical learning, yet viewed by many scholars as the monumental transitional text into medieval thinking, Boethius' slim volume occupied a place of honor amongst great thinkers for over a millennium after it was composed. Only now, in the modern period, has Boethius fallen into relative oblivion.

My own introduction to the *Consolation* began in my medieval Great Texts class at Baylor during my sophomore year. I was struck immediately by its relevance both to my interests in the Classical period and my increasing attention to the post-Christian world of philosophical literature. Now, nearly three years of researching and writing later, my interest in this strange Roman has only grown. In particular, my journey alongside Boethius investigating the Classical and Medieval conception of memory's right relation to the soul's happiness has been the primary focus of my scholarship in my last two years at university.

Inspired by a personal conversation with Yale theologian Miroslav Volf in my thesis director's living room, the backdrop to my thesis is the psychological predicament injustice creates, namely, the paralyzing effect of suffering. Particularly within the context of the *Consolation*, I contend that the resolution to this problem hinges upon memory as it actively works to alter our conception of seemingly arbitrary circumstance.

In the rightly ordered soul, memory becomes a primary means of regaining our true sense of self, thereby moving us from despair toward hope. Over the course of the *Consolation*, the process of remembering rightly takes Boethius from a state of metaphorical blindness to clear sight, from crushing despair to consolation, even as his outward condition remains essentially the same. Without denying the reality of suffering, right remembrance in Boethius offers a framework for honest reflection in reconciling both the good and the painful. As such, right remembrance becomes not only a theoretical means of achieving peace and happiness, but also more poignantly a pragmatic, realistic means of living well amidst troubled and difficult circumstance.

In Chapter One, I consider the classical and medieval concepts of the relationship between memory and the soul. By drawing from the following sources—Hesiod, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Augustine—I briefly consider how the history of this relationship undergirds and defines Boethius’ understanding of memory and the soul. This inquiry provides a foundation for the remainder of the thesis—predominantly focused upon the *Consolation* proper—and situates my understanding of Boethius within a larger philosophical context.

Chapter Two attends to the primary problem at hand: Boethius’ forgetfulness, subsequent misremembering, and illness. When we first meet the character of Boethius, he is soul-sick—having forgotten who he really is, the nature of his situation, and the true order of the universe. This chapter relates precisely the cause and result of Boethius’ immediate situation. It also explores the philological significance of the terms Boethius employs to convey memory and forgetfulness, thereby enriching our understanding of the subtle distinctions he makes. With the philological background established, I relate the



forgetfulness of Boethius to his concept of self-exile, more precisely delineating what Boethius means by the term soul-sickness. This chapter also introduces the effects of Lady Fortuna upon Boethius, beginning a thread that will be taken up in full in Chapter Three. This chapter ends with the diagnosis of Boethius by Lady Philosophy, laying the groundwork for full development of Philosophy's remedy for Boethius' soul-sickness.

Finally, Chapter Three considers Lady Philosophy's proposed remedy for his neglectful behavior, forgetfulness, and misremembering. The remedy, as portrayed in Book II and III of the *Consolation*, relies upon a refutation of Boethius' misconceptions regarding Lady Fortuna's usefulness and the good represented by her handmaidens, temporal blessings. Through careful consideration of Philosophy's dialogue in the voice of Fortuna, we, alongside Boethius, order rightly the good and may begin the process of healing. Boethius, through Lady Philosophy, reminds us that circumstances do not define us: our memory allows us to define the circumstance. With the nature of the remedy well in hand, I move to consider its effect upon the patient. Encapsulating the journey of Boethius from forgetfulness to memory, I move forward to examine the helpfulness of her remedy, characterizing Boethius' recovery through the lens of philosophical concepts that loom large in the *Consolation*: love, peace, and happiness.

In conclusion, while antiquarian interest, philological clarity, and philosophical inquiry all have their own significant place in academic discourse, the goal of my thesis from the beginning has been and remains to this day the arguably more difficult task of grasping true wisdom. Wisdom, as Aquinas succinctly reminds us, is the knowledge of the highest. My study of memory and the soul through the lens of the *Consolation* has opened my mind to crucial insights and valuable means of not only reading literature

well, but also living life well. My desire has been not to write merely a well-conceived and executed, but ultimately ordinary academic work. Rather, my ambition has been from the start something far loftier. Even if this work only touches one person beyond me, I sincerely wish that the import of this thesis might reach far beyond the matter of Boethius and his life to grow in pertinence for each individual who comes across this material.

While the ultimate success or failure of this attempt remains finally to be judged, my pleasure in crafting, caring, and nurturing this body of work for the past three years has been unparalleled. Alongside Boethius, my own mind and soul have been reordered by my careful study of memory, imbuing my life and circumstance, such as it is, with the peace and hope Boethius reached. Each and every day, I am reminded that it is Love who rules the starry sky and the equally mysterious human heart, inspiring me, now and always, to seek true Happiness, which through the wondrous faculty of our memory, is ever and always just beyond and in reach.

C.B.B.

## CHAPTER ONE:

*“Carmina qui quondam studio florente peregi,  
flebilis heu maestos cogor inire modos.  
Ecce mihi lacerae dictant scribenda Camenae  
et ueris elegi fletibus ora rigant.”*

### The Classical and Medieval Pairing of the Soul and Memory

I begin this chapter by tracing the mythical and theoretical background of the concept of right remembrance. First, I attend to the significance of the goddess Mnemosyne (Memory personified) and her children, the nine Muses. Considering Hesiod’s account of Mnemosyne and the Muses, given the appearance of the Muses in Boethius’ *Consolation*, enriches our understanding of the latter text. Next, I examine three important classical conceptions about the relationship between memory and the soul taking in turn the writings of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero. Finally, I address Augustine, whose understanding of memory and the soul draws on his classical predecessors, places them in theological context, and influences Boethius.

#### *Mnemosyne (Memory) and the Muses*

The goddess Memory, Mnemosyne, is traditionally identified as the mother of the nine Muses, with Zeus as the Muses’ father. Taken in light of the opening scenes with Lady Philosophy and the Muses in Book I of Boethius’ *Consolation*, intriguing connections abound between the Muses and the human faculty of memory. To tease out the various implications of these striking parallels, I consider first the history of

Mnemosyne and the Nine Muses as offered by Hesiod in his *Theogony*. Then, acquainted with Mnemosyne's story, I discuss the role of the Muses and memory of the *Consolation*.

Hesiod's *Theogony*, his poetic genealogy of the Greek gods, offers particular insight into the connection between memory and the Muses. As one of the earliest Greek poets to offer a detailed genealogy of the gods, Hesiod serves as a primary source to locate the origins of the Muses within the Greco-Roman mythological framework.

In the opening section of the *Theogony*, Hesiod begins with a hymn to the Muses clarifying their powers and explaining their function within the schema of the Olympic deities. When explaining the genealogy of the Muses, Hesiod states, "The goddess who protects Eleuther's hills / Memory, bore them [the Muses] in Pieria / To the father, son of Kronos, and they bring / Forgetfulness of evil, rest from pain."<sup>1</sup> Since Memory personified as a goddess is chosen to be the mother of the Muses, memory itself must be an essential element whenever discussing the Muses. To the "nine like-minded daughters" of Zeus, their "one thought is singing" and their "hearts are free from care" (*Theog.* 63-64). Likewise, when further reflecting upon the role of the Muses, especially in relationship to the bard, Hesiod states:

...he is lucky whom the Muses love.  
His voice flows sweetly from his mouth, and when,  
A man has sorrow newly on his mind  
And grieves until his heart is parched within,  
If a bard, the servant of the Muses, sings  
The glorious deeds the men of old performed,  
And hymns the blessed ones, Olympian gods,  
At once that man forgets his heavy heart,  
And has no memory of any grief,  
So quick the Muses' gift diverts his mind (*Theog.* 100-10).

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<sup>1</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, in *Hesiod and Theognis: Theogony, Works and Days, and Elegies*, trans. Dorothea Wender, (London: Penguin, 1973), lines 52-55. References will be henceforth indicated parenthetically in the text.

Hesiod connects good fortune, or luck, to the man whom the Muses love. Additionally, the man loved by the Muses easily composes sweet verses, and banishes grief from his mind speedily. It is vital to note that forgetfulness of grief, or the privation of memory of evil, is the gift of the Muses emphasized by Hesiod.

Strikingly, Hesiod's inclusion of details of the Muses' specific occupation leads naturally to comparisons with the Muses' function in Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*. This description of the Muses' art in mythology becomes particularly pertinent in light of their visit to Boethius' sickbed at the beginning of the *Consolation*. Boethius, beginning his work with a strange, quasi-invocation to the Muses, pathetically relates:

I who once wrote songs with joyful zeal  
Am driven by grief to enter weeping mode.  
See the Muses, cheeks all torn, dictate  
And wet my face with elegiac verse.<sup>2</sup>

In light of Boethius' heavy, grief-stricken heart in the *Consolation*, the counter offered by Hesiod would seem to be the precise place we find him in the beginning of Book I—surrounded by the Muses and preparing to sing verses to encourage forgetfulness of grief within himself. Yet, upon closer examination, we see that Boethius' attention has turned to elegiac verse. Boethius' compositions, somber and tearful in essence, do not divert his mind from grief, but rather cement his mind into dark despair.

For this reason, it is unsurprising that Lady Philosophy angrily denounces the effects of the Muses upon Boethius. Her vivid description of the poetic Muses as

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<sup>2</sup> Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, rev. ed., trans. Victor Watts (Penguin: London, 1999), I.m.1. References will be henceforth indicated parenthetically in the text.

“hysterical sluts” is nothing less than remarkable considering the root problem she is addressing (*Cons.* I.p.1). By accusing these Muses of the charge of simple prostitution, Lady Philosophy sees them as essentially encouraging Boethius toward a type of disordered love. Rather than following his first love, Philosophy, Boethius is being swayed toward the path of false, cheap “love” by these “hysterical sluts.” Lady Philosophy further decries the Muses’ effect by stating:

They have no medicine to ease his pains, only sweetened poisons to make them worse. These are the very creatures who slay the rich and fruitful harvest of Reason with the barren thorns of Passion. They habituate men to their sickness of mind instead of curing them (*Cons.* I.p.1).

When Lady Philosophy speaks here of medicine and cures, she denies the Muses’ ability truly to cure the illness of Boethius. In fact, insomuch as Philosophy claims the Muses poison rather than offer a cure for sadness, she effectively illustrates her belief that the Muses harm rather than help Boethius. Simply, Boethius’ Muses of Poetry focus solely upon exciting the passions to the exclusion of reason. Having lost the good of reason, Boethius becomes unable to remember his first and best teacher, Philosophy. In this state, he is incapable of recognizing essential qualities about the world and Fortune, misled instead by the passions into despair and hopelessness. Only when Lady Philosophy dismisses the Muses can Boethius’ reason begin to reemerge, allowing him to remember his own nature and his former understanding of the workings of the world.

Therefore, Boethius’ Muses, like those in Hesiod, do bring some manner of forgetfulness of evil. However, this forgetfulness is the absence of memory stemming from neglect of the good, not the prudential ability to hold in mind the good and bad and consider both truly. As a result, an interesting tension emerges in Boethius’ representation of the Muses. While some idea of the traditional role of the Muses as in

Hesiod certainly remains, the Muses' role in the *Consolation* appears significantly more multifaceted. Lady Philosophy's dismissal of the Muses indicates clearly that the Muses' mythological function of assuaging grief cannot be effectual in Boethius' particular case.

Her dismissal of the Muses raises a question: if Boethius the author does not view the Muses as Hesiod does, what does this suggest about the Muses' role in the *Consolation*? I suggest two plausible interpretations exist to explain the divergence in the typical understanding of the Muses for Boethius. The first, certainly the more traditional interpretation, hearkens to Plato's *Republic* and suggests that Boethius may be invoking the age-old battle between poets and philosophers.<sup>3</sup> On this view, the disagreement about the proper cure for Boethius between the Muses and Lady Philosophy accords with this classic dispute, supporting the idea that poetry and philosophy simply cannot mix. In spite of its possibility for clever allusion, this view is self-refuting, as Lady Philosophy frames the *Consolation* as a series of prosaic and poetic passages. Plainly, the authorial Boethius is both a poet and a philosopher. Moreover, Lady Philosophy bids the Muses to leave Boethius "for my own Muses to heal and cure," suggesting that her view of poetry and inspiration is not innately negative (*Cons.* I.p.1). Indeed, as soon as Philosophy sends away the Muses, she begins a healing poem of her own. Taken together, Lady Philosophy's dismissal of Muses cannot be read as simply an

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<sup>3</sup> Moreover, throughout Plato's corpus, myth and metaphor are liberally found throughout Socrates' philosophical prose. The *Republic* notably ends with the Myth of Ur, a story that seemingly is itself a contradiction of the exile of poets from Kallipolis. While the scope of this thesis does not allow for a full treatment of this issue, moving forward, in my selection of Plato's vivid metaphors and myths from his work, I will continue to develop the idea that Plato's adoption of myth decries a simplistic view of entirely banishing poetry from the polis.

exemplum of poets and philosophers failing to cohere, but rather points strongly to another layer of meaning within the text.

An alternative interpretation of the Muses' role in the *Consolation* is that Boethius rejects the standard mythological understanding of the Muses from a conviction about the impoverishment of the Greco-Roman mythological system. Two reasons seem plausible to explain Boethius's turn away from tradition. On the one hand, Boethius' reticence in accepting the traditional account of the Muses may stem simply from unease about the problematic nature of the Greco-Roman mythological system. Alternatively, on the other hand, Boethius may have theologically grounded reservations about accepting the complex, often internally inconsistent account of pagan deities. If the latter reason is accepted, this theologically driven view allows for a richer reading of the text, one that explores Boethius as a Christian deeply interested in preserving the pagan world. If Boethius is indeed rejecting the traditional account from a sense of discontinuity with his theological beliefs, he stands in an exceptional place as both an admirer and critic of the past. Although the role of Boethius' Christianity in the *Consolation* is notably difficult in light of little direct textual evidence, the denial of the traditional view of the Muses presents interesting insights for further consideration of Boethius' philosophical and theological thought. In any case, this apparent inconsistency invites us to consider thoughtfully a fuller understanding of the complexity of Boethius' authorial project, and drives us forward to attempt to reconcile these difficulties by an examination of memory within the classical sphere.



## *Platonic Recollection*

Plato's impact upon classical conceptions of memory is widely acknowledged. Moreover, neo-Platonism is often identified as one of the primary philosophical influences of Boethius. Jointly taken, the two points speak to the helpfulness of surveying a few key Platonic depictions of memory as part of Boethius' intellectual inheritance. More specifically, Socrates' discussion in the *Theaetetus* of the figures of the wax tablet and the aviary cone, as well as his propounding of the Myth of Theuth and Thamus in the *Phaedrus* serve as key texts for understanding Plato on memory. After an overview of the relevant parts of these two dialogues, the basic elements of the Platonic model of memory will be explained, emphasizing Socrates' dialogical claims about the difficulties of remembering rightly. With Plato, we will also begin to grasp important connections made between the nature of the soul and power of the memory. Though the details regarding the soul and memory differ for subsequent authors, Plato's contributions are decisively important to this study.

### *The Figures of the Wax Tablet and the Aviary Cone in Plato's Theaetetus*

In the midst of the *Theaetetus*, a dialogue devoted to explaining the emergence of false opinion in men, Socrates changes the direction of his argument with two metaphors. The first metaphor likens memory to a wax tablet residing in the soul of each human being. This metaphor allows for individual differences depending upon the quality of each tablet. Sometimes the memories firmly impress themselves into the figurative wax; sometimes they do not. The tablet itself, Socrates supposes, is a gift from the goddess

Mnemosyne.<sup>4</sup> According to this image, “we remember and know anything imprinted, as long as the impression remains in the block; but we forget and do not know anything which is erased or cannot be imprinted” (*Tht.* 191e).

With his tablet imagery, Socrates uses a metaphor that would be familiar to any learned man of the time. This kind of tablet was the common means used by students during this time to practice their writing and to record their thoughts for better remembrance. Moreover, the tablet encompasses the idea that each individual person’s memory differs as each homemade wax tablet inevitably would differ, depending upon the quality of the wax, the size of impressible area, and the intent of the person when impressing upon the wax. Socrates posits the purest, deepest, and most easily impressed wax would represent the memory of a wise person. Thus, “in the first place, then such people are good at learning; secondly, they have good memories; thirdly, their beliefs are true, because they don’t mismatch perceptions and marks” (*Tht.* 194d). In contrast, however, the person who often struggles with false opinions is presented as possessing a tablet too small, too hard, or made of impure wax.

While the dialogue does not develop them in full, a variety of implications arises from Socrates’ use of the wax tablet metaphor. On the one hand, memories appear to have some kind of near-physical reality, as represented by the literal mnemonic marks on the tablet. Yet, memory—as represented by the metaphor of the tablet—is fragile. Just as the wax tablets of Socrates’ time would be subject to the harsh effects of heat, rough handling, or accidental breakage, so too are memories subject to breakdown and decay.

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<sup>4</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus*, trans. Robin Waterfield, (London: Penguin, 2004), 191d. References will be henceforth indicated parenthetically in the text.

Perhaps because the wax tablet does not capture adequately all of the crucial features of human memory, Socrates offers another notable memory-related figure in the *Theaetetus*. Socrates uses the aviary cone to describe how various types of knowledge are stored within the mind. The crucial aim of this metaphor is to distinguish between merely “possessing” knowledge, and being able to recall it in useful fashion. To ground discussion of the aviary cone, Socrates sets certain rules for the metaphor. First, the space of the aviary cone “is empty in infants” (*Tht.* 197e). Moreover, the birds “are to be thought of as a pieces of knowledge; that to acquire a bird and confine it in the enclosure is to have learned or discovered the matter with which the piece of knowledge is concerned; and that is what knowing is” (*Tht.* 197e).

Within the concept of the aviary cone, Socrates likens a person gaining different types of knowledge to catching a number of doves. This person may thus possess many kinds of knowledge, but the metaphor suggests that in order to use a particular bit of knowledge he must track it down within the larger group. A man may not always be successful, however, because the memory might fly away from the grasp of the man, or rest within sight but out of easy grasp. Alternatively, the memory may struggle within the grasp of a man, causing him to be uncertain of this memory because of his tentative grasp. On the other hand, one may catch the wrong memory, or find the memory that one seeks has left and flown away completely. In a sense, then, while the man does possess all these means of knowledge, “in another sense he has none of them, except potentially” (*Tht.* 197c).

In particular, the nature of the aviary cone brings out the concept of Platonic recollection—the idea that all learning is simply recollection—in full force. Socrates

explains that there are two different kinds of tracking knowledge: “one takes place before acquisition and as a means to acquisition; the other takes place after acquisition, as a means to getting hold of and having in one’s grasp what one has possessed for a while” (*Tht.*198d). This, as Socrates goes on to elucidate, clarifies how “even things which were learned some time ago (that is, the pieces of knowledge which have been present for some time), can be re-learned, in the sense of getting hold of and having the relevant piece of knowledge” (*Tht.*198d). Through the image of the aviary cone, Socrates offers an appreciable visual illustration for the conundrum of memory in which a memory is clearly within the mind, but not readily accessible.

*Remembering Wrongly versus Remembering Rightly  
in Plato*

The concept of right remembrance comes up obliquely in the *Theaetetus*, as Socrates discusses the ways in which false opinions crop up in the mind of humans. Intriguingly, according to Socrates, errors in thinking and remembering come from connecting present sensations with past impressions and thoughts, not from an erroneous union of two present sensations or two present thoughts. Thus, “it is apparently impossible to be in error and to have false beliefs about things which are unknown and have never been perceived. It is in the cases where things are both known and are being perceived that belief wheels and whirls about, and ends up true or false” (*Tht.*194b). From this statement, one gleans that one must have prior knowledge about something in order to twist it into error. In the wax tablet analogy, a person must have some knowledge of the memories inscribed upon the tablet in order to twist the memories into false memories. In the other analogy, a person must have possessed and used a particular

kind of knowledge from the aviary cone, released the knowledge, and then sought it fruitlessly a second time, or mishandled the knowledge and confused it with another kind of knowledge. Clearly, the ramifications for right remembrance, given the possibility of error in memory, are weighty.

*Theuth, Thamus, Memory, and the Soul  
in the Phaedrus*

In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates introduces another image bearing upon the exercise of human memory. This time, however, he frames his example within the context of an ancient Egyptian myth. In relating the myth of how writing first came to humans, Socrates conveys through the character Thamus the idea that writing is the greatest enemy of memory. He states:

For your invention will produce forgetfulness in the souls of those who have learned it, through lack of practice at using their memory, as through reliance on writing they are reminded from outside by alien marks, not from within, themselves by themselves. So you have discovered an elixir not of memory but of reminding. To your students you give an appearance of wisdom, not the reality of it; thanks to you, they will hear many things without being taught them, and will appear to know much when for the most part they know nothing, and they will be difficult to get along with because they have acquired the appearance of wisdom instead of wisdom itself.<sup>5</sup>

The dichotomies set up by Plato here, between memory and reminiscence, truth and semblance of truth, offer a complex situation in which the good of mnemonic devices as an aid to memory are not as clear cut as they might first appear. Thamus' wise commentary upon the dichotomy of internal understanding and the external marks of this

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<sup>5</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Christopher Rowe, (Penguin: London, 2005), 275a – b1. References will be henceforth indicated parenthetically in the text.

understanding holds especially true in the case of memory, as the interior workings of memory are nearly impossible to discern truly from its outside effects.

Far earlier in the dialogue, after the initial pages of the *Phaedrus*, Socrates moves from a discussion of Love to insisting to Phaedrus, “we must comprehend the truth about the nature of soul, both divine and human, by observing experiences and actions belonging to it” (*Phdr.* 245c). Socrates moves into a famous proof of the immortal soul, in which he emphatically claims that the immortal soul is self-moving and never ceases to move, and is without beginning itself. It is “not possible for this [the soul] either to be destroyed or to come into being” (*Phdr.* 245d). To help his readers understand the nature of the soul, Socrates uses another metaphorical figure, this time a pair of winged horses and a charioteer. One of the horses is good and noble; the other is bad. It is the charioteer’s job to drive both toward what he deems to be good and true. Socrates’ perfect soul, freed from a mortal body, is winged and able to traverse all of heaven, whereas the imperfect soul loses her wings and must settle in a mortal body on the earth. The perfect soul beholds in heaven “being which really is, which is without colour or shape, intangible, observable by the steersman of the soul alone, by intellect...to which the class of true knowledge relates” (*Phdr.* 247c).

Indeed, Socrates intimates that man’s knowledge of universals comes from the past experience of souls:

This is a recollection of those things which our soul once saw when it travelled [sic] in company with god and treated with contempt the things we now say are and when it poked its head up into what really is. Hence it is with justice that only the thought of the philosopher becomes winged; for so far as it can it is close, through memory to those things his closeness to which gives a god his divinity. if a man uses such reminders rightly, being continually initiated in perfect rites, he alone achieves real perfection (*Phdr.* 249c-d).

As Socrates admonishes us, the philosopher, pursuing justice, must use his memory to remember the Forms of things above. Yet, not all souls easily remember the things of the divine world. Whether because the souls have only seen the Forms for a short time or because of the corruption in earthly things, souls often lose the capacity to remember the precious and holy things of above. The soul remains frail and lacking the full good it once possessed, a mournful commentary on Plato's ultimate belief about the soul.

### *Summation of Plato's Contributions*

Within his *Phaedrus* and *Theaetetus*, Plato offers insightful contributions to our understanding of memory, especially regarding its fragility, uncertainty, and relation to the soul. In the *Theaetetus*, Plato underscores the fragility of memory by relating it to a changeable wax tablet. Similarly, he explains uncertainty in memory by comparing its capacity with erratic and unorganized birds within a cage. Finally, Plato's use of myth in the *Phaedrus* unites the relation of the soul to the power of memory. These elements of memory, encapsulated by Plato by his use of vivid metaphors and myth, spur us onward to our discussion of our other classical authors, including Aristotle, Cicero, and Augustine, and thenceforth to the crux of Boethius' dilemma with memory in the *Consolation*.

### *The Aristotelian Concept of the Soul and Memory*

The influence of Aristotle for Boethius is no less important than Plato. For, while often remembered today as a Neo-Platonist, Boethius spent much of his life at work on translations and commentaries of Aristotle's works of logic. These included finished translations of the *De Interpretatione*, the *Topics*, the *Prior and Posterior Analytics* and the *Sophistical Fallacies*.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, from historical records, it is clear that Boethius also was familiar with Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, *Physics*, *De Generatione et Corruptione*, *De Anima*, and the *Poetics*.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, many scholars credit the limited knowledge of Aristotle's works of logic that survived throughout the medieval age in the West to the effect of Boethius' translations.<sup>8</sup> Boethius himself, in his *Commentary on Aristotle's De Interpretatione*, states that he "wishes to translate the whole work of Aristotle, so far as it is accessible to me, into the Roman idiom...."<sup>9</sup> Moreover, Boethius, in the same passage, also indicates his wish "to translate all Plato's Dialogues, and likewise explain them, and thus present them in a Latin version."<sup>10</sup> Boethius' ambitious goal for this massive undertaking was to prove "that the Aristotelian and Platonic conceptions in every way harmonize, and do

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<sup>6</sup> Victor Watts, "Introduction," in Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, xvi.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid [passages qtd. from Campenhausen, *Commentary on Aristotle's De Interpretatione*, 285-6).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.



not, as is widely supposed, completely contradict each other.”<sup>11</sup> The key word, of course, in this quote is “harmonize,” as none of the existing evidence indicates that Boethius viewed the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle as precisely parallel. Perhaps the most suitable analogy for Boethius’ project would be that of a major chord in a piece of music. Seeing Aristotle’s views as the first in the chord, and Plato as the fifth, Boethius’ own views harmonizing the two would have added the third, creating the harmonious tri-tone of full chordal harmony. Without the third, of course, many major chords sound flat, even hollow. Whether or not Boethius would have been successful at completing his lofty aspirations given sufficient time, history will never know, as his untimely death cut short his philosophical endeavors. Yet, even given ample time, such a herculean task might well have stymied even a philosophical mind of Boethius’ caliber.

With Boethius’ intentions of harmonizing Plato and Aristotle in mind, it seems clear that a nuanced reading of his *Consolation* will regard the viewpoints of these two philosophers jointly. Therefore, careful consideration of Aristotle’s meticulous presentation of the nature of the soul and its consequences for his view of memory will be vital for our greater project of situating memory within its classical and medieval context. First, I review Aristotle’s general thinking about nature, giving specific attention to his ideas about natural and non-natural beings, matter and form, and the four causes. With this foundational understanding, I consider Aristotle’s examination of the soul in *De Anima*, and from there I construct a working Aristotelian concept of memory.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

## *Nature in Aristotle*

When Aristotle conceives of nature, he distinguishes between two kinds of beings:

Some things exist by nature, others are due to other causes. Natural objects include animals and their parts, plants, and simple bodies like earth, fire, air, and water...the obvious difference between all these things and things which are not natural is that each of the natural ones contains within itself a source of change and of stability, in respect of either movement or increase and decrease or alteration.<sup>12</sup>

Importantly, beings “by nature” for Aristotle possess self-motion—they are able to move themselves. Human beings, animals, plants, and the four elements are “natural” beings, whereas a created thing such as a house is not a “natural” being, as its motion for change does not come from itself, but from causes external to it.

Adding upon the natural and non-natural distinctions in his hierarchy for understanding nature, Aristotle distinguishes between matter and form. A substance can be either matter, or form, or a combination of matter and form. One way to understand Aristotle’s thought is by thinking of matter as potentiality and form as actuality. Matter, then, makes up the material substance of everything in the world. It is, however, potential, dependent on whether its building blocks—the wood “stuff” in a piece of wood or the little pieces of marble making up a marble rock formation—may be used by man. These building blocks may then be turned from their potential state into a specific form, be it the mast of a ship or a marble statue. From this example, we can see that form as actuality describes the actualized potential of matter. The mast of the ship is the actualized potential of wood, just as a marble statue is one form of actualizing the

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<sup>12</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. Robin Waterfield, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 192b8-15. References will be henceforth indicated parenthetically in the text.

potential of marble simpliciter. From these distinctions, we see that Aristotle is a *hylomorphist*, a person who believes that “natural beings are composites of matter (*hylê*) and form (*morphê*, a synonym of *eidos*).”<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, even though Aristotle is concerned with matter / potentiality, form / actuality is more important for Aristotle’s conception of the natural being. Thus, the “key to a natural being for Aristotle is not what it is made of, or what it might become, but *what it is*.”<sup>14</sup>

Ending with this idea of needing to determine “what” natural beings are, we can naturally progress to discussion of Aristotle’s four causes. For Aristotle, a “‘cause’ is an explanation or an answer to the question ‘why?’”<sup>15</sup> Traditionally, Aristotle’s four categories of causes have been titled and explained thus: 1) the material cause answers the question, “what is it made of?” 2) the formal cause answers the question, “what is it?” 3) the efficient cause answers “what moved or produced it?” 4) The final cause answers the question “what is it for?”<sup>16</sup> Both for our purposes and for Aristotle, however, the formal cause becomes the most important, since “in order to fully understand X, one must understand and articulate what X is, and this means grasping its form.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> David Roochnik, *Retrieving the Ancients: An Introduction to Greek Philosophy*, (Oxford: Blackwell: 2004), 175.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 177.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. The efficient cause is the closest to the modern conception of causality—the notion of cause and effect.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 178.

### *The Nature of the Soul and Memory*

Aristotle considers the nature of the soul at greatest length in *De Anima*, making several key distinctions regarding the composition of the soul. He states: “It must then be the case that soul is substance as the *form* of a natural body which potentially has life, and since this substance is actuality, soul will be the actuality of such a body”<sup>18</sup> Here, Aristotle is indicating that the soul is a substance in the sense of “form.” Furthermore, Aristotle states, “The soul, then, is the [formal] cause and principle of the living body” (*De Anima* 415b). The soul is “the form of a natural body potentially having life” and “the soul is the actuality of a natural body potentially having life.”<sup>19</sup>

According to Aristotle’s hierarchical schema, the state of being alive distinguishes things with souls from things without souls. The potentialities of the soul include: nutrition, perception, desire, locomotion, and understanding. Understanding is the faculty of the soul unique to humans, not shared, as the other potentialities are, with plants or animals. Importantly for our discussion, while understanding appears to be a distinctive power of the soul, Aristotle believes it requires a body. In the peculiar faculty of understanding, then, Aristotle finds his distinct category of human reason as highest within his system.

Closely bound with Aristotle’s privileging of understanding, Aristotle’s view of knowledge is an early form of what is later called empiricism. For Aristotle, the primary source of knowledge is perception; though perception is not knowledge itself. In Aristotle’s view, each of the five senses receives perceptible forms without actually

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<sup>18</sup> Aristotle, *De Anima*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred, (Penguin: London, 1986), 412a. References will be henceforth indicated parenthetically in the text.

<sup>19</sup> Roochnik, *Retrieving the Ancients*, 187-188.

receiving the matter itself. To illustrate this process, Aristotle draws upon the metaphor of a wax imprint. The sense object makes an imprint upon the wax, leaving evidence of its existence, without leaving its actual matter. Like Socrates' wax tablet in the *Theaetetus*, the wax in Aristotle's metaphor plays a key role, as its malleability and relative impermanence are two characteristics extremely important to its role in gaining and storing knowledge. Briefly, "Knowledge, in sum, is bred by generalization out of perception."<sup>20</sup> From perception and retention of data for some animals comes memory, and from memory comes experiential knowledge. Understanding, the pinnacle of the faculties of the soul, allows for rational consideration of the empirical data.

For Aristotle, a key distinction seems to be that only some are able to move from perception to retention to memory. Under the Aristotelian schema, then, memory as a capacity or power is shared theoretically with other animals, but for humans, possessing rational understanding, memory also orders right reasoning through right consideration of the current situation with the past and present. One wonders, then, whether or not right remembrance would be even more rare, given that memory itself is not a universal gift. While Aristotle offers no pithy, descriptive metaphor as Plato helpfully provided to demonstrate further this point on memory, one can easily imagine his adaptation of either the aviary cone or the wax tablet to suit his purposes.

A further wrinkle enters into the equation now, however, as Aristotle describes two levels of actuality within the soul. For instance, imagine two individuals:

One, representing the first sense of actuality, has knowledge of arithmetic but is not now using it. The other is actually using that knowledge, say by trying to

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<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Barnes, *A Very Short Introduction to Aristotle*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 94.

figure out what the sum of 1,836 and 5,432 is. While the second person is performing the computation, she has activated her knowledge and thereby raised it to the second level of actuality.<sup>21</sup>

Given this two-tiered actualization scheme, it seems likely that memory itself, like knowledge, is one of the higher functions of the soul that must be actualized in order to be effective. Merely owning knowledge, like possessing the knowledge within Socrates' aviary-cone, is not sufficient to enable remembrance. The knowledge must be able to be accessed by the understanding of the soul and activated for full effect.

### *Summation of Aristotle's Contributions*

Like Plato, Aristotle profoundly unites memory and knowledge, both of which are potential for human beings, given his understanding of the soul's nature. However, unlike Plato, Aristotle connects the body and soul together nearly inextricably. The soul in Plato freely leaves its body behind to behold truly the forms, but for Aristotle, as noted above, even faculties of the soul like understanding require a body. Aristotle's rootedness of the soul in the body points to an important facet about his conception of memory—memories are located in the “thisness” of the tangible world of perceptions. Plato, on the other hand, locates his highest conception of memories as essentially otherworldly in his forms.

Yet, the similarities between these two philosophers, in the case of interpreting Boethius, matter more than their differences. Critical here is an understanding that Boethius' conception of right remembrance<sup>21</sup> encompasses both Aristotelian perception and Platonic recollection and points toward a higher truth—that memory and the human

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 188.

soul are bound together in a harmonious relationship recognized both by the empiricist and the rationalist.

### *Cicero, Memory, and the Soul*

The third thinker for our consideration, Marcus Tullius Cicero, adds a distinctive Roman voice to the classical tradition of memory. Considering that Boethius, like Cicero, was deeply involved in the political life of the Rome of his time, and like Cicero, suffers by standing at the precipice between two different political regimes, a brief glance at Cicero's view of memory will prove even more illuminating. Intriguingly, the concept of memory undergirds many of Cicero's philosophical works, offering the impetus and means to approach diverse problems. This is particularly the case in his *Tusculan Disputation 1*. Cicero, through the character of M, wrestles with the nature of the soul, its existence after death, and the concept of immortality, ending by reasoning that the soul is immortal and persists beyond the fleshly body. For Cicero, memory far surpasses the mere faculty of remembrance, the memory of a specific individual or event, or a memory of historical events written down. Three separate themes of this term arise in Cicero's reflection upon *memoria*: *memoria* as a function of history, *memoria* as it affects the concept of legacy, and *memoria* as proof of a divine element in the soul.

As Cicero begins his case for the immortality of the soul, he sees a vital connection between the concept of memory and its relationship to history, especially as an avenue of gaining examples, or *exempla*, to support his claims. In his search for *exempla* in the *Tusculan Disputation 1*, Cicero initially draws from two different sources:

well-respected Greek philosophers and the even more honorable Roman ancestors, the *maiores*.

Carefully explicating the beliefs of such Greek philosophical giants as Pythagoras and Plato, Cicero reinforces the validity of his claim for the immortality of the soul. Recounting the fact that Pythagoras was one of the first philosophers to put credence in an immortal soul, Cicero explains how this belief passed from Pythagoras to a large body of followers in Magna Graecia. In fact, Cicero relates how Pythagoras' followers were the first to teach Plato about the immortal soul. As Cicero explains, Plato's primary reason for his visit to Italy was to learn this concept from the Pythagoreans. After learning and considering the original conception of the soul by the Pythagoreans, Plato develops the Pythagorean belief by adding evidentiary reasons. Cicero recounts the Platonic doctrine mentioned earlier, in which the memory of the soul becomes the "recollection of an earlier life" because this memory is "an illimitable one of objects beyond number...[thus] learning is simply recollection"<sup>22</sup> Clearly, if the memory of the soul comes from memories of past lives, the soul itself must not be limited by mortality. By introducing the beliefs of Pythagoras and Plato as complementary to his own position, Cicero brings in the philosophical standards of previous eras to add credence to his own philosophy.

However, in keeping with the good Ciceronian custom of continual support for Roman superiority, Cicero collects evidence from historical Roman sources to prove the Roman *maiores*, not just ancient Greek philosophers, believed in the soul's life after

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<sup>22</sup> Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, Douglas, A.E., ed. and trans., (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 2005.) 1.57-58. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the *Tusculan Disputation 1* are from Douglas's translation of the text and will be referenced hereafter parenthetically in the text.



death. Importantly, these historical sources deal overtly with the connection between history and memory. For instance, when tracing the history of the belief in an eternal soul, Cicero uses Ennius as a source, stating:

...in those men of old, whom Ennius calls *casca*, there was implanted the one conviction, that there is sensation in death and a human being is not so completely wiped out at death that he is wiped out utterly (*Tusc.* 1.27).

By referring to Ennius, the famed Roman of several generations prior, Cicero presents an influential witness well-qualified to speak for the beliefs of the past, in order to validate his philosophical stance on the nature of the human soul. As plainly seen in his fondness for remembering and applying historical evidence in his writing, whether this evidence was historical figures or historically based laws and traditions, Cicero saw much importance in the pairing of *historia* and *memoria* together as harmonious companion concepts. In fact, in the *de Oratore*, Cicero states that “*historia*” is the *vita memoriae* (*de Orat* 2.36), that is, history is the life force of memory, “which gives life to memory and renders it deathless.”<sup>23</sup> In this statement, Cicero proposes a type of symbiotic relationship between *memoria* and *historia*, the idea that, as Alain Gowing relates, “History enacts memory, and memory, in turn, enlivens history; or to put this in yet another way, *historia* stands in the same relation to *memoria* as *corpus* (“body”) to *spiritus* or *animus* (“breath”).”<sup>24</sup> Thus, under Cicero’s conception, in the same way that *memoria* breathes life into *historia* making it deathless and eternal, so the *memoria*

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<sup>23</sup> Alain Gowing, *Empire and Memory: The Representation of the Roman Republic in Imperial Culture* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 13.

<sup>24</sup> Gowing, *Empire and Memory*, 12. The Latin word “*spiritus*” may also be translated as “soul, spirit, or wind.” This multiplicity of meaning becomes especially interesting in light of the interplay between the soul and *memoria* as described by Cicero in the *Tusculan Disputation 1*.

connected directly to the soul defines itself and ensures its immortality in some part by remembering the events of the past and the present.

Along the same lines of argumentation, Cicero contends that the possession of *memoria* properly maintained may indicate in and of itself the presence of an immortal soul. For instance, *memoria* inspires the concept of legacy, as without proper care and attention to the propagation of the memory of an individual, eternal fame would be impossible. Thus, the *memoria* cherished by others of a particular individual, dead or alive, affects the past, present, and future legacy of a person. Of course, the remembrance by others becomes especially vital after death, as the assurance of remembrance brings some hope for a kind of immortality. The future ever stands as the unknown, and must be considered, since, as Cicero states:

The procreation of children, the continuation of a name, adoptions of sons, the careful drafting of wills, the very sepulchral inscriptions and epitaphs – what do they all mean if not that we take thought for the future too? (*Tusc.* 1.31).

Furthermore, as Cicero reminds his readers in the following passage, the great Roman writer Ennius requires neither tears nor funerals, but instead claims the rewards of fame, and believes, “Living I move upon the lips of men” (*Tusc.* 1.32). For Ennius, the thought of his words moving upon the lips of living men offers an eternal legacy far eclipsing the above-mentioned tokens of remembrance.

After drawing evidence from historical records and the concept of legacy, Cicero refocuses his discussion on *memoria* to its role as proof of a divine element in the human soul. When differentiating the human soul from the bestial and the earthy, Cicero identifies *memoria* as its first defining quality. In Cicero’s mind, the faculty for *memoria* is not “a property of heart or blood or brain or atoms,” and that “if I could assert anything

else on this obscure topic, I should swear that whether soul is breath or fire, it is divine” (*Tusc.* 1.60). The soul reveals its divine nature by “the power of *memory*, mind, thought, which keeps hold of the past, foresees the future, and can embrace the present” (*Tusc.* 1.65, emphasis added). From observing the mind and soul of man, Cicero concludes:

the mind of man, even though you don’t see it, just as you don’t see God – still, as you recognize God from his works, so from *memory*, discovery and swiftness of movement and all the beauty of virtue you must acknowledge the divine power of the mind (*Tusc.* 1.70, emphasis added).

Here, Cicero names *memoria* as the first of the three characteristics necessitating the divine essence of the soul, the other two being *motus* (eternal movement) and *inventio* (discovery). For Cicero, if the soul is divine, it must persist after death, since by definition the divine is eternal.

### *Augustinian Memory*

In the long and complex journey to uncover the true nature of self by glimpsing faintly the true nature of God, memory holds nearly endless uses for St. Augustine of Hippo. Standing on the precipice between ages, Augustine arguably was both one of the last of the classical thinkers and a forerunner for much of medieval philosophy and theology.

Under Augustine’s conception of the human capacity for memory, the Christian uses memory to plumb the depths of his soul and to remember the old, long-forgotten truths hidden there. Extolling the great power of memory, Augustine points to its significance in holding the past, present, and future within its capacity, in enabling happiness and joy, and in freeing the Christian from forgetfulness of God, the source of all wisdom and knowledge.

Roland Teske offers a concise summation of Augustine's conception of memory, stating,

...memory is not a distinct power or faculty of the soul, but the mind itself, from which memory, understanding, or will are distinguished only in terms of their different activities.<sup>25</sup>

To understand Augustine's idea of memory, it is nearly as important to recognize what Augustine's conception of memory is not—a part of the whole, a “power or faculty” in the soul, but the entire mind itself.<sup>26</sup> For help untangling this seemingly contradictory definition, consider Augustine's own Trinitarian analogy relating how some facets of memory appear to be merely parts, but are in fact unified as a whole. In the *De Trinitate*, Augustine appeals to the timeless enigma of the Trinity as a way to think analytically about some features of memory. Augustine categorizes memory, understanding, and will as the three characteristics of the Trinity shared with mankind. For, as bearers of the *imago dei*, Christians reflect the Trinity, the mystery of the divine community of three-in-one and one-in-three. In this way Augustine affirms memory's relationship to a triune essence:

Since memory, which is called life, and mind, and substance, is so called in respect to itself; but is called memory, relatively to something. And I should say the same also of understanding and of will, since they are called understanding and will relatively to something; but each in respect to itself is life, and mind, and essence. And hence these three are one, in that they are one life, one mind, one essence.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Roland Teske, "Augustine's Philosophy of Memory," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 148.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> St. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, trans. Arthur West Haddan, from *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, Vol 3, ed. by Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature

“Relatively” functions as the vital word in this section—Augustine is determined that we understand that memory, understanding, and will can only be spoken of a whole in union, and as singular forces in relation to the other. Moreover, “like the Persons of the Trinity who are one God, memory, understanding, and will are one mind, and whatever is said of each of them is said of three together in the singular, just as the three Persons are not three gods, but one God.”<sup>28</sup>

Reflecting upon Paul’s words, “now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known,” we recognize that this mystery, this enigma, is always shadowing our vision (1 Corinthians 13:12 KJV). For Augustine, part of “obscure image of the Trinity in the human mind includes the mental word, which is brought forth from memory.”<sup>29</sup> This account of the “mental word” allows for a clearer understanding of the Trinity, as “in the human mind, memory is analogous to the Father, and a mental word is analogous to the Word of the Father,” the Logos of God, Christ.<sup>30</sup> Finally, as love is the means by which our soul can return to God, it is only fitting that the indwelling Spirit represents the virtue of *caritas*.

Thinking upon memory in Augustine’s *Confessions* particularly, Teske relates the suggestion of Jean-Marie Le Blond for a schema of memory. Le Blond “sees the unifying theme of the work as lying in the threefold function: memory of the past (Books

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Publishing Co., 1887.) 10.11.18. References will be henceforth indicated parenthetically in the text.

<sup>28</sup> Teske, "Augustine's Philosophy of Memory," 155.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 156-157.

1-9), intuition of the present (Book 10), and expectation of the future (Book 11-13).”<sup>31</sup>

Augustine certainly does not have a vision of memory as merely a means of maintaining knowledge of the past. In a real and meaningful way, Augustine sees memory breathing life to the present and the future too—considering his own current process of creating memory, remembering as he looks and plans toward the future.

### *Forgetfulness: Privation of Memory*

When dealing with the relationship of forgetfulness to memory, Augustine clearly presents forgetfulness as the privation of memory. Just as evil is the *privatio boni*, the privation of the good, without any substance other than in relation to the good, so forgetfulness can only have substance in light of memory. Thus, Augustine asks, *sed quid est oblivio nisi privatio memoriae?* (but what is forgetfulness unless the privation of memory?). In this fashion, he connects forgetfulness inextricably to memory, stating, “When I remember memory my memory itself is present to itself by itself; but when I remember forgetfulness, then memory and forgetfulness are present together—forgetfulness which I remember, memory by which I remember. But what is forgetfulness except absence of memory?”<sup>32</sup> Thus, memory has substance *by itself*, whereas forgetfulness belongs to the shadowy category of unreality where something exists and yet is known for what it is not.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>32</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. F.J. Sheed and ed. by Michael P. Foley, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006), 10.16.24. References will be henceforth indicated parenthetically in the text.

Another key idea related to forgetting and memory relates to Augustine's use of the parable of the lost coin. Augustine's "reflection of the parable of the lost coin in Luke 15:8 brings out the fact that, in order to find some physical object we have lost, we must retain an image of it by which we can recognize the thing found as the one we have lost."<sup>33</sup> When thinking about a lost object, Augustine insightfully reminds us:

Unless I had remembered it, whatever it was, even if it had been offered to me I should have not found it because I should have not recognized it...we do not say that we have found what was lost unless we recognize it, nor can we recognize it unless we remember it. It was only lost to the eyes; it was preserved in the memory. (*Conf.* 10.18.27).

Augustine's description of memory prompts us to recall that in some fashion, knowledge of what we are trying to remember is absolutely indispensable for memory. According to Augustine's model, unless we possess prior knowledge of that which we are attempting to remember, we will be unable to retrieve the desired memory.

### *Illumination or Recollection?*

Much debate reigns amongst Augustine scholars about his ostensible indebtedness to the Platonic belief of learning as recollection. Returning to the traditional Platonic doctrine, learning is simply recollection—the capacity for memory allows the individual to gain knowledge not merely by learning new and unknown facts, but rather by searching one's memory and remembering the necessary knowledge. This theory of learning bolsters the Socratic method—for if all learning is only recollection, what better way to learn than a teacher asking questions to prompt the memory of the student?

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<sup>33</sup> Roland Teske, "Augustine's Philosophy of Memory," 153.

Determining Augustine's own position on this matter presents quite a challenge, the obscurity seemingly growing with careful study, rather than becoming more apparent. Teske pulls quotes from Augustine's earlier and later works, and argues that Augustine clearly held the Platonic doctrine of recollection early on, but that by the time of his later works, had rejected recollection in favor of the soul's illumination by God. Under the illumination theory, the soul's knowledge comes from God reflecting the light of eternal reason upon it. Augustine clearly moves toward favoring illumination over sheer Platonic recollection in his later works, but real uncertainty lies in whether or not he completely rejects recollection theory.

Robert Miner, in his article *Augustinian Recollection*, argues for a fundamentally different understanding of Augustine's views on recollection. Instead of classifying Augustine either for or against Platonic recollection, Miner argues that, when considering Augustine's corpus of works as a whole, Augustine's famed later "retraction" of Platonic recollection is "more plausibly understood as a complex rhetorical act whereby Augustine distances himself from overtly pagan versions of the theory, while reaffirming a view that may be justly termed 'Augustinian recollection.'"<sup>34</sup> In resisting the urge to describe Augustine's view of memory as either illumination or recollection, Miner argues that the Augustinian view would be better represented by a synthesis of both illumination and recollection.

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<sup>34</sup> Robert C. Miner, "Augustinian Recollection," *Augustinian Studies* 38.2 (2007): 436.



*Memory, Happiness, and Joy*

Within Augustine's masterful reflection upon memory in Book Ten of the *Confessions*, one finds Augustine considering the age-old question of the quest for happiness. Augustine queries: "How then do I seek You, O Lord? For in seeking You, my God, it is happiness that I am seeking..." (*Conf.* 10.20.29) Interestingly, Augustine's initial conversion—to philosophy—was based in Cicero's now lost work on happiness, the *Hortensius*, which taught him all humans seek happiness in life as a teleological end.<sup>35</sup>

Augustine's dilemma in this section is whether "should it [seeking happiness] be by way of remembrance" as something he has known, or something he merely has desired "by a kind of appetite to learn it as something unknown" (*Conf.* 10.20.29). Augustine's concern, simply, is "whether happiness is in the memory" because he believes strongly "we should not love it [happiness] unless we had some knowledge of it" (*Conf.* 10.20.29). By considering the proof that regardless of language, both Greeks and Romans and "men of all language" ever pursue happiness, Augustine reasons happiness must be "known to all, for if they could be asked with one voice whether they wish for happiness, there is no doubt whatever that they would all answer yes. And this could not be unless the thing itself, signified by the word, lay somehow in their memory" (*Conf.* 10.20.29).

Further complicating Augustine's discussion of memory and happiness, Augustine refines his ideal of the Christian quest for happiness in the next section by reflecting upon its relationship to Christian joy. As a Christian, Augustine is eager to

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<sup>35</sup> Roland Teske, "Augustine's Philosophy of Memory," 153.

differentiate between the concept of “happiness” and “joy.” Reflecting upon Augustine’s choice of Latin words may be particularly helpful. The word Augustine uses for happiness, *beatus*, is the adjectival form of the verb meaning “to bless” or “to make happy.” From its very form, this verb indicates the necessary work of an outside agent upon another to produce feelings of blessing and happiness. On the other hand, the word for joy, *gaudium*, is a noun meaning “joy, delight, and gladness.” *Gaudium* is also connected to the verb *gaudere*, which means “to rejoice” or “to be glad.” Here, the nature of the verb for joy indicates it to be an innate response to something—joy is always *in response* to something else. In essence, “joy” is the individual’s chosen action of response—and thus is linguistically active—whereas “happiness” is a goal or end of someone else’s action upon ourselves—and thus is linguistically passive.

In reference to memory and happiness, these distinctions between joy and happiness become even more distinct, especially when one realizes their significance for memory. Like joy, Augustine views memory as an ability granted to humans by God. Again, the Latin is insightful. The Latin word for memory, *memoria*, is closely related to the verb *memorare*. From this connection, it seems that memory is the capacity granted to humans both to remember what is stored in their memory, and to be mindful (in and of themselves) of the significance of this capacity. God has given humans the ability to be joyful and to remember, but in order to do either, humans must also exercise their will and understanding, coming full circle once again to the conception of memory and the Trinity. Augustine states:

All agree that they desire happiness, just as they would agree, if they were asked, that they desire joy: and indeed they think joy and happiness are the same thing. One man may get it one way, another another, and all alike are striving to attain this one thing, namely that they may be joyful. It is something that no one can say

that he has had no experience of, which is why he finds it in his memory and recognizes it when he hears the word *happiness* (*Conf.* 10.21.31, emphasis in original).

Through explaining the human confusion about joy and happiness, Augustine reveals that every man understands the true relationship between the two. It is simply this: happiness is the teleological end of man, and joy is the natural response of the human to the state of happiness. For Augustine, “this is happiness, to be joyful in Thee and for Thee, and because of Thee, this and no other” (*Conf.* 10.21.31).

Another dimension of happiness and joy for Augustine is worthy of our attention, particularly as it pertains to our overall concern of right remembrance. In section XXIII, Augustine makes his definition of happiness even clearer as he states that “joy in truth is happiness: for it is joy in You, God, who are Truth” (*Conf.* 10.23.33). By describing happiness as joy in truth, Augustine not only underscores the reality of true happiness’ end in God, but also points to necessity of truth for happiness. Moreover, inasmuch as Augustine claims that everyone loves and seeks after happiness, he states “they must love truth also: and they could not love it unless there were some knowledge of it in their memory” (*Conf.* 10.23.33). Once again, Augustine privileges the idea that prior knowledge is necessary for memory. Nonetheless, Augustine recognizes that men are not happy as they ought to be, given their access to ultimate happiness. For, even though men have some knowledge of true happiness in their memory, “they are much more concerned over things which are more powerful to make them unhappy than truth is to make them happy, for they remember truth so slightly. There is but a dim light in men” (*Conf.* 10.23.33). Fundamentally, as we have noted above, men struggle to remember what they know, and thus, may fail to remember their situation rightly. Augustine sees

that many hold onto injustice and hate truth “simply because truth is loved in such a way that those who love some other thing want it to be the truth, and precisely because they do not wish to be deceived, are unwilling to be convinced that they are deceived” (*Conf.* 10.23.34). Ultimately, however, Augustine has a high view of the human mind’s ability to grasp truth rather than falsehood, believing that even “for all its worthlessness, the human mind would rather find its joy in truth than falsehood...so that it shall be happy if, with no other thing to distract...in that sole Truth by which all things are true” (*Conf.* 10.23.34).

Clearly, Augustine’s contributions to this overall project are significant. Both as a commentator upon classical sources such as Plato and Aristotle, and as a unique thinker in his own right, Augustine paves the way for Boethius’ reflections upon memory. Armed with Augustine’s categories of memory, mind, and will, and tasked with a better understanding of memory, happiness, and joy, we can leave Augustine charged with a greater understanding of the Truth in which we find happiness.

### *Conclusion*

Beginning with Hesiod’s Muses and Mnemosyne, and continuing with Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Augustine, I have traced the history of memory and its relation to the soul through classical and medieval philosophical thought. As we have seen, the lines of thought established by these thinkers suggest innumerable implications for human knowledge and its relationship to the good life. Notably, the connection of the human soul to the capacity for memory is lasting and recurring in importance. It is hardly surprising that plentiful consequences abound for Boethius’ own project of

remembering rightly even when faced with unjust situations. While many difficulties may lie in the path of right remembrance, as illustrated well by Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Augustine, it is historically seen as important for individuals seeking to live the best life. The knowledge of the good, enabled by memory and ordered by the human soul, allows men to move from the dimness of false knowledge into the brilliance of truth. As we move on to consider more deeply the significance of right remembrance in the *Consolation* in the next chapter, the foundational work begun in this chapter will lay the groundwork for future insight.

## CHAPTER TWO:

*“Quid ipse sis, nosse desisti”:*

### Boethius’ Forgetfulness, Misremembering, and Illness

Given the background now established, this chapter begins by focusing upon the major source at hand, Boethius’ *Consolation*. As careful examination of textual evidence will show, Book I of the *Consolation* remains curiously and overwhelmingly preoccupied with concerns of memory and forgetfulness. While this matter may elude the attention of the first time reader, the attentive returner is struck by the frequency and intensity by which the text names forgetfulness as the chief cause of Boethius’ state of despair and subsequent illness. As Lady Philosophy relates, Boethius’ lack of memory and misremembering has placed him in his ailing state and continues to work ill against the health of his soul.

I begin this chapter by considering pertinent passages from the *Consolation* regarding Boethius’ illness as reflective of his forgetful state, looking especially to the original Latin for clues. As I examine these passages, two recurring, paired motifs of light/darkness and sight/blindness clarify the essential nature of Boethius’ illness. Moreover, I consider how his illness, especially Boethius’ inability to remember rightly, is a moral failing for which he is partially culpable. I end the chapter by considering Lady Philosophy’s warning that this sickness is a grave one that may lead even to death, followed by a brief explanation of her diagnosis and proposed remedy for Boethius.

## *Terms of Memory*

To display the obvious concern of Book I to the concepts of memory and forgetfulness, I will turn to consideration of the memory-related terms. A detailed examination reveals at least twenty-two uses<sup>1</sup> of words related to memory and forgetfulness in Book I alone, not counting the many poetic passages that tacitly revolve around these words. While this count is likely not exhaustive, it is revealing. For, not only is the sheer count of these terms impressive, but also the variety of terms used in this chapter to describe memory and forgetfulness is prodigious. Of the twenty-two memory-related terms in Book I, the root words cited are, in order of frequency: *memini* (7), *desisto* (5), *memoria* (4), *obliviscor* (3), *confundo* (2), and *recognosco* (1). Even so, because considering every single instance of memory-related terminology goes beyond the scope of my project, I will limit myself to surveying in detail only a few of the more pertinent and illuminating terms.

The main Latin noun used by Boethius for memory, *memoria*, occurs three times in Book I. *Memoria* is used first by the disconsolate Boethius in Prosa 3, when he states, “at Canios, at Senecas, at Soranos, quorum nec pervetusta nec incelebris *memoria* est, scire potuisti” (you do know of Romans like Canius, Seneca and Soranus, whose memory is still fresh and celebrated) (*Cons.*I.p.3, emphasis added). Here, *memoria* seems to be

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<sup>1</sup> 1. Sui paulisper *oblitus* est (I.p.2), 2. Nec incelebris *memoria* est (I.p.3), 3. At uolui nec umquam uelle *desistam* (I.p.4)., 4. Stilo etiam *memoriaeque* mandavi (I.p.4)., 5. *Meministi*, ut opinor, (I.p.4)., 6. *Meministi*, inquam, (I.p.4)., 7. Piget *reminisci*. (I.p.4)., 8. Sis patriae *reminiscare*. (I.p.5)., 9 & 10. uelle *desierit* pariter *desinit* etiam mereri (I.p.5)., 11. uel falsitate cunctis nota *memorasti* (I.p.5)., 12. Que *recognoscentis* omnia vulgi (I.p.5)., 13. *Meministine*, quis sit rerum finis. (I.p.6)., 14. Sed *memoriam* maeror hebetavit. (I.p.6)., 15. hominemne te esse *meministi*? (I.p.6)., 16. Quidni, inquam, *meminerim*? (I.p.6)., 17. Quid ipse sis, nosse *desisti*. I.p.6)., 18 & 19. Nam quoniam tui *oblivione confunderis* (I.p.6)., 20. Quibus gubernaculis mundus regatur *oblitus* es. (I.p.6)., 21. Totum natura *destituit*. (I.p.6)., 22. Verum illum *confundit* intuitum. I.p.6).

best understood by one of the more obscure definitions, “what is remembered of a person or a thing.”<sup>2</sup> In Prosa 4, Boethius again uses this term, but in a slightly different context. He states: “Cuius rei seriem atque veritatem ne latere posteros queat, stilo etiam *memoriaeque mandavi*” (though so that the true details of this affair cannot lie concealed from later generations, I have written it down to be remembered).<sup>3</sup> In this case, Boethius’ adoption of this word appears to fulfill another secondary meaning, this time the “tradition preserved in writing, a memorial, record.”<sup>4</sup> The final use of this noun is at the heart of the dialogue’s preoccupation with this concept. In response to Lady Philosophy’s query about Boethius’ understanding of what end moves the universe, Boethius responds, “Audieram....Sed *memoriam* maeror hebetavit” (I heard it once...but pain and grief have weakened my memory).<sup>5</sup> Here, the meaning of *memoria* lines up nicely with the primary definition of the word, “the power or faculty of remembering, memory.”<sup>6</sup>

Within Book I, of equal or perhaps even greater interest are the terms that Boethius employs to describe forgetfulness. Two words portraying forgetfulness—*oblitus* and *desisti*—predominate Boethius’ prose upon his condition. For both terms, the emphasis centers upon how Boethius has essentially lost sight of his true nature through forgetfulness, though in different degrees. *Oblitus* is a perfect participle from the verb

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<sup>2</sup> *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, 1097.

<sup>3</sup> Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. S. J. Tester. (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, 1973), I.p.6. Emphasis added.

<sup>4</sup> *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, 1097.

<sup>5</sup> Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. S. J. Tester, I.p.6. Emphasis added.

<sup>6</sup> *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, 1096.



*obliviscor*, which means, “to lose remembrance of, forget (something).” Even more does it carry this sense, in the case of a perfect participle in a passive sense (which is how Boethius uses it), when *oblitus est* means “forgotten.”<sup>7</sup> In this way, Lady Philosophy states: “Sui paulisper *oblitus est*” (he has for a little while forgotten his real self).<sup>8</sup> This participle reappears in the final *prosa* section, “quibus gubernaculis mundus regatur *oblitus es* (since indeed you have forgotten what sort of governance the world is guided by).<sup>9</sup> Obviously, both of these usages strongly reflect the fact that Boethius has lost cognizance of his real self. This forgetfulness of self, however, does not have the thrust of purposeful moral weakness, but rather simply states the fact of Boethius having lost his self-knowledge.

On the other hand, when Lady Philosophy diagnoses the cause of Boethius’ illness, she uses the verb “*desisti*” in a striking fashion: “Quid ipse sis, nosse *desisti*” (you have forgotten what you are).<sup>10</sup> This verb, “*desisto, desistere, destiti, destitus*,” not typically associated with memory, generally means “to leave off, desist, cease” and rarely “to dissociate oneself.”<sup>11</sup> Lady Philosophy uses this verb later, “Sed sospitatis auctori grates, quod te nondum totum natura *destituit* (But I thank the author of all health that you have not wholly lost your true nature).”<sup>12</sup> Once again, Lady Philosophy makes a

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 1216.

<sup>8</sup> Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. S. J. Tester, I.p.2. Emphasis added.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, I.p.6. Emphasis added.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

<sup>11</sup> *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, 526.

<sup>12</sup> Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. S. J. Tester, I.p.6. Emphasis added.

tight connection between Boethius' nature and this verb of losing. In both of these cases, however, a moral element is added to the discussion simply by the meaning of the verb *desisto* in comparison with *obliviscor*. *Desisto*, insofar as it speaks to actions being ceased or desisted, introduces linguistically the idea that Boethius' forgetfulness is in some measure a willed choice.

Apart from breeding a despairing soul-sickness, it is clear from cues in the text that Boethius' "desisting" or ceasing to remember rightly puts the burden of moral failing upon his decision-making. From the viewpoint of Lady Philosophy, Boethius should remember aspects of reality that he has neglected. She reflects:

The moment I saw your sad and tear-stained looks, they told me that you had been reduced to the misery of banishment; but unless you had told me, I would have still not have known how far you had been banished. However, it is not simply a case of your having been banished far from your home; you have wandered away yourself, or if you prefer to be thought of as having been banished, it is you yourself that have been the instrument of it. No one else could ever have done it (*Cons.* I.p.6).

The language of self-exile and banishment is poignant here, as it illustrates that Lady Philosophy ascribes some agency to Boethius for the fault of his illness. Returning to the two terms used by Boethius for forgetfulness mentioned, *oblitus* and *desisto*, both may be adopted profitably to explicate further the case of his exile. Just as we have made a distinction between two types of forgetfulness, in Book I, Lady Philosophy and Boethius mention two different types of exile. First, objectively Boethius has been exiled from Rome physically—this indeed, is the exile about which he complains bitterly to Lady Philosophy. Like the verb, *oblitus*, this is an exile not caused specifically by Boethius' moral failings, but results from the hard facts of being on the losing side of political maneuverings. However, the other type of exile mentioned in Book I, is the "self-exile"

which can only be affected by Boethius himself, according to Lady Philosophy. In this fashion, this self-exile may be connected with the verb *desisto*, a connection which becomes evidently apparent when one considers the usage of this word in this most famed passage about exile.

An ignoras illam tuae civitatis antiquissimam legem, quam sanctum est ei ius exulare non esse quisquis in ea sedem fundare maluerit? Nam qui vallo eius ac munimine continetur, nullus metus est ne exul esse mereatur. At quisquis eam inhabitare uelle *desierit* pariter *desinit* etiam mereri.

Surely you know the ancient and fundamental law of your city, by which it is ordained that it is not right to exile one who has chosen to dwell there? No one who is settled within her walls and fortifications need ever fear the punishment of banishment: but whoever ceases to desire to live there has thereby ceased to deserve to do so.<sup>13</sup>

It seems hardly likely that Boethius' use of forms of *desisto* twice in this, the decisive paragraph describing Boethius' self-exile is coincidental. Rather, it indicates, through the very adoption of the word, action upon the part of Boethius placing him in his current state. This notion of active moral failing, alongside our earlier discussion of this word's relationship to forgetfulness, forms an integral part of the tension in this section of the *Consolation*.

Moreover, this view of self-exile is well contrasted when we view Boethius' own reckoning of his situation in Book I. When Boethius explains his present situation to Lady Philosophy, he opines disconsolately:

You *remember*, I am sure, since you were always present to give me your guidance when I was preparing a speech or some course of action – you *remember* how at Verona a charge of treason was made against Albinus and how in his eagerness to see the total destruction of the Senate the king tried to extend the charge to them all in spite of their universal innocence; and you *remember* how I defended them with complete indifference to any danger, and you know

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., I.p.5. Emphasis added.

that I am telling the truth and have never boasted of any merit of mine. (Cons. I.p.4, emphasis added).

Here Boethius, deploring his treatment at the hands of his government, emphatically repeats twice *meministi*, the second person singular perfect Latin verb from *memini*, meaning to “to remember” or “to recall.” Notice that in his very complaint against his situation Boethius repeatedly uses words associated with memory. Just a few lines down, he says,

I have no mind to *recall* all the rumours that are circulating and the discord of their multifarious opinions. I will just say that the final burden which adversity heaps on her victims, is that when some accusation is made against them, they are believed to have deserved all that they suffer. (Cons. I.p.4).

This time, Boethius uses the present infinitive *reminisci*, which means to “call to mind” or “recollect,” but the overwhelming sense of these passages is striking. Boethius, as he complains of his situation, makes significant use of memory-laden terms, particularly after Lady Philosophy has diagnosed him previously with soul-amnesia.

All of the textual evidence points to an interesting conclusion: a significant cause of Boethius’ soul-sickness is a forgetfulness that has come from his purposely “choosing” to forget things that must be remembered. Under this willed choice, Boethius is responsible for his decision to forget, and thus is taken to task by Lady Philosophy for his lack of self-memory. In effect, Boethius becomes morally culpable for his soul-sickness. Yet, Lady Philosophy does not intend to leave him on his own to sort out the situation, as Boethius fears earlier in this book, but rather becomes his comfort, consolation, and surest physician.

### *Boethius’ Soul-Sickness*

Recall that the *Consolation* opens with Boethius in deep despair, surrounded by the Muses. We may say more clearly now precisely what is ailing this Roman philosopher. According to Lady Philosophy, Boethius is suffering from a sickness of the soul, brought about by a particular kind of forgetfulness and faulty memory.

She came closer and sat down on the edge of my bed. I felt her eyes resting on my face, downcast and lined with grief. Then sadly she began to recite the following lines about my confusion of mind:

‘So sinks the mind into deep despair  
And sight grows dim; when storms of life  
Inflate the weight of earthly care,  
The mind forgets its inward light  
And turns in trust to the dark without’

(*Cons.* I. p.2, m.2)

This quote begins the thought of Lady Philosophy about Boethius’ forgetfulness of mind, and introduces interesting imagery regarding light and darkness, a recurring motif within this idea of forgetfulness. Because Boethius’ mind has sunk “into deep despair,” his “sight grows dim,” “the mind forgets its inward light / And turns in trust to the dark without.” As a corrective to this soul-sickness, then, Lady Philosophy focuses from the beginning upon restoring Boethius’s sight, implying that correcting his mental sight will cure his inability to see his world aright in all areas of his life, physically and mentally.

Considering the importance of light to the eye for proper vision, these motifs appear to have a significant connection to each other. As Lady Philosophy continues to uncover the causes for Boethius’ illness, both forgetfulness and the powerful imagery already mentioned color her discourse.

When she saw that it was not that I would not speak, but that, dumbstruck, I could not, she gently laid her hand upon my breast and said, “It is nothing serious, only a touch of *amnesia* that he is suffering, the common disease of deluded minds. He has *forgotten* for a while who he is, but he will soon *remember* once he has

recognized me. To make it easier for him I will wipe a little of the blinding cloud from his eyes (*Cons.* I.p.3, emphasis added).

Lady Philosophy identifies here “a touch of amnesia” as the “the common disease of deluded minds.” The fault is that “he has forgotten a while who he is.” Boethius’ confusion of self-identity in relation to his teacher proves the delusion of his mind. Again, at the end of this quote, we have the imagery of the “blinding cloud” preventing clear vision. The next section, Meter 3 of Book I, is essentially a poetic representation of removing the darkness from Boethius’ vision, making way for his greater self-understanding of his situation in Prosa 4.

*The night was put to flight, the darkness fled,  
And to my eyes their former strength returned:  
Like when the wild west wind accumulates  
Black clouds and stormy darkness fills the sky:  
The sun lies hid before the hour the stars  
Should shine, and night envelops all the earth:  
But should the North wind forth from his Thracian cave  
Lash at the darkness and loose the prisoner day,  
Out shines the sun with sudden light suffused  
And dazzles with its rays the blinking eye  
(Cons. I.m.3, emphasis added).*

As is easily seen from reading this meter section, the oppositions between light / darkness and sight / blindness are made even more apparent. Now Boethius’ vision is cleared enough that he is able to recognize his physician and old teacher:

*In the same way the cloud of grief dissolved and I drank in the light. With my thoughts recollected I turned to examine the face of my physician. I turned my eyes and fixed my gaze upon her, and I saw that it was my nurse in whose house I had been cared for since my youth – Philosophy” (Cons. I.p.3).*

With the “cloud of grief dissolved,” Boethius begins to fill his eyes with the light of understanding and recollection. It is important, however, to see that Boethius has chiefly received his physical sight back, and that the process of retrieving his mental and spiritual

sight will take much longer and be much more difficult. Indeed, it will be the subject of the conversations between Lady Philosophy and Boethius for the rest of the dialogue.

Another significant connection related to Boethius' use of the motif of sight can be related to our familiar friend, Plato. In the *Republic*, Socrates states:

Sight may be present in the eyes, and the one who has it may try to use it, and color may be present in things, but unless a third kind of thing is present, which is naturally adapted for this very purpose, you know that sight will see nothing, and the colors will remain unseen.<sup>14</sup>

Socrates' point, as becomes clear, is that this "third kind of thing," this *tertium quid*, must necessarily spring from an outside source. In the case of sight, light enables the eyes to see, but it is not sight itself. Furthermore, when that light is compromised, our vision itself is impaired. As Socrates explains:

When we turn our eyes to things whose colors are no longer in the light of day but in the gloom of night, the eyes are dimmed and seem nearly blind, as if clear vision were no longer in them (*Rep.* 508c).

Returning to the above quotes from Boethius, it is easy to imagine how he might have borrowed much from Plato's sight imagery. In Plato, we see first "the eyes are dimmed and seem nearly blind," words that fit nearly perfectly with Boethius' statements.

The connection between Plato's sight imagery and the *Consolation* appears even more profound when Plato connects the ability of the soul to understand truth and goodness "in the same way" as he has just explained sight. Consider the following statement from Plato:

Well, understand the soul in the same way: When it focuses on something illuminated by truth and what is, it understands, knows, and apparently possesses understanding, but when it focuses on what is mixed with obscurity, on what

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<sup>14</sup> Plato, *Republic*, trans. G.M.A. Grube, (Indianapolis, ID: Hackett, 1992), 507d. References will be henceforth indicated parenthetically in the text.

comes to be and passes away, it opines and is dimmed, changes its opinions this way and that, and seems bereft of understanding (*Rep.* 508d).

Socrates goes even further, however, connecting the faculty of giving “truth to the things known and the power to know to the knower” to the “form of the good” (*Rep.* 508e).

While Socrates considers this faculty a cause of knowledge and truth, it is an object of knowledge (*Rep.* 508e). As Socrates states:

In the visible realm, light and sight are rightly considered sunlike, but it is wrong to think that they are the sun, so here it is right to think of knowledge and truth as godlike but wrong to think that either of them is the good—for the good is yet more prized (*Rep.* 509a).

Moreover, his earlier use of the word “illumination,” particularly as relates to happiness and the good, cannot help but remind the reader of Augustine’s modifications to the Platonic system. As a Christian, Augustine placed significant weight upon the necessity of illumination in order for the true good, God, to be known.<sup>15</sup>

In short, the connection between sight imagery in the *Republic* and the imagery that pervades Book I of Boethius’ *Consolation* is decidedly not haphazard. While Boethius’ adoption of Platonic ideals is not surprising, given his fame as a Neo-Platonic thinker, it is indeed remarkable that such tight comparisons in terms of poetic imagery can be made between these two texts. On Boethius’ part, this almost certain awareness of his debt indicates a familiarity with Plato’s work at a very great level.

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<sup>15</sup> For examples of Augustine’s illumination theory, consider the following excerpts from Augustine’s *Confessions*. “I will confess therefore what I know of myself and what I do not know; for what I know of myself I know through the shining of Your light; and what I do not know of myself, I continue not to know until my darkness shall be made as noonday in Your countenance” (*Conf.* 10.5.7) and “Now joy in truth is happiness: for it is joy in You, God, who are Truth, my Light, the Salvation of my countenance and my God... There is but a dim light in men; let them walk, let them walk, lest darkness overtake them (*Conf.* 10.23.33).



### *A Deadly Illness?*

While Lady Philosophy offers great comfort to Boethius near the culmination of Book I by outlining the cause of his disease, she also lays out the seriousness of his illness:

Now I know the other cause, or rather the major cause of your illness: you have forgotten your true nature. And so I have found out in full the reason for your sickness and the way to approach the task of restoring you to health. It is because you are confused by loss of memory that you wept and claimed you had been banished and robbed of all your possessions. And it is because you don't know the end and purpose of things that you think the wicked and the criminal have power and happiness. And because you have forgotten the means by which the world is governed you believe these ups and downs of fortune happen haphazardly. These are grave causes and they lead not only to illness but even death (*Cons.* I.p.7).

Lady Philosophy recognizes the cure necessary to restore full memory of self and the right working of the world to this confused Roman philosopher. Yet, upon reciting these causes, she states ominously that Boethius is in danger of death merely from the cause of his faulty memory: no exterior cause is needed to end his life. Returning back to our discussion of Aristotle's four causes, remember that a "cause" is an explanation or an answer to the question 'why?'"<sup>16</sup> As a brief review, Aristotle's four categories of causes are titled and explained thus: 1) the material cause answers the question, "what is it made of?" 2) the formal cause answers the question, "what is it?" 3) the efficient cause answers "what moved or produced it?" 4) The final cause answers the question "what is it for?"<sup>17</sup> In the dialogue leading up to this decisive paragraph, it is clear that Boethius retains knowledge of the material cause of his being, that is, he still understands and affirms that

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<sup>16</sup> David Roochnik, *Retrieving the Ancients: An Introduction to Greek Philosophy*, (Oxford: Blackwell: 2004), 177.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

he is a rational and mortal animal, with all of the materiality implied by mortality and animality. Additionally, Boethius has no apparent boundary to understanding his efficient cause, as when asked whether he knows the “source from which all things come,” he names God (Cons. I.p.6). The pressing issue of Book I, displayed well in this paragraph, is that Boethius has forgotten his formal cause—as Lady Philosophy says, “you have forgotten who are you are.”<sup>18</sup> Insofar as Boethius has forgotten his formal cause, knowledge of his final cause remains in flux in Book I. Repeatedly, we see Boethius with knowledge of his origin (and thus his efficient cause), but lacking understanding of his end, or final cause. This is an issue that will continue to press this philosopher, and leads into the questions that preoccupy the later books, including the nature of Fortune, happiness, and providence.

What type of death does Lady Philosophy have in mind, and what is the significance of returning to this “causal” language? It seems clear that far worse than physical death is in view. After all, at the time when the *Consolation* was penned, Boethius knew, barring a miraculous event, his imprisonment would shortly lead to death. Perhaps, alternatively, we should understand the death of which Lady Philosophy speaks to as connected to an Aristotelian conception of human nature. In the loss of rationality and strong sense of his ultimate end in relation to the cosmos resulting from his “forgetting” his true nature, has Boethius slipped into a state of sub-humanity? If, as seems proper, we ascribe some moral culpability to Boethius’ forgetfulness, his lack of memory not only leads to distress and sadness; it leads to Boethius dangerously close the

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<sup>18</sup> Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. S. J. Tester, I.p.6. This translation, taken from the Loeb edition, makes this linguistically clearer than the Penguin translation used above for the same passage.

loss of essence of personhood, as defined by his rational understanding of his end and purpose in life. In this state, Boethius himself has diminished himself.

This discussion becomes particularly interesting in light of a passage from Book II, which discusses the nature of man. Lady Philosophy chides Boethius:

It seems as if you feel a lack of any blessing of your own inside you, which is driving you to seek your blessings in things separate and external. And so when a being endowed with a godlike quality in virtue of his rational nature thinks that his only splendour lies in the possession of inanimate goods, it is the overthrow of the natural order. Other creatures are content with what is their own, but you, whose mind is made in the image of God, seek to adorn your superior nature with inferior objects, oblivious of the great wrong you do your Creator (Cons. II.p.5).

By rejecting God's will for humans to "rule all earthly creatures," one perpetuates the ultimate problem of mankind—the fall of humans from their highest seat in the universe by forgetting their nature made in the image of God (Cons. II.p.5). Lady Philosophy further diagnoses the plight of humankind, saying:

Indeed, the condition of human nature is just this; man towers above the rest of creation so long as he recognizes his own nature, and when he forgets it, he sinks lower than the beast. For other living things to be ignorant of themselves, is natural; but for man it is a defect (Cons. II.p.5).

When Lady Philosophy returns to her language of Boethius' ignorance of his true nature, this section is strongly reminiscent of her commentary upon Boethius' illness in Book I. Moreover, in her statement that couches man's superiority over the brute beasts chiefly upon a rationality ordered to God, once again the element of responsibility for knowledge of the self returns.

While definitively identifying the type of death Boethius faces at the end of Book I may be well beyond the clear evidence of the text, it seems likely that the loss of rationality highlighted in Book II offers a plausible answer. In retreating from the lofty seat reserved for rational man by ignorance of his own nature, Boethius would place

himself in this schema below the beasts. This type of existence, although one might still live and breathe, certainly does not fit the kind of life man should reach, and thus represents a form of death.

### *Lady Philosophy's Diagnosis and Proposed Remedy*

According to Lady Philosophy, Boethius must find a balance between remembering rightly the good, and therapeutic forgetting, which is to say, releasing the evil from overwhelming concern. In the first Prosa of Book II, Lady Philosophy sums up her diagnosis of the previous book, clarifying the effect of Fortune upon his state:

If I have fully diagnosed the cause and nature of your condition, you are wasting away in pining and longing for your former good fortune. It is the loss of this which, as your imagination works upon you, has so corrupted your mind. I know the many disguises of that monster, Fortune, and the extent to which she seduces with friendship the very people she is striving to cheat, until she overwhelms them with unbearable grief at the suddenness of her desertion. If you can recall to mind her character, her methods, and the kind of favour she proffers, you will see that in her you did not have and did not lose anything of value. But I am sure it will require no hard work on my part to bring this all back to your memory. (*Cons. II. p.1*).

In this way, Lady Philosophy redirects Boethius' mind to see the fickleness and falseness of the gifts that Fortuna gives. She urges him to see the turning away of Fortuna from him as a gift, rather than a punishment. For, free from the clouding of the world from Fortuna's actions, Boethius is free to see clearly, without the blinders of worldly success or false happiness. To this end, Philosophy ends the prose sections of Book II by reminding Boethius that in misfortune, he has found "the most precious of all riches—friends who are true friends" (*Cons.II.p.8*). Like the biblical character of Job, Boethius becomes aware whom his true friends are when he is suddenly stripped of the goods of life that attract false friends.

On the face of things, it seems here again that Boethius is influenced less by biblical exemplum and more by his classical forebears, perhaps most apparently Cicero's

*De Amicitia*:

Est enim amicitia nihil aliud nisi omnium divinarum humanarumque rerum cum benevolentia et caritate consensio, qua quidem haud scio an excepta sapientia nihil melius homini sit a dis immortalibus datum. Divitias alii praeponunt, bonam alii valetudinem, alii potentiam, alii honorem, multi etiam voluptates. Beluarum hoc quidem extremum, illa autem superiora caduca et incerta, posita non tam in consiliis nostris quam in fortunae temeritate.

For friendship is nothing less than an accord in all things, human and divine, conjoined with mutual goodwill and affection, and I am inclined to think that, with the exception of wisdom, no better thing has been given to man by the immortal gods. Some prefer riches, some good health, some power, some public office, and many even prefer sensual pleasures. The last is the highest aim of brutes; the others are fleeting and unstable things and dependent less upon human foresight than upon the fickleness of fortune.<sup>19</sup>

Cicero, in praising friendship, lifts it to a harmonious union—nearly divine—only capped in excellence by wisdom. Intriguingly, Boethius picks up some of the language of Cicero in Prosa 2 of Book III, with some interesting variants:

Atqui haec sunt quae adipisci homines volunt eaque de causa divitias, dignitates, regna, gloriam voluptatesque desiderant quod per haec sibi sufficientiam, reverentiam, potentiam, celebritatem, laetitiam credunt esse venturam.

These surely are the things men want to gain, and for that reason they desire riches, high office, the rule of men, glory and pleasure, because they believe that through them they will achieve sufficiency, respect, power, celebrity and joy. (*Cons.* III.p.2).

Lady Philosophy here charts out the two types of happiness possible, one, *mendax felicitas*, false happiness, and two, *vera felicitas*, true happiness. The difference between these two types is one not merely of morality. Rather, it is a distinction between means and ends. The false kinds of happiness are only means—riches (*divitias*), worthy offices,

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<sup>19</sup> Cicero, *On Old Age, On Friendship, On Divination*, trans. W. A. Falconer. (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, 1923), 6.20, emphasis added.

(*dignitates*), kingdoms (*regna*), glory (*gloria*), and sensual pleasures (*voluptates*). By contrast, the true kinds of happiness are the ends to which the *mendax felicitas* turn; namely, self-sufficiency (*sibi sufficientia*) as the end to which riches seek, respect (*reverentia*) the real end of seeking worthy offices, power (*potentia*) the end of seeking kingdoms, celebrity (*celebritatem*), the end of seeking glory, and joy (*laetitia*), the end of seeking sensual pleasures. In order to begin to understand the peculiarities of Fortune and to reorder his conception of happiness, Boethius must learn to distinguish the means of happiness from the ends of happiness.

Throughout the *Consolation*, Boethius makes it clear that one of the severest of Fortuna's ills is that she often causes you to confuse false happiness for true happiness. At once recalling us back to the Aristotelian distinctions drawn in Book I, as well as preparing us for the future line of argumentation Lady Philosophy will take up in Book Three regarding the nature of happiness, Boethius makes clear the limitations of Fortune in leading to happiness. In essence, Boethius calls us to remember that while Fortune can take away temporal handmaidens, or temporal goods, which at their highest are only means toward happiness, she cannot take away the metaphysical ends to which these temporal goods seek. Thus, Lady Philosophy ends this section by indicating the essential limits of Fortune. She has no power over non-temporal goods, and as such, her fickle favors should not be prized above the lasting, non-temporal goods represented by Philosophy.

### *Conclusion*

With the diagnosis of Boethius' ailment in hand, this chapter—largely preoccupied with the identification of the place of memory, forgetfulness, and its relation to the soul—comes to a natural conclusion. As we have seen through careful textual study, the overwhelming concern of Lady Philosophy regarding forgetfulness and memory pervades Book I and II of the *Consolation*. By relating the soul-sickness Boethius suffers from at the beginning of the *Consolation* tightly to his forgetfulness of self and of the tenets of his philosophical tradition, the implicit insistence of Boethius (qua author) that right remembrance remains the only cure for his sickness comes brilliantly to light. Additionally, attending to the deadly type of sickness and the role of Lady Fortuna clarifies the devastating nature of Boethius' situation. Of course, the argument is incomplete without considering the remedy that Lady Philosophy suggests, namely the actual process of remembering rightly. To that topic, in the final chapter, we must turn.

## CHAPTER THREE:

*“Quod quisque discit immemor recordatur”:*

### Lady Philosophy’s Therapy and Final Prognosis

Given what I have described of Boethius’ diagnosis of forgetfulness, I now examine Lady Philosophy’s method of therapy and final prognosis. In sum, Philosophy’s remedy moves Boethius from his grief-wracked paralysis in the beginning to hope-sustained constancy of mind by the end. Her therapeutic interventions—including pointed Socratic questioning in prose and soothing hymns in meter—guide Boethius toward healing and recovery. The final result leads Boethius toward a mental constancy not dependent on Fortune’s blessing and temporal circumstance. Rather, in recovering firm knowledge that there is an all-powerful, omniscient Creator who made and controls all things by His sovereign Providence, the upheavals of Fortune no longer control Boethius’ mind.

I propose to attend first to several key passages in the *Consolation* proper. As the chapter unfolds, I examine Boethius’ recovery through the lens of philosophical concepts that loom large in the *Consolation*: love, peace, and happiness. By the conclusion of the chapter, I aim both to explicate the interdependency of these concepts, as well as to account for how they ought to be brought to bear in situations of suffering. I end by considering how memory is a unique faculty of the soul and mind that helps us to transcend circumstance and achieve constancy of spirit.



### *Lady Philosophy's Therapy*

The therapy proposed by Lady Philosophy for Boethius's malady—a balance of right remembrance and therapeutic forgetting—becomes apparent in Books II and III. Intriguingly, one of her key methods involves philosophical dialogue, as is evident both from the pattern she sets up in Book I, and particularly in her vigorous dialogue against Fortune in Book II.

Responding to Boethius' persistent laments about his sufferings at the hands of Fortune, Lady Philosophy gently reprimands him for his misconceptions about the true role of riches and worldly power in determining fortunate circumstances. After diagnosing Boethius with faulty memory leading to soul-sickness, Lady Philosophy meticulously proceeds through a book-long discourse, all intended to lead Boethius to a proper understanding of the ultimate significance of Fortune and her handmaidens. This argumentation reveals the complex, subtle, and unified line of reasoning behind Philosophy's case; namely that, following after true happiness leads to a deeper understanding of Love's marvelous harmony in the world, pictured in human relationships. Philosophy is determined that Boethius should redefine his paradigm of the force that controls the world. For, as Philosophy is keen to explain, fickle Fortune does not control the workings of men, but it is Love that rules and binds all men together, working always and ever toward a good end.

After talking for some time to Boethius about the nature and personality of Fortune, Lady Philosophy begins to pinpoint the consequences of mistaking wealth for happiness. Faced with humanity's nearly universal belief that wealth brings happiness, she posits two explanations of why humanity mistakenly endows wealth with such

significance: first, the allure of accumulation, and second, the belief in wealth's power to endow the individual with intrinsic value.

Consider the first cause for the valorization of wealth, the allure of accumulation. The urge to obtain wealth appears omnipresent, and the goal behind the collection often seems to be bound together with the human fascination to possess increasingly more. However, if accruing wealth alone leads to the ultimate good of happiness, why then, as Philosophy mentions, are miserly individuals hated fiercely, while generous individuals gain popularity? If "it is by spending rather than hoarding that men win the better reputation," then clearly a paradoxical position emerges (*Cons.* II.p.5).<sup>1</sup> For, although men may see the accumulation of wealth as the supposed path to the ultimate good, in actuality, as Philosophy reminds Boethius, when "money is transferred to others in the exercise of liberality and ceases to be possessed" then "it becomes valuable" to its former owner (*Cons.* II.p.5). In this way, the release and transfer of wealth by generosity, the opposite of miserly accumulation, becomes a practical good. As Philosophy reminds us, this phenomenon shows just "how poor and barren riches really are," since it is "impossible for many to share them undiminished or for one man to possess them without reducing all the others to poverty" (*Cons.* II.p.5). Thus, in this way, the acquisition of wealth for the mere sake of accumulation is a self-defeating proposition, and cannot elevate mankind to an ultimate end of happiness.

The other contention, that riches possess some intrinsic worth, is subsequently addressed by Philosophy, who offers for consideration several items possibly endowed

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<sup>1</sup> Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, rev. ed., trans. Victor Watts (Penguin: London, 1999), II.p.5. References to this edition will be henceforth indicated parenthetically in the text.

with inherent worth: precious stones, the beauty of the countryside, and resplendent clothing. When dismissing the possibility that happiness proceeds from the intrinsic worth of objects, Lady Philosophy argues that both sustaining personal happiness with an outside object's fundamental worth and subordinating human worth and dignity below the worth of the object produces an untenable circumstance.

By Philosophy's first proposition, while one may appreciate the beauty intrinsically present in jewels or creation, the fact that one is merely the appreciator, not the creator, belies any attempt to settle one's ultimate happiness in exterior excellence. As Lady Philosophy states, this time about the wonders of nature, "not one of these has anything to do with you...you daren't take credit for the splendour of any of them" (*Cons.* II.p.5). If one attempts to find ultimate joy in the beauty of nature, one becomes "enraptured with empty joys, embracing blessings that are alien to you as if they were your own" (*Cons.* II.p.5). To underscore this line of argumentation, Philosophy reminds Boethius that "Fortune can never make yours what Nature has made alien to you" (*Cons.* II.p.5).

The other difficulty proffered by Lady Philosophy concerns the unnatural subordination of humans to lower forms of creation. Finding ultimate happiness in objects such as precious jewels that "may draw some minimal beauty from their own ornamental nature" is a flawed impulse because "they are of an inferior rank to you as a more excellent creature" (*Cons.* II.p.5). By raising inanimate jewels above the worth of human beings, "you, whose mind is made in the image of God, seek to adorn your superior nature with inferior objects, oblivious of the great wrong you do your Creator" (*Cons.* II.p.5). By rejecting the divine purpose for humans to "rule all earthly creatures,"

one perpetuates the ultimate problem of mankind—the fall of humans from their highest seat in the universe by forgetting their nature made in the image of the Creator (*Cons.* II.p.5).

Adding the abuses of high public office and the exercise of power to her growing censure of Fortune's handmaidens, Lady Philosophy begins Prosa 6 of Book II by pursuing three lines of argumentation. She describes first the fallacy marked by equating inherent virtue with the possession of a powerful political office, then the illusion grounded in the actual inability of one man truly to exercise unassailable power over another man, and finally, the disjunction created by misunderstanding the terminology commonly used to describe worldly power.

Under Philosophy's belief, the claim that virtue must be a result of holding a public office is indefensible. As Philosophy repeatedly suggests, "for the most part it is evil men who hold the offices," and therefore these offices cannot be "intrinsically good, since they admit of being associated with evil men" (*Cons.* II.p.6). However, Philosophy does not rely entirely upon this negative argument. In fact, Philosophy claims that when virtuous men gain public office, they prove even more concretely that honor is not a result of the office, since "honor is not accorded to virtue because of the office held, but to the office because of the virtue of the holder" (*Cons.* II.p.6). Philosophy's reminder about the common failings of public officials tarnishes the ubiquitous belief that power innately brings the holder virtue and happiness.

Continuing her discussion of worldly power, Lady Philosophy obliges Boethius to recognize that a great deal of the frailty of mortal power is rooted in a false sense of authority. She claims that "the only way one man can exercise power over another is

over his body, and what is inferior to it, his possessions. You cannot impose anything on a free mind...firmly founded on reason” (*Cons.* II.p.6). As exemplified by the illustration about the tyrant Nearchus and the philosopher Zeno, this principle demonstrates itself most often in the ability of a man to withstand and obstruct the forceful attempts of a powerful figure endeavoring to impose his authority.

Tying together her arguments against worldly power with her arguments against riches, the zenith of Philosophy’s criticism of these companions of Fortune aims at redefining the language used to describe these supposed “gifts” of Fortune. In the other real-life examples Philosophy offers—including musicians, doctors, and orators—the innate definition demands that the profession “perform the office proper to it” (*Cons.* II.p.6). In Philosophy’s view, mankind’s false sense of the importance of riches and power comes from the common usage “of the wrong words to refer to things which are by nature otherwise, and are easily proved so by their very operation” (*Cons.* II.p.6). Thus, “riches are unable to quench insatiable greed; power does not make a man master of himself if he is imprisoned by the indissoluble chains of wicked lusts; and when high office is bestowed upon unworthy men, so far from making them worthy, it only betrays them and reveals their unworthiness” (*Cons.* II.p.6). In the case of riches, power, and public office, the definition does not define their operation. These “gifts” of Fortune, far from fulfilling their alleged purpose of bestowing perpetual good fortune and intrinsic worth upon the owner, forsake and fail those seekers, offering nothing but empty promises and squelched hopes.

Connecting her discussion of riches and power to the main subject at hand, the character of Fortune, Lady Philosophy states:

Lastly we may reach the same conclusion about Fortune as a whole. She has nothing worth pursuing, and no trace of intrinsic good; she never associates with good men and does not turn into good men those with whom she does associate (*Cons.* II.p.6).

Philosophy takes her argumentation against riches and power, and neatly brings it to bear upon her harangue against trusting in and wishing for good Fortune alone.

At this point, Fortune's status as a futile friend seems fixed. However, Philosophy is not yet finished redefining and expanding these paradigms. In her definitive judgment of the worth of Fortune and her companions at the end of Book II, Philosophy offers the answer to the question of Fortune's worth in the form of a stunning paradox. In a surprise turn in her argument, Philosophy advocates Fortune's usefulness. Of course, there is a twist. So-called bad fortune benefits man more than good fortune. Simply put, "good fortune deceives, but bad fortune enlightens" (*Cons.* II.p.8). Using the imagery of slavery and freedom, Philosophy affirms "with her display of specious riches good fortune enslaves the minds of those who enjoy her, while bad fortune gives men release through the recognition of how fragile a thing happiness is" (*Cons.* II.p.8). Philosophy reminds Boethius how even more disastrously "by her flattery good fortune lures men away from the path of true good" (*Cons.* II.p.8). In contrast, adverse fortune, though not in a pleasant manner, "frequently draws men back to their true good" (*Cons.* II.p.8).

This image of "drawing men back" to their true good is particularly important, as the notion of returning, or recalling, is pertinent to my primary theme, memory, and its opposite, forgetfulness. Memory, or recalling, is the chief means by which men, in Lady Philosophy's schema, are able to return to their own true good. It is to man's "true good" that Philosophy joins "true happiness" as Book III begins. Philosophy says that "true

happiness” is the ultimate destination of their journey, telling Boethius, “Your mind dreams of it...but your sight is clouded by shadows of happiness and cannot see reality” (*Cons.* III.p.1). By freeing his mind of the shadows that obscure understanding, she helps him remember what he knows, recalls him to his wits, and puts his shifting fortunes in proper perspective.

Lady Philosophy works assiduously to explicate the relationship between true good and true happiness:

It is clear, therefore, that happiness is a state made perfect by the presence of everything that is good, a state, which, as we said, all mortal men are striving to reach though by different paths. For the desire for true good is planted by nature in the minds of men, only error leads them astray towards false good (*Cons.* III.p.1).

According to Lady Philosophy, happiness is the end every man seeks in his mind, but, being forgetful, many often lose the true path by their own error, straying instead toward false good. Most importantly, though, Philosophy reminds Boethius that adverse fortune weeds out fictitious friends and counterfeit happiness. In her desertion of Boethius, Fortune “has taken her friends with her and left those who are really yours” (*Cons.* II.p.8). Without the clarity enabled by the winnowing out of the false friends of good Fortune, Philosophy tells Boethius he “would have been unable to get such knowledge at any price” and wonders at his daftness for “weeping over lost riches” when he has “really found the most precious of all riches—friends who are true friends” (*Cons.* II.p.8). Instead of placing his happiness in the inconstant and fickle companions of Fortune, Philosophy urges Boethius to stake his well being upon virtues that remain constant and point to higher truth—love and friendship, for example—remembering the good, and not only the evil in his life. Throughout the *Consolation*, Boethius makes it clear that one of

the severest of Fortuna's ills is that she often causes you to confuse false happiness for true happiness. In essence, in Book II, Boethius calls us to remember that while Fortune can take away the means of happiness, she cannot take away the ends of happiness.

Lady Philosophy's dialectic is clear and cogent, and Boethius has the marks of a generally good student. Yet, in the early stages of her ministrations, the "gentler remedies" of sweet poetry do much work. Two instances of poetry merit particular mention.

First, Book II ends memorably with a moving poem on Love, ending with "O happy race of men / If Love who rules the sky, / Could rule your hearts as well!" (*Cons.* II.m.8). Lady Philosophy commends the world to the working of Love, rather than Fortune, in a glyconic meter section of exquisite poetry and simple truth. Love is the opposite force to Fortune and her ills. Boethius must remember the constancy of the workings of Love, which holds all the cosmos together, or he will forever be hostage to Fortune and her will.

Second, Boethius' indebtedness to Plato is straightforwardly acknowledged in Book III, when the idea of Platonic recollection is vividly portrayed:

What error's gloomy clouds have veiled before  
Will then shine clearer than the sun himself.  
Not all its light is banished from the mind  
By body's matter which makes men forget  
The seed of truth lies hidden deep within,  
and teaching fans the spark to take new life;  
Why else unaided can man answer true,  
Unless deep in the heart the torchwood burns?  
And if the muse of Plato speaks the truth  
Man but recalls what once he knew and lost.  
(*Cons.* III.m.11).



The poetic meter Boethius chooses for this particular metrical section is called scazons, (“limping” iambic trimeter)—the same meter used in Book II, Meter 1, right after his diagnosis by Lady Philosophy. The limping effect is produced because the last foot of the line is always a spondee (two long syllables-LONG-LONG).

Quisquis profunda mente uestigat *uerum*  
cupitque nullis ille deuiis *falli*  
in se reuoluat intimi lucem *uisus*  
longosque in orbem cogat inflectens *motus*  
animumque doceat quicquid extra *molitur*  
suis retrusum possidere *thesauris*;  
dudum quod atra textit erroris *nubes*  
lucebit ipso perspicacius *Phoebo*.  
Non omne namque mente depulit *lumen*  
obliuiosam corpus inuehens *molem*;  
haeret profecto semen introrsum *ueri*  
quod excitatur uentilante *doctrina*  
nam cur rogati sponte recta *censetis*  
ni mersus alto uiueret fomes *corde*?  
Quodsi Platonis Musa personat *uerum*,  
quod quisque discit immemor *recordatur*.  
(*Cons.* III.m.11, emphasis added).

If we examine the words emphasized by the specific peculiarity of this rhyme scheme, the spondees at the end of each line draw the reader's eye to words that Boethius wants us especially to remember. To name just a few, *uerum*, *uisus*, *motus*, *thesauris*, *nubes*, *lumen*, *doctrina*, *corde*, and *recordatur*, end the lines. Recall how the ancients relied heavily upon mnemonic styles of teaching, particularly for younger children as an effective means of retaining information. It is noteworthy that Boethius' poetic reflection on memory itself would contain the sense of memory device reminding the reader of key words throughout the *Consolation*. In addition, repetition of an unusual meter alongside the topic of memory and forgetfulness suggests significant continuity with memory's thematic use across the book. It underscores the relationship between Boethius' *prosa*

and meter sections, particularly in the matter of right remembrance, and makes evident the stature of a well-ordered memory as an abiding preoccupation of the *Consolation*.

Let me note that the mnemonic effect produced by the meter is nearly completely lost in the English translation. The emphasis that Boethius gains in his poem by placing special stress upon concepts that loom large in the rest of the *Consolation* are all the more apparent to Latin readers in a way that is lost in translation. The highlighted words in the meter section, familiar from the earlier meter sections in Book I, particularly m.2 and m.3, form the majority of the vocabulary Boethius adopts to speak about his condition and his subsequent journey of healing.

#### *Tranquility, Rest, Peace*

Although the Christian influences upon Boethius are marked, the *Consolation* also shows evidence of Boethius' adaptation of key Stoic insights. Possibly nowhere is a form of Christianized Stoicism more evident than in Boethius' emphasis, in connection with happiness, upon peace. Yet, in relating this state of peace, it is not Stoic tranquility *simpliciter* that Boethius gives us, but a type of Stoicism altered through the theology of Augustine. In particular, this concept comes across through the shared adoption of the Latin word *quies* to describe this state of mind and being. However, because a multiplicity of meaning is inherent in the Latin *quies*—translated at various times as tranquility, peace, or rest—noting from where Boethius borrows, from whom, and to what extent reveals a great deal about his own state of mind in composing the *Consolation*.

In the following passage, Seneca describes the attributes of the man gripped by the fickleness of Fortune:

Why do we complain about nature? She has acted kindly: life is long if you know how to use it. But one man is gripped by insatiable greed, another by a laborious dedication to useless tasks. One man is soaked in wine, another sluggish with idleness. One man is worn out by political ambition, which is always at the mercy of the judgment of others. Another through hope of profit is driven headlong over all lands and seas by the greed of trading. Some are tormented by a passion for army life, always intent on inflicting dangers on others or anxious about danger to themselves. Some are worn out by the self-imposed servitude of thankless attendance on the great. Many are occupied by either pursuing other people's money or complaining about their own. Many pursue no fixed goal, but are tossed about in ever-changing designs by a fickleness which is shifting, inconstant and never satisfied with itself.<sup>2</sup>

Seneca urges his readers not to blame nature for the situations brought upon them by Fortune. He catalogues the various passions—much like the false kinds of happiness described by Boethius earlier in this chapter—decrying their temporality in favor of the constancy offered by Nature. Thus, for Seneca, the force preventing tranquility in human beings, much like Boethius, is Fortune.

For Seneca, the only way to achieve a kind of tranquility is to remember and praise those who are courageous and forget those who are cowardly in the face of faltering Fortune. To this point, Seneca further states:

Indeed, all the rest is not life, but merely time. Vices surround and assail men from every side, and do not allow them to rise again and lift their eyes to discern the truth, but keep them overwhelmed and rooted in their desires. Never can they recover their true selves. If by chance they achieve some tranquility, just as a swell remains on the deep sea even after the wind is dropped, so they go on tossing about and never find rest from their desires.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Seneca, *On the Shortness of Life*, trans. C.D.N. Costa, (Penguin: New York, 1997), 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

Seneca's view of the "stuff" of life being not true living, but rather "time" adds to his contemplation of the effect of Fortune upon human activity. The vivid metaphor of the swell upon the sea overturns the notion of tranquility—true rest will not be found in desire, even if tranquility has once been found. The original Latin is particularly helpful:

Ceterum quidem omne spatium non uita sed tempus est. urgent et circumstant uitia undique nec resurgere aut in dispectum ueri attollere oculos sinunt, sed mersos et in cupiditatem infixos premunt. numquam illis recurrere ad se licet; si quando aliqua fortuito quies contigit, uelut profundo mare, in quo post uentum quoque uolutatio est, fluctuantur, nec umquam illis a cupiditatibus suis otium stat.<sup>4</sup>

For Seneca, even the achievement of tranquility can be connected to nothing more than some "chance" (*fortuito*) collision of happy events, not Love's ordering of things or a belief in a peace that transcends circumstance. This is why, crucially, Seneca says of the man once tossed about by the swells of Fortune, that "numquam illis recurrere ad se licet (never can they recover their true selves)."<sup>5</sup> Once again, the language of "self" and the problems of the loss of the true self is right at the heart of philosophy's aims.

Although we see in Seneca some of the same patterns we have already noticed in Philosophy's teaching in the *Consolation*, distinctions ought to be drawn. The self's memory of the ideals of philosophy and basic conception of the ordering of nature—for Lady Philosophy—prevents the paralysis brought upon by suffering, and the attendant belief that circumstances alone define our well-being. A critical distinction is that, for Seneca, once the self has been lost, the loss is permanent. This is strikingly unlike the situation in Boethius, who, when we first meet him, has forgotten his true self, and has "lost" himself in his grief. Nevertheless, just as this loss of self is permanent in Seneca; it

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<sup>4</sup> Seneca, *De Otio, De Brevitate Vitae*, Ed. G.D. Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 45.

<sup>5</sup> Seneca, *On the Shortness of Life*, 3.

is not permanent in Boethius. For, throughout the *Consolation*, Boethius slowly regains his true self.

Another conception closely connected to our topic is Seneca's idea of the memory of tranquility in the past. Consider Seneca's discussion of time and memory:

Life is divided into three periods, past, present, and future. Of these, the present is short, the future is doubtful, the past is certain. For the last is the one over which Fortune has lost her power, which cannot be brought back to anyone's control. But this is what preoccupied people lose: for they have no time to look back at their past, and even if they did, it is not pleasant to recall activities they are ashamed of...the man who must fear his own memory is the one who has been ambitious in his greed, arrogant in his contempt, uncontrolled in his victories, treacherous in his deceptions, rapacious in his plundering, and wasteful in his squandering.<sup>6</sup>

In short, only excessively vicious people need fear the memory of the past. Seneca advocates living a moderate, virtuous life in order to achieve *quies*, or the state of tranquility of mind fitting for a man. Seneca's consideration of the past, an overly nostalgic valuing of the fixed nature, should be valued above all as that "which has passed beyond all human risks," what "cannot be disturbed or snatched from us...an untroubled, everlasting possession."<sup>7</sup>

What is chiefly important to realize here is that the type of "peace" sought after by Lady Philosophy is not only a subjective or psychological state of well-being, but also an objectively determinate condition of health. Simply, Lady Philosophy's goal is not merely to make Boethius feel better temporarily like the Muses of Poetry, whose soothing rhetoric might give him momentarily pleasure, as was an option at the beginning of this dialogue. Rather, Philosophy's goal is to undergird the health of his mind, which in turn

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

will help banish his grief. This is not dependent upon a temporal sequence of events or circumstances shifting, or Fortune proving favorable for once.

The constancy of mind or peacefulness that Lady Philosophy advises for Boethius looks surprisingly familiar to those knowledgeable of Augustine's concepts of *inquietus* and *quietus* (restlessness and rest), *quietus* being the source for the verb *requiescat*, which is introduced in the opening lines of the *Confessions*:

quia fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te. da mihi, domine, scire et intellegere utrum sit prius invocare te an laudare te, et scire te prius sit an invocare te. sed quis te invocat nesciens te? aliud enim pro alio potest invocare nesciens. an potius invocaris ut sciaris? quomodo autem invocabunt, in quem non crediderunt?

For Thou has made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee. Grant me, O Lord, to know which is the soul's first movement toward Thee—to implore Thy Aid or to utter its praise of Thee; and whether it must know Thee before it can implore. For it would seem clear that no one can call upon Thee without knowing Thee, for if he did he might invoke another than Thee, knowing Thee not. (1.1.1)

Yet, while both Augustine and Seneca use the Latin word *quies* when they attempt to describe a state of mental constancy, clearly there is variation in their meaning.

Augustine firmly roots his concept of rest, and its attending privation, restlessness, in abiding in God. Seneca, left without a firm, fixed point from which to ground his standard of tranquility, offers at best the praise of men, but places tranquility ultimately as a temporary state of the good dependent upon the whims of Fortune. When the wheel of Fortune turns away altogether from your favor, tranquility, in the sense of Seneca, is also lost, and in the loss of tranquility, the best one might hope for is to die courageously. Insofar as the cosmos is indifferent to personal misfortune, the Stoic must necessarily be struck by the bleakness of his situation, and in this place, feel real loss of personal tranquility.

Augustine's move to root human rest and peace in a transcendent, fixed Good allows him to mitigate Fortune's sway in his consideration of the soul's quest for rest. This fixed standard in God lessens the fear and uncertainty of losing the self due the workings of Fortune; the soul is animated and stirred in relation to its Creator, not by the fickle movements of Fortune. Augustine's final position—grounding the beginning, middle, and end of human life in God—argues for the ultimate stability of human life, even in the midst of shifting situations. The centering force of the human experience is its beginning (God) and its end (also God). Thus, even if circumstances arise, causing havoc in the mind of human beings, faith and hope can be had in the nature of an unchanging and unmovable Creator God.

Boethius' indebtedness to Augustine is far more apparent than his allegiance to the views of Seneca. From the beginning of Book I to the final words of Book V, Lady Philosophy guides Boethius to see that he is a rational animal whose beginning and end is found in a God described as "Love who rules the sky" and who, when called for, lovingly rules all those of happy heart. While influenced by Seneca, Boethius constructs a conception of peace formally more alike to Augustine than Seneca. Yet, with the noted absence of Trinitarian doctrine, Boethius' view is not materially identical to Augustine's late outlook.

### *Peace Surpassing Understanding?*

Given the presentation of Stoic tranquility, peace, and even Augustinian rest in the last section, the basic nature of peace in Boethius has now been explored in some detail. Yet, given Boethius' presumed faith as a Christian, the other attested theological

works to his name, and the facts known about his life, a final interesting angle on peace emerges from St. Paul's counsel to the Philippians:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7, ESV).

However he might have been personally influenced by texts such as Philippians, Boethius leaves out of the *Consolation* any overt appeal to a Biblical peace which surpasses human understanding. In the *Consolation*, the type of peace achievable by humans is made possible by a rational consideration of one's situation through the faculty of memory. Even so, these verses are a likely undergirding of Boethius' conception of peace, influencing, if only tacitly, his ideal of peace in the soul.

This peace "which surpasses all understanding" actively works to guard believers' hearts and minds against its opposite—worry, despair, or unrest. Yet, this peace which Paul exhorts his readers to achieve both passes all understanding "in the sense that it is inconceivably great, beyond human capacity to comprehend (c.f. Eph. 3:19, 20)" but also "in that it is far better than any 'peace' which human 'understanding' could bring. Notably, *it is a peace which is found in the midst of trouble, not by escaping it.*"<sup>8</sup> As we ought to remember well, at the time that Paul was writing, the Philippian church was undergoing both persecution and tribulation.

The idea of a peace that surpasses or is above understanding does lead to some interesting questions. As alluded to earlier, much of our discussion has been based upon a strong valuation of reason and the human ability to know. If peace is a quality unable to

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<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey, David Lyle, ed. *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1992), 593, emphasis mine.



be achieved by knowing through the use of human reason, what does this tell us about the very quality of peace? A deep part of Christian spirituality, developed strongly in writers like Pseudo-Dionysius and St. Teresa of Avila, puts significant emphasis upon the ability of the state of “unknowing” to grant to humans that which is above knowledge, true wisdom. For a writer like Pseudo-Dionysius, one of the difficulties with basing theological concepts upon rationality alone is that this often gives way to a rigid legalism of thought. Dionysius views the concept of unknowing—that of surpassing rationality in a level of human communion and participation with the divine— as necessarily shattering smug and over-familiar conceptions of the divine. At the same time, however, this state of unknowing encourages believers to be freed from the tyranny of overly narrow religious language and practice.

Therefore, at its most basic level, the biblically praised peace that surpasses understanding must not be, by definition, a faculty of human creation or achievement. Rather, it is a gift of the greater to the lesser. Nevertheless, as rational beings living in a temporal and tangible sphere, peace “beyond understanding” should not be a paradox that paralyzes. Rather, as one understands that this peace exists beyond knowledge and understanding, the mind is freed to realize fully the remarkable depths of true peace.

Once again, in this peace surpassing understanding—the peace not as the world gives—one sees glimmers of the Augustinian principle of rest and peace inextricably linked to their source and end, God. Yet, if read into Boethius’ ideal of peace, the Augustinian view presents serious ramifications for the reader. Without abiding in God, without resting—happily in the kind of unknowing of the soul in communion with God—peace cannot be achieved by the human quest alone. Precisely because peace so defined

cannot be directly collated with Boethius' project in the *Consolation*, it offers a critical lens through which to see and interpret the authorial choices of Boethius.

*Happiness: What Is It? How Do We Find It?*

Where, then, does the *quies* come from that Lady Philosophy commends to Boethius? In answering this question, a review of Boethius' philosophical woes is helpful. They include his inability to consider the world rightly, forgetfulness of the good in his present life, and a misjudging of the prevailing patterns of the world. By the time of the beginning scenes of the *Consolation*, these woes have become so great that Boethius' has lost his true self. Alternatively, to phrase this in a slightly different way, but in keeping with the concepts of exile and self-exile introduced in Chapter Two, Boethius' self has become obscured to himself. In the paralysis brought upon by his suffering, Boethius nearly loses his grip upon the very qualities that make him human—his rational self-consideration and self-knowledge.

If we posit self-knowledge as a middle term connecting memory and happiness, is it possible to have happiness without either memory or self-knowledge? Boethius comes to realize that it is not, as his failures of both memory and self-knowledge demonstrate. Moreover, he lacks the self-knowledge necessary to connect his remaining memory with the end of happiness he desires. What is ambiguous is whether he has forgotten his true self through the insidious teasing of Fortune and her wiles, or whether he has himself been the agent of his woes by failing to use his rationality aright. A complicating factor is that not all self-deception is completely willed or willfully dishonest. One may posit a situation quite easily where a person might forget that he has lied to himself. By telling

and believing his own lie for a long period of time, it is nearly inevitable that this lie will seem to him to be the truth. Yet, at the heart of the matter, some culpability still lies with the individual for once believing the lie of the self. Thus, once again, the question arises: to what extent is Boethius responsible for his sorry state? Has Boethius indeed been a victim of his own self-deception? In any case, it is clear that Boethius must follow the regimen set up by Lady Philosophy to regain his memory and self-knowledge in order to secure the happiness he desires. Putting it plainly, Boethius must remember truthfully, which is to say fully, who he is and what is his place in the world.

Book III begins with Lady Philosophy introducing the idea that “true happiness” is the ultimate destination of their journey. She tells Boethius, “Your mind dreams of it...but your sight is clouded by shadows of happiness and cannot see reality” (*Cons.* III.p.1). To further unpack her meaning, Lady Philosophy explains the nature of true happiness by saying:

It is clear, therefore, that happiness is a state made perfect by the presence of everything that is good, a state, which, as we said, all mortal men are striving to reach though by different paths. For the desire for true good is planted by nature in the minds of men, only error leads them astray towards false good (*Cons.* III.p.2).

Further, Lady Philosophy uses the image of a drunken man to explicate both the state of forgetfulness and the moral component attached to memory leading one to find happiness.

In spite of a clouded memory, the mind seeks its own good, though like a drunkard it cannot find the path home (*Cons.* III.p.2).

According to Lady Philosophy, happiness is the end every man seeks in his mind, but, forgetful, often loses the path in his own error, straying instead toward false good.

In stating that happiness is a desire of man by nature, Philosophy complicates the matters. How precisely is that every man conceives of this end? To answer this, we must return to our discussion of the nature of memory and the soul in two of Boethius' obvious influences: Plato's *Phaedrus* and Augustine's *Confessions*. First, the soul in the *Phaedrus*—having once risen high and experienced true knowledge and happiness—never entirely forgets what it has seen there. It is forever changed by its experience of the good. Similarly, Augustine in Book Ten of the *Confessions* reminds us that “joy in truth is happiness,” yet men “could not love it unless there were some knowledge of it in their memory.”<sup>9</sup> Having established that men know happiness through memory, Augustine presses to know why men do not rejoice in it. He determines “they are much more concerned over things which are more powerful to make them unhappy than truth is to make them happy, for they remember truth so slightly. There is but a dim light in men; let them walk, let them walk, lest darkness overtake them” (*Conf.* 10.23.33).

Here then, we are reminded in succinct fashion why Boethius needs to remember rightly—because if happiness is joy in truth, lies to self are completely opposite to the state one should find oneself in to find happiness. If truth is a necessary condition for happiness, then error is an obstacle to happiness. Insofar as remembering rightly allows us to remember truly apart from error, it frees the individual to pursue the good for the right reasons and the best of ultimate results. False memory, errant memory, distorted memory are all obstacles to the truth, and therefore, happiness. Thus, in his journey from sickness to health, Boethius must overcome these roadblocks to reach the happiness of

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<sup>9</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. F.J. Sheed and ed. by Michael P. Foley, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006), 10.23.33. References will be henceforth indicated parenthetically in the text.

which a philosopher and good man is susceptible. While Boethius' circumstances will not change at the end of the *Consolation*, his mindset—and his prospect of happiness—has altered completely.

### *Conclusion*

Ordering the mind aright through understanding the beginning and end of all things in God ought to encourage anyone in periods of suffering. By focusing upon the means by which we may reorder our understanding through right memory, we may teach most profitably wisdom—the knowledge of conclusions through their highest causes. Boethius' work teaches us aptly that the love of wisdom leads to true happiness and a knowledge of freedom that transcends circumstance, which sustains and comforts man during times of adversity. If we, like Boethius, remember our proper place in the world, gaining from this understanding a true vision of the cosmos in relation to its Creator, we ought to move toward a fuller understanding of wisdom and realization of happiness.

Clearly, important and strengthening lessons emerge for our own struggles. Boethius, in finding the most poignantly philosophical answer to his travails, ends by affirming an all-powerful, omniscient Creator and his providential workings. With the foundation of clear sight enabled by right remembrance, Boethius rests content that his life is dependent not upon circumstances or the fickle turns of Fortune's wheel, relying instead upon firm knowledge that there is an all-powerful, omniscient Creator who made and controls all things by His sovereign, providential workings. While this is not education of a trade, instruction in mathematics, reading, or writing, Boethius' reflection

encourages us to view education as first a matter of the soul, then the mind. If the soul is rightly ordered by the power of memory, the workings of the mind will follow.

The wisdom-lover's art of right remembrance offers significant benefits to people of every time and circumstance. More particularly, I wish to stress right remembrance's use for laying the foundation for the pursuit of the knowledge of the highest things, wisdom. In his work highlighting the consoling power of philosophy, Boethius gives a timeless account rich with possibility for instructing his own self and his readers in the art of right remembrance. For my part, inasmuch as it offers a true and honest reflection about how best to remember both the good and the painful, Boethius' work is worthy of deep reflection and consideration.

We shall not cease from exploration.  
And the end of all our exploring  
will be to arrive where we started  
and know the place for the first time.  
Through the unknown, remembered gate  
When the last of earth left to discover  
Is that which was the beginning...

And all shall be well and  
All manner of thing shall be well  
When the tongues of flame are in-folded  
Into the crowned knot of fire  
And the fire and rose are one.

T. S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*

## CONCLUSION

*“Magna uobis est, si dissimulare non uultis,  
necessitas indicta probitatis,  
cum ante oculos agitis iudicis cuncta cernentis.”*

In Chapter One, I articulated a brief history of the relation between memory and the soul in the classical and medieval period, examining seminal works by Hesiod, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Augustine.

I began by underscoring the connection between the classical Muses of Poetry and their mother Memory in Hesiod’s *Theogony*. Importantly, this association displayed a propensity in the classical mind to link memory closely with poetry. From a better understanding of this relationship, discussion turned to Boethius’ adaptation and dismissal of the Muses of Poetry in Book I. In particular, I considered Boethius’ qualified affirmation of poetry and the Muses—and especially their gifts of memory—in the form of a rebuke that does not reject the Muses outright. In this way, Boethius adds another wise voice to an old debate mediated by many of Boethius’ influences, including Plato and Aristotle.

As noted, rather than dismissing the poetic Muses and their effect entirely from this work, Philosophy insists that her own philosophical Muses must moderate the dialogue. The adoption of reason-governed, rather than passion-governed Muses, is of vital importance to Boethius’ ultimate ideal of the soul’s relation to memory. Reason must be balanced, and be a real presence in the mind, in order for right remembrance to



reign over the passions of the human soul. More concretely, however, this choice gives rise to the very form of Boethius' *Consolation*, as the alternations between prose and meter are, in themselves, a picture of reason and passion working in harmony.

Moving forward, I discussed the contributions of Plato to Boethius' view of memory. As Plato's own conception of memory remains multifaceted and varied throughout his career, choosing only a few of Plato's most pertinent works to focus upon became a matter of prudence. For my purposes, the metaphors and myths of the *Theaetetus* and *Phaedrus* best served to understand memory as Boethius conceives it in the *Consolation*.

Specifically, the image-rich metaphors of the wax tablet and the aviary cone in the *Theaetetus* helped explain the character of classical memory. On the one hand, memory is subject to both the ease of creation, destruction, malleability, and fragility of the student's wax tablet. Moreover, the image of the aviary cone fills out the conception of memory by considering its relation to knowledge retrieval and forgetfulness.

Plato's *Phaedrus* aids this growing understanding of classical memory in two primary ways. In his description of the soul's ascent to the forms, Plato considers memory as the means by which this experience is burned upon the soul. Similarly, in the myth of Theuth and Thamus, Plato underscores his belief in the interiority of memory. In both of these cases, Plato's use of myth unites the relation of the soul to the power of memory.

The transition to the contributions of Aristotle to the history of memory and the soul not only marks an important philosophical shift, but also reminds us of Boethius' own goal to harmonize the work of Plato and Aristotle. In this section, I succinctly

considered Aristotle's view of nature, his four causes, and his view of the soul and memory. In Aristotle, the importance of the body to the soul, even in the exercise of memory, is underscored. Yet, as noted, Boethius' view of remembering rightly encompasses both the spheres of Platonic recollection based in the Forms and Aristotelian perception based in observation of nature. In his views on Plato and Aristotle and many others, following Roman tradition, Boethius is first and foremost a synthetic thinker. His adoption of earlier masters and ability to harmonize their beliefs is nothing less than impressive.

With the addition of Cicero's philosophical synthesis, a distinctly Roman voice enriched this discussion of classical memory. In Cicero, we not only have the bedrock of Boethius' society, albeit from long ago—but also a man with whom Boethius the author may find significant parallels from a shared turbulent political life. Importantly, for Cicero, memory far surpasses the mere faculty of remembrance, the memory of a specific individual or event, or a memory of historical events written down. Rather, Cicero relates the working of *memoria* to the human soul in three significant ways: *memoria* as a function of history, *memoria* as it affects the concept of legacy, and *memoria* as proof of a divine element in the soul.

Augustine completes our discussion of classical and medieval memory by relating its significance in holding the past, present, and future within its capacity, in enabling happiness and joy, and in freeing the Christian from forgetfulness of God, the source of all wisdom and knowledge. In particular, his discussion of memory's relation to the Trinity and its ability to connect humans to true happiness became increasingly important to the argument of this thesis.

Chapter Two began by returning the focus to the *Consolation* proper. To examine the nature of Boethius' forgetfulness, misremembering, and illness, careful textual attention was given to the description of Boethius' state at the beginning of the *Consolation*. This textual analysis functions in several ways. First, the linguistic ramifications of the memory-laden terms populating Book I were considered in some detail. Moving forward, recurring themes surrounding Boethius' illness, such as sight/blindness, light/darkness, exile/self-exile illuminated further the nature of Boethius' soul-sickness.

Finally, I examined the deadly nature of Boethius' illness in relation to his own culpability. This chapter ends with a brief summation of Philosophy's ultimate diagnosis of Boethius in Book II, and her proposed remedy. Boethius learns especially from this exchange that he must begin to orient himself rightly concerning the gifts of Fortuna, else he will always seek after false happiness, and never find true happiness.

Chapter Three served as the necessary finish to this thesis' argument; namely, describing the actual process of Boethius' right remembrance and his recovery. Lady Philosophy's therapy, seen through the lens of therapeutic interventions—including Socratic questioning in prose and healing hymns in meter—move Boethius toward his eventual state of bodily recovery and mental constancy. Through grasping the true ordering of the universe, especially Fortune's relation to Providence, Boethius grows to understand his world aright.

Above all, Boethius must orient his mind rightly by way of a proper understanding of love, peace, and happiness. Fickle Fortune does not control the workings of men. Philosophy brings Boethius to remember that it is Love that rules and

binds all men together, working always and ever through Providence to achieve a good end. Peace—and even happiness, under this kind of ruling control—may then influence and shape the soul, mind, and body, regardless of circumstances, painful or joyful. Simply, the *Consolation* is an honest and wise dialogue between the Love of Wisdom personified and a man searching for love, peace, and happiness.

### *Living Well after Consolation?*

One of the undeniable qualities of great books is their ability to prompt questions of lasting importance. More than simply providing material for great conversations, however, these questions are a means for us to continue a lasting dialogue both with the author and with fellow students long after the last line has been read.

A little while ago, I was talking with a close friend. Talk turned, as it often does for a senior in the midst of the thesis, to the details of my project. This particular friend, having read the *Consolation* recently, asked me why Boethius ends his work as he does—seemingly so abruptly. For, after Lady Philosophy takes Boethius through a discussion of Fortune versus providence, defines the nature of happiness, attempts one of the earliest known theodicies, and deals with eternity's relation to time and free will, she ends her teaching with an unexpected note. By appealing to necessity, reiterating the importance of a significant God figure, and advocating the importance of the virtue of hope, Lady Philosophy reminds Boethius that he has a responsibility to live well. Oddly enough, it seems Boethius' responsibility is even greater because his days on earth are numbered. Boethius' memory, mind, and will must be exercised to help himself rise out of the mire

of his circumstances; yet paradoxically, it seems that Boethius is unable to reach any type of health without the ministrations of Lady Philosophy.

A conundrum of interpretation thus remains. Boethius, it seems, finds a measure of peace and happiness by the end of his *Consolation*. Yet, does this consolation matter beyond the man writing this book in his prison cell? How should the reader be changed through reading and meditating upon Boethius' greatest work? To answer these questions, and the larger question of the ultimate purpose and reasoning behind this thesis, let us turn to final lines of the *Consolation*.

Nec frustra sunt in deo positae spes preces que, quae cum rectae sunt inefficaces esse non possunt. Auersamini igitur uitia, colite uirtutes, ad rectas spes animum subleuate, humiles preces in excelsa porrigite. Magna uobis est, si dissimulare non uultis, necessitas indicta probitatis, cum ante oculos agitis iudicis cuncta cernentis.

Hope is not placed in God in vain and prayers are not made in vain, for if they are the right kind they cannot but be efficacious. Avoid vice, therefore, and cultivate virtue; lift up your mind to the right kind of hope, and put forth humble prayers on high. A great necessity is laid upon you, if you will be honest with yourself, a great necessity to be good, since you live in the sight of a judge who sees all things (*Cons.* V.p.5).

Considering the tight connections in the ancient and medieval mind between exile and pilgrimage, the movement from Boethius' forgetful self-exile at the beginning to the last image of Philosophy commending hope to Boethius seems significant indeed.

Philosophy's last words urge the necessity of virtue—and even more poignantly, for a man about to be executed, hope. Boethius, at the end of his journey, has become a resilient person not tossed and turned by every storm of Fortune's vicissitudes, but rather a man always drawing from an inward radiancy that cannot be quelled simply by untoward situations. His hopeful frame of mind, characterized as a necessity by Lady Philosophy, allows him to look toward the future with mental constancy. Perhaps even

more significantly, no verbal response is required from Boethius to end his final work properly. No longer is Boethius blind and sick from the very woes attacking him—the very cure of Lady Philosophy has freed him from the illness hounding him at the beginning of the *Consolation*. His constancy of mind is proved in his silence.

### *Finding Wisdom*

Above all, what must be realized about this journey is that, from the beginning, our guide has been Philosophy, the Love of Wisdom personified. Without Wisdom, Boethius could not have moved from his pitiful, sick state at the beginning of the *Consolation* to his peaceful, healthful state at the end. Indeed, this fact is highlighted by early translators of the *Consolation*, most notably by King Alfred who replaced the name Philosophy with Wisdom in his Old English translation. This nomenclature echoes both the Biblical character of Wisdom and reminds the reader of the real nature of Philosophy's influence and purpose in this book.

Indeed, contemplating Philosophy must lead us to consider precisely how far have we traveled. What is the connection of wisdom and living life well to memory? For only Philosophy—Wisdom—brought Boethius, and thus us, this far on the path of healing, through her didactic dialogue of practicing right remembrance. Yet, only Philosophy's dialogue format, steeped as it is in the classical tradition of memory, may bring a suffering soul from sickness to health. Only then, is right remembrance able to be effectual in Boethius' life, and possibly our own. In effect, because of the very nature of Platonic recollection, Philosophy's dialogue with Boethius enables him rightly to

understand and order memory of his world in a fashion that would not be possible apart from the shared experience of memory.

From her entrance, Philosophy transcends the mere accumulated knowledge of philosophers and schools of human knowledge. This love of wisdom as figured in the character of Philosophy does not merely encourage Boethius to think and remember rightly, but rather guides him unfailingly along a path of asking questions, testing of his faith with unwavering truth, and knowing firmly the ordering of the world. Through her constant presence, Philosophy frees Boethius from endless fear about asking the difficult questions—regarding evil in the world, providence versus fortune, whether or not there is a good God, and how all these matters hold together.

As becomes clear, Wisdom is not simply about gaining theoretical knowledge (*theoria*), or even about the practice of living life in a particular fashion (*praxis*). Rather, returning to the image of Lady Philosophy's robe at the beginning of the *Consolation*, her brand of personified Wisdom is greater than either *theoria* or *praxis*, or any of the vicissitudes that had torn sections of her robe away. Rather, as Philosophy herself teaches us by example, living life wisely entails living life well.

### *Arriving Where We Started*

What now? Do we relegate Boethius back to the dusty shelves? Or does his message matter enough to us, right here, right now, to continue to remember well?

The simple fact of the matter is that we know many more people like the passion-racked, emotionally-paralyzed Boethius at the beginning of the *Consolation* than the consoled, constant Boethius at the end. My own life, relatively sheltered from deep pain,

resonates deeply with Boethius' own struggles. Whether it be the heartbreak of continually-grieving family friends who lost an eight-year-old to brain cancer or my childhood companions mourning the loss of their young fathers, suffering is a present reality in our world. Never was this clearer to me than my freshman year, when one of the girls living just down the hallway passed away in a car accident—just eighteen. Death is not supposed to visit the young. University is an odd place, ever populated by a vital and young peer group. But this peer group, as I have learned, has no framework for suffering and death. Friend after friend changed the subject as I struggled for weeks with the death of a young friend I had barely begun to know. While the blithe attitude of others toward suffering was difficult for me to bear, the worst fact was the overwhelming guilt of not having actually known this young, beautiful woman enough to mourn her properly. Emotionally shaken and saddened by the loss, I realized then, as had never been clear before to me, that I could not remain sanely in that sad, grieving state. No matter the suffering of the world around, the paralysis brought about by suffering is not helpful—as Boethius finds in the *Consolation*, it is poisonous to the soul, mind, and body.

Emerging from a grief-ridden state induced by suffering will never be easy. Yet, the point of Boethius' *Consolation* is not to be the cure-all for suffering that “changes the subject” in our minds from the suffering that is assailing us. Philosophy does not merely tell Boethius to “snap out of it” and “believe better” without allowing for time and space to heal some of his wounds. Rather, she allows Boethius to question, search, and find his way back slowly, all the way with her constant guidance forbidding him to remain too long in a melancholic, self-abusing state. Remembering rightly, as this thesis has



considered time and time again, is the shared experience of considering the world with the best perspective alongside a kind and wise guide. The difficulty with suffering, as anyone who has suffered in any measure can explain to you, is that one's own control over mind, memory, and will are often weakened to such an extent that choosing the good seems to not be an option. The beauty of Lady Philosophy's therapy, then, in the *Consolation*, is her insistence on helping Boethius consider rightly how to order his mind in order that he might be fully healed. Boethius is not alone.

*Knowing our Place—The End in the Beginning*

Ever since I read T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, many of Eliot's haunting words remain firmly fixed in my mind. Perhaps none remain more so than his emphatic declaration in "Little Gidding" regarding memory, journey, and exploration. Reminding us poignantly that one of the virtues of the human heart is our need for exploration, Eliot stands at counterpoint to Boethius. Like Boethius, Eliot urges us to pursue the journey into philosophical knowledge, knowing all the while that once we arrive, the beginning, not the end will greet us. The *Consolation*, contrary to most readings, is not a story about endings, or coping about endings. Rather, from her first appearance in Book I, Philosophy gently guides Boethius to see—again and again—that the end he seeks, knowledge, constancy, and peace—are all to be found in the truth he has known from her since his infancy. Boethius has known his proper end since his beginning; he has only forgotten it for a little while.

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