

# Boethius: An Inspiration for Modern Readers

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The greatness of each period in human history lies in the strength and intellectual breakthrough of its renowned thinkers. Such was the case with Plato and Aristotle, who were not only great scholars in antiquity but whose philosophical thought left an indelible mark on the annals of their time. A similar scholar was Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, whose enduring legacy was remarkable in the 6th century. He was a great thinker, described by many scholars as an intellectual genius. His scholarly exposition provided the background for later medieval philosophical discussions. Also, it influenced scholars such as Richard of Saint Victor, Peter Abelard, Gilbert of Poitiers, Thierry of Chartres, and Thomas Aquinas. Although his life was cut short because he challenged the corruption of the Ostrogothic court, it was nevertheless a victory. This paper examines Boethius's influence on the intellectual development of the Middle Ages and his enduring legacies, which could inspire contemporary scholars.

*Keywords:* Boethius, philosophy, medieval, treatise

## Introduction

Today, as the historical awareness of most students declines rapidly and many individuals show indifference towards their studies due to the social challenges we face, I find myself seeking an intellectual genius whose works and scholarly achievements can inspire and motivate students, and help them confront the uncertainties of our time. Many scholars come to mind, but because of the troubling situation, I have been particularly drawn to Anicius Boethius, a sixth-century scholar who lived during turbulent times when the Roman Empire was divided, and the Goths conquered the Western half. His life and works are inspiring. However, the problem is that most students today are more persuaded by modern ideological, political, and cultural “lies of progress” and promises of a better future. This comforting illusion has been promoted by the political philosopher John Gray for the past three decades. It also aligns with Friedrich Nietzsche's Zarathustra, whose Übermensch aims to give meaning to life on earth and advises his audience to ignore the “old” teachings that promise otherworldly fulfilment, encouraging them to focus on the worldly. It is the belief that the human condition will improve more than ever before in the future. This conviction has diminished modern readers' interest in voices from the past, where Boethius belongs. To them, that past appears as an empty, long-forgotten era—an unenlightened, unscientific world lacking modern technology, a civilisation whose cultural relevance ended around the time their great-grandparents were born. Nevertheless, this paper seeks to inspire and motivate contemporary scholars by highlighting Boethius's life and achievements and to convince them that scholars of antiquity were as intelligent and resourceful as we are today. Their works, such as Boethius's treatises, could serve as a remedy to the myopia of the modern mind.

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### Boethius's Biography

Boethius—a renowned philosopher and theologian—whose scholarly legacy influences centuries of scholars, employed a methodological approach in his philosophical argument characterised by deductive and axiomatic reasoning. Pope Benedict XVI dedicated parts of his Wednesday general audience on March 12, 2008, to Boethius. Benedict acknowledged Boethius's significance in the growth of Christian philosophy, as his works aim to bridge the Hellenistic-Roman heritage with the message of the Gospel.

His name, Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, reflects the common Roman practice of naming children to indicate their family heritage. After his father, who became a consul in AD 487, died, Boethius, at the age of seven, moved in with the aristocratic family of Quintus Aurelius Memius Symmachus. Aurelius Symmachus himself was a consul in AD 485, just before Boethius's father. Boethius, who was consul under Theodoric the Ostrogoth in AD 510, married Symmachus's daughter Rusticana, who later became the mother of two sons who also served as consuls in AD 522. Remarkably, Boethius, named after Pope Severinus—famous in Rome for his charity—was later charged with treason. This led to his death under Emperor Theodoric in AD 524, after writing the *De Consolatione* in prison. Kijewska (2013) compares Boethius's last days in prison to those of Socrates, beginning with the accusation against Boethius. She states, “the political nature of the case was camouflaged, giving the process appearance of a case concerning impiety”. However, “Boethius, like Socrates, facing death, undertakes a philosophical journey into the depths of himself, one more journey in search of the highest values” (p. 76).

According to the first edition of the *Liber Pontificalis*, Theodoric ordered that Boethius's body be concealed after his death (Chadwick, 1981). Perhaps Theodoric realised that his execution of Boethius—an influential figure in the Roman Catholic Church whose *Opuscula Sacra* were already well known—could be seen as a form of martyrdom, given that he was an Arian king (Zeiller, 1905; Balk, 1944). Boethius became so revered as a “saint” and “Latin West Scholar” in the 10th century that his bones were relocated to Pavia's Church of San Pietro in Ciel d'Oro (Saint Peter in Caelo Aurea), the same church that had acquired Saint Augustine's relics in the 8th century. The relationship between Augustine and Boethius is remarkable and extends beyond their resting places, likely due to the profound influence both had on medieval thought. The Sacred Congregation of Rites approved Boethius's local cult in the Diocese of Pavia in 1883, affirming the tradition of celebrating the feast of Saint Severinus on October 23 every year. However, some scholars have argued that since this date coincides with the feast of St. Severinus of Cologne, as recorded in the Roman Martyrology, it is difficult to determine whether the Pavian calendar intended Boethius (Balk, 1946; Patch, 1947; Chadwick, 1981). Stewart and Rand (1968) describe Boethius as “the last of the Roman philosophers, and the first of the scholastic theologians” (p. x). Bryan (2004) calls him “a man of the old Roman world standing at the threshold of the new” (p. 98). Perhaps, this description can be attributed to the fact that Boethius's birth coincided with the fall of the last Roman Empire, marking the beginning of a new era.

### Boethius's Philosophical Project

Boethius's influence on medieval intellectual learning can be likened to that of Plato, Aristotle, and Augustine, who lived before him. A similar comparison is found in Marenbon's (2003) *Boethius*. Early in his career, Boethius declared his aim to translate and comment on all the works of Plato and Aristotle, showing their consistency and harmony. It was not surprising that Boethius found such inspiration at the start of his career.

According to Kijewska (2013), the philosophical schools of Alexandria and Athens, especially the influence of Porphyry, informed Boethius's Neo-Platonic belief that Plato and Aristotle agreed on issues of vital philosophical importance. This conviction underlines his translations and his effort to present the works of these two great Greek thinkers to Latin culture. His project aimed to help scholars in Rome become acquainted with the new translations of ancient Greek texts introduced into Roman scholarship. In this project, Boethius aimed to reconcile the Greek and Latin traditions, believing that the harmony would influence both secular and theological studies. Despite his brief life, his literary achievements were substantial. Notably, the philosophical system of this era, known as Neo-Platonism, acted as a strong supporter and protector of Plato's teachings, while also striving to harmonise the ideas of Plato and Aristotle. Some scholars have argued that Boethius, who was highly influenced by Neo-Platonic thought, introduced a more refined Neo-Platonic interpretation of Aristotle's works into the medieval tradition through his commentaries.

### Boethius's Commentaries

Boethius served as a bridge for transmitting Aristotle's works to medieval schools. For Bryan (2004), Boethius remains a primary source for the study of medieval logic. His explanations and definitions were very clear, with some of his definitions serving as the ideal of precision, such as: person—an individual substance of rational nature; eternity—the simultaneous possession, whole and complete, of unending life; and nature—a significant property of any substance. Though Boethius did not translate any of Plato's works, he focused on Aristotle's *Organon*. His translations of Aristotle include the *Categories*, *On Interpretation*, the *Analytics*, the *Topics*, and the *Sophistical Refutations*, though not all have survived. Boethius wrote a commentary on Aristotle's *Categories* and two works—one on *On Interpretation* and the other on Porphyry's introduction to Aristotle's *Categories*. In his first commentary on Porphyry's introduction to the *Categories*, he used Marius Victorinus's Latin translation, whereas in the second, he employed his own translation. He also commented on Cicero's *Topica*, on *Division*, and on *Topical Differences* "*De topicis differentiis*". Western medieval scholars relied on Boethius's translations of Aristotle's logic, except for two: The *Categories* and the *Posterior Analytics*. Marenbon (2003) argues that this dependence stemmed from the belief that Aristotle's logic was difficult. Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* was translated into Latin only in the 12th century by James of Venice, who also translated Aristotle's *Sophistical Refutation*. Boethius's translation of the *Posterior Analytics* did not survive. Aristotle's *Categories* first became known through the *Categoriae decem*; by the 12th century, these had vanished and were replaced by Boethius's translation. His translations of Porphyry's *Isagoge*, *Categories*, and *On Interpretation*, along with other texts, formed the curriculum of the early 12th-century logical schools and were called *logica vetus*, or "old logic". Later, other works of Aristotle's logic, translated by Boethius and known as the *logica nova* or "new logic", were added to the curriculum. These included: *On Sophistical Refutations*, the *Analytics*, and the *Topics*. Leff (1992) observes that,

Although Boethius had translated all Aristotle's main works on logic, apart from the *Posterior Analytics*, only those of the so-called "old logic" had continued to be known before the 12th century...Boethius's translations of Aristotle's other logical writings remained unknown until the 1120s, when they became the foundation of the "new logic". (p. 314)

These translated texts formed the medieval curriculum, and many universities copied them into their manuscripts.

Boethius, a rare breed in a unique form, presented many philosophical ideas and provoked thought in his works. The themes he raised in his commentaries sparked major debates in the 11th and 12th centuries; one of

the most notable was the discussion on the universal, focusing more on Porphyry's *Isagoge*. At the heart of the medieval problem of universals were Boethius's responses in his second commentary to the three questions Porphyry posed regarding *genera* and *species*, alongside the chapter in the *Isagoge* where Porphyry raised these questions without offering an answer. Boethius's commentary on the *Categories* provided the foundation for debate on this topic. In response to the question of what the *Categories* are about—things or words—Boethius's commentary on the *Categories* provides the insightful explanation that they relate to words serving as signifiers of things. This discussion led to a heated debate in the 11th century over the proper interpretation of the *Categories* and how the *Isagoge* should be read: whether the *Categories* referred to things or, as some translators believed, to words rather than things. Boethius's discussion on the logical art, *logicae artis*, in his literary work further provoked the debate over the role of logic in philosophy. In his first commentary on Porphyry's *Isagoge*, Boethius tells Fabius that six critical questions should be considered when masters comment on a work. These include, first, determining to which part of philosophy the work belongs. By this, Boethius aimed to show the importance of Porphyry's logical work in relation to his discussion on the nature of philosophy. The debate further raised questions about the place of logic in philosophy and the definition of philosophy itself. In this context, Cassiodorus Senator, his contemporary and kin, distinguished between logic as science and logic as art. The Stoics likened philosophy to a living animal, with logic representing the bones, and ethics and physics representing the flesh and the soul, respectively. Another version of Stoicism makes ethics the soul.

Porphyry's *Isagoge* was not an altered translation of Aristotle's logic, as Porphyry himself noted when he introduced Aristotle's logic into the Platonic curriculum. Porphyry followed the translation of Alexander of Aphrodisias, who was the greatest interpreter of Aristotle. In this way, Porphyry commented upon Aristotle's logic using Aristotle's terms. Boethius's logic followed the thought pattern of Porphyry's *Isagoge*, as opposed to the introduction of Platonic themes into Aristotle's logic, which became common among later Athenian and Alexandrian commentators. This highlights Boethius's significance for the Middle Ages as a transmitter of genuinely Aristotelian logic, including the Aristotelian approach to related philosophical problems that confronted early medieval philosophers in their discussions of logic. We can conclude that logic survived until the 13th century through Boethius's translations of Aristotle's logic, whose fluency in Greek and knowledge of Greek philosophy enabled this work.

### **The Original Works of Boethius**

The Categorical Syllogism, which deals with classes (e.g., "All men are mortal"), and the Hypothetical Syllogism, which employs "if-then" conditional statements, are Boethius's original treatises. Besides these logical works, he also achieved other literary successes. The *Consolation of Philosophy* is an original Boethian work that reflects many of his earlier intellectual concerns and literary aspirations. According to Bryan (2004), it is his most well-known work. For Relihan (2001), the originality of this work is conveyed more by the structures into which it fits its arguments than by the arguments themselves: "what is clearly at the heart of *Consolation* is Platonism: the dialogue form, the influence of Crito, the appropriation of the arguments of Gorgias and Timaeus... the underlying philosophical principles of *Consolation* are Neo-Platonic" (p. xvi). Boethius's *Consolation* was the dominant work of literature in the Middle Ages, inspiring writers such as Dante, Thomas Aquinas, and Jean de Meun. In England, it was translated into Old English by Alfred the Great, into Middle English by Geoffrey Chaucer, and later by Queen Elizabeth I. This work was written in prison after Boethius had been sentenced to death by his former patron, King Theodoric. It is a dialogue with Dame Philosophy, showing

the search for wisdom as the one and lasting consolation in a world of injustice. Relihan believes that philosophy is in the prisoner's cell, inspiring the prisoner to return to his natural source. Haren (1985), however, argues that the major themes Boethius treated in his *Consolatione* were not original to him. For instance, the variation of fortune discussed in Books One to Three, the nature of evil in Books Three to Four, and the compatibility of providence with freedom of choice in Book Five, all relied more on the Greek tradition. However, he concludes that the work's uniqueness lies "in the circumstances in which Boethius poses these time-honoured problems...and the urgency which they acquire" (Haren, 1985, p. 64). The *Consolation* was composed and played a role similar to that of the myth in Plato's dialogues, gradually unfolding and discussing its topic in a freer manner than in prose.

The form of the *Consolation* is five books of alternating prose and metrical verse passages. The combination of prose and verse derives ultimately from the satires of the Greek Cynic philosopher Menippus (third century BC), but the technique had been imitated in Latin by Varro and had also been used by Martianus Cappella in his *Marriage of Philology and Mercury*. (Haren, 1985, p. 65)

The structure of *De Consolatione* has sparked serious debate among contemporary scholars. Some, such as Joel Relihan, D. Shanzer, and James O'Donnell, have argued that the work is a Menippean satire. This view was opposed and criticised by Kazimierz Korus, a Polish scholar and authority on classical literature, who claims that the work lacks humour and irony. His perspective was supported by Gerard O'Daly but criticised indirectly by Relihan. Considering this, Kijewska (2013) writes,

I think that "labels" are not so important, but in the structure of *De Consolatione* we can easily observe the change of genre, languages and cultures to which has pointed Weinbrot. And I believe that the most perspicuous point of that change is the metrum 9 form [sic] the book III... (p. 78)

She concludes that "up to that point [Metrum 9, book III] we can label the work as consolation: Dame philosophy consoles the prisoner because he suffers from the fickleness of fortune" (p. 78). The lack of Christian references in *The Consolation* has led modern critics to doubt whether Boethius was a Christian or even the author of the theological works that bear his name. In response, Stewart and Rand (1968) state that the discovery made by Alfred Holder and the discussion of Hermann Usener concerning a fragment of Cassiodorus are sufficient defence of the manuscript tradition. Warton (1871), in one of his passages, wrote, "I must add that it was Boethius's admired allegory on the Consolation of Philosophy which introduced personification into the poetry of the Middle Ages" (p. 264). Boethius's work has further influenced notable 18th-century scholars, such as James Harris, Oliver Goldsmith, Thomas Warton, Walter Harte, Gibbon, Johnson, and Mrs.

Furthermore, Boethius's *Opuscula Sacra*, the Sacred Writings, were important texts in the 12th century. Before then, they served as the bases for philosophical and theological arguments. Also, they played a significant role in the controversy between Gottschalk and Hincmar of Rheims over the theology of the Trinity. The *Opuscula* established a method that effectively highlighted the Neoplatonic approach of transcending from physics through mathematics to theology. This structure was theoretical and followed a deductive methodology. In his *De Trinitate*, Boethius describes Aristotle's division of theoretical philosophy into natural science (physics), mathematics, and theology. These disciplines came to replace the liberal arts (*trivium* and *quadrivium*) in the 13th century. The classification of the theoretical discipline's methodology can be found in the works of many 12th-century scholars. Boethius's logical approach shaped the entire medieval philosophical tradition. Marenbon (2012) argues that

In theological method, he [Boethius] provided both a development of Augustine's and a complement to it; in the *Consolation*, he both opened a whole way for Christian authors to relate to ancient philosophy and elaborated an argument about a major theological problem, divine prescience and human freedom, to which thinkers returned throughout the Middle Ages. (p. 23)

Despite Marenbon's claim, it could be argued that the method did not originate with Boethius, especially in the Latin Church, as references to it can be found in the writings of St. Augustine and Marius Victorinus in his defence of the Nicene Creed.

Boethius also made a notable contribution to arithmetic and music. His works, *De institutione arithmetica* and *De institutione musica*, were well known in the ninth century. His five books on music were written for Clovis, King of the Franks. Although these works are less familiar today, their ideas and thought structures are still evident in later European theories of music and aesthetics. They were standard texts used in medieval schools and remained part of the curriculum, despite the advent of newer texts. Reading these works continued until the Renaissance. In his *De institutione arithmetica*, Boethius adopted Nicomachus's arithmetic, and the treatise *De institutione musica* was composed upon the authorities of many Greek scholars, remaining in use at Oxford and Cambridge Universities until modern times. For Boethius, merely enjoying music is a natural, instinctive animal response. But in humans, the appeal of musical harmonies arises from their correspondence with the harmony of the body and soul. That is why only certain types of music resonate with specific individuals or even nations. Consequently, music can heal, evoke strong emotions, or even transform a nation. Boethius's *De musica* has inspired many music writers over the centuries, including Aurelian of Reome, Hucbald, Regino of Prum, Odo, Guido of Arezzo, Glareanus, Zarlino, and Calvisius.

### **Boethius's Other Contributions to the Intellectual Learning of the Middle Ages**

In the light of rational justifications that Boethius gave to the works of Aristotle and his provoked thoughts in these commentaries, and in addition to his original works, Boethius's writings conserved and transmitted the liberal sciences. His writings provided the materials for the classification and understanding of the liberal sciences, which were very important for every philosophical movement. The liberal arts that made up the classical Roman curriculum were grammar, logic, rhetoric, geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, and music. These courses were divided into two stages: the *trivium* and *quadrivium*. The first stage, the *trivium*, which includes grammar, logic, and rhetoric, dealt with techniques of discussion. The second stage, the *quadrivium*, which includes geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, and music, studies the principles of order in the physical world. Haren (1985) recalls that the allegorical work of Martianus Capella, *Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, written in the early 5th century, was the only source available for the liberal courses. This work by Martianus was probably based on Varro's nine-volume treatise on the disciplines, which was lost early in the post-classical period. Lohr (2002) pointed out that scholars of the early Middle Ages saw the liberal arts (*trivium and quadrivium*) as part of theology within a single system of knowledge, in line with Augustine's unrealised vision. Consequently, entry to the theological faculty until the 14th century was only possible after passing through the arts faculty.

As a channel of Aristotle's teaching, Boethius also introduced Aristotle's method for approaching faith-related problems. The introduction of this theoretical method can be attributed to his dual status as a logician and a specialist in metaphysics. As a renowned logician, metaphysician, and philosopher, Boethius's method for tackling theological questions influenced and served as a model for medieval theologians. This method requires developing philosophical analyses in their own terms and placing them alongside the Christian teaching to show

the rational coherence of the Christian doctrine. The method is different from Augustine's, who teaches from within the doctrine of faith. Boethius applied this new method in his treatise against Eutyches and Nestorius, *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium*, to help explain the hypostatic union and to show the logical incoherence of Eutyches' and Nestorius' views, which he rejected. Marenbon (2012) calls this Boethian method "the Aristotelian physics of mixture" (p. 25). For Haren (1985), "Boethius is noteworthy for having explicitly advocated the disciplined reconciliation of reason and faith and for the confidence with which he wrote to that end" (p. 62). Although the *Opuscula* were not central to the thinking of John Scottus Eriugena, the greatest philosopher of the late 9th century, he knew them very well. Peter Abelard's *Theologia Summi Boni* was also influenced by Boethius's logical method, which provided a rational understanding of the Trinity through logical analysis but also clearly pointed out the limits of human reasoning. Aquinas's success in his various works on Aristotle could be attributed to the technique Boethius handed over to the Latin West. The *Opuscula* also influenced Gilbert of Poitiers. In his commentary on Boethius's *Opuscula*, Gilbert made an effort to incorporate and explain every confusing phrase of Boethius found in the text. Notwithstanding, he made his own contribution by arguing that "the principle of reasoning appropriate for natural science does not apply directly to theology, but they can be transferred 'proportionately,' so as to give humans some rational grasp of the Trinity" (Gilbert, as cited in Haring, 1966). Thierry of Chartres, in the mid-12th century, also commented on the *Opuscula*, but from the point of view of the procession of all forms from the one divine form (Thierry, as cited in Haring, 1971).

On the theoretical and practical level, the Boethian faith-reason-harmony model sets the stage for the *Opuscula*'s defence of the Church's doctrines against the heresies of the centuries. Boethius's *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium*, written around 512 AD in response to questions posed by some Oriental bishops to Pope Symmachus, was the first important Latin interpretation of the Council of Chalcedon's declaration. This treatise was unique for its clear logical counterargument to the Monophysites' and the Nestorians' positions. The document's definition of the terms involved was also remarkable. In the words of Marenbon (2012),

Boethius lived in an entirely Christian milieu. Though not a priest, he decided to use his training and talents in logic and philosophy to help resolve the doctrinal disputes about Christology and the Trinity that divided Catholics like himself in Italy from the church in Greece. (pp. 24-25)

More significantly, the terms *poesis* and *techne* were commonly used in many writings of the period. These terms found their clarifications and meaning in Boethius, as a distinction between liberal and servile, from the Latin *servilis*, from *servus*, "slave". *Episteme* or *poesis* are Greek terms most often translated as knowledge, while *techne* is translated as either craft or art. In philosophical discourse, *techne* is distinguished from *poesis* or *episteme*. Aristotle describes *episteme* as pure knowledge and *techne* as practice. *Techne* was a knowledge associated with the lower classes and practised by domestic workers. On the other hand, the upper class practised the liberal arts related to contemplation. Plato and Aristotle described a basic education in ancient philosophy consisting of a grounding in elementary grammar, music, literature, and arithmetic. This study helped pave the way for the more advanced study of mathematics and, ultimately, philosophy, whose goal was wisdom rather than servility. The difficulties in interpreting these texts made Boethius's commentaries relevant. Thus, the knowledge of these two terms came to be understood fully in Boethius's commentary. Boethius made this distinction clearer in his *De musica* by distinguishing between the theory of an art/musical composition and the practice of playing, which requires blowing the pipe, plucking the strings, and beating the drums. Here, the player is not liberal because they are bound to strictly conform to the composition's rules.

### Boethius's Impact on Modern Scholars

The study of Boethius has become more relevant in the current situation, where society has reached the point that all its dreams seem unrealised. Human rights issues, poverty, the effects of climate change, and corruption are among the major social problems facing society today. Boethius's life and works can offer us guidance, comfort, and consolation, bearing in mind that he lived in troubled times. The accusation brought against him and his cruel execution, giving the process appearance of a case concerning impiety, calls to mind the decades-old problem of corruption. Undoubtedly, today's society places a high value on financial worth, status, and power, which are the root causes of corruption. Corruption is a malign force which promotes injustice, instability, and distrust. It sows insecurity, perpetuates poverty, and denies desperately needed public services to the most vulnerable members of society. The problem of evil across different levels and states of human existence has provoked debates among scholars. The political nature of Boethius's case was obviously masked, and the ugly situation persists today. Despite the intimidation he faced, Boethius still had the courage to denounce the extensive corruption prevalent among other members of the government. It was no surprise that he became deeply unpopular among other members of the Ostrogothic court, who condemned and executed him.

Boethius's life was cut short in 523. Even at the time he was already condemned, jailed, and suffering from depression, he did not allow himself to be weighed down by the challenges of the moment. It was then that he wrote a masterpiece, *De Consolatione Philosophiae* (*The Consolation of Philosophy*)—a philosophical treatise that became a world-class literary work and one of the most influential and widely reproduced works of the Early Middle Ages. In this work, he personified philosophy as a lady and portrayed an imaginary conversation between himself and philosophy. The Lady Philosophy argued that, despite the world's seeming inequality, there is, in a Platonic sense, a higher power and that everything else is subject to that divine Providence (Boethius, 2008). Boethius tells us that something good and inspiring can come out of any situation in one's life, or from a person, regardless of who they are, where they are, or the surrounding difficulties. In his difficult moment, Boethius stopped looking at his ugly circumstance and started looking at his potential. If his life had turned out as he had planned, he would not have written *The Consolation*. Most people who have accomplished greatness have come from difficult circumstances, like Boethius. Hence, challenges and difficult moments could be productive only if we allow spirits such as the Boethian spirit to inspire us.

Again, notwithstanding the short period Boethius lived due to the political conspiracy of his time, he was able to influence the intellectual learning of his time by his works, which exercised a great influence on the development of medieval terminology, doctrine, and method, especially in logic. The classical definition of a "person" that he formulated in the third chapter of his treatise *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium* (Treatise Against Eutyches and Nestorius), the fifth of his five theological books, as "*Naturae rationalis individua substantia*" (an individual substance of a rational nature) is considered a major contribution to Trinitarian theology and Christology (Boethius, 1968, p. 1342). His theological works were used in defence of Catholic doctrines against the prevalent heresies of the time, especially those of Eutyches and Nestorius, not minding that he was not a cleric. The historical period he lived in was challenging, yet he stood firm and made his mark before finally leaving the stage.

Apart from the theological and philosophical vision Boethius's *Consolation* offers, it contains moral and spiritual wisdom for those living in contemporary society. Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* has consoled and comforted countless men and women who have found themselves in troubling times for the past 1500 years—



even Dante finds solace in it when his beloved Beatrice dies in the *Convivio*. This treatise, when read and reflected upon, could be a great source of encouragement to contemporary readers when they come to realise, at some point in their lives, how fragile and unpredictable life is. They will need the consoling wisdom of old books, like *The Consolation*, when the social sedatives and digital distractions they so often turn to for solace cease to soothe them. It could also serve as a source of consolation when the tragic nature of human existence strikes, such as when a loved one passes away unexpectedly, or in the case of undeserved loss of a job, when a spouse betrays them, when an unanticipated terminal cancer is diagnosed, or the fear of the uncontrollable global climate change. The *Consolation* will help them come to terms with themselves and their lives as they truly are. In Boethius's case, his life has been centred around the pursuit of fortune's false goods: fame, wealth, power, status, high office, honour, and pleasure. Unfortunately, his quest for these false goods ended fruitlessly. Consequently, his sadness conceals his desires that are ordered, structured, and oriented towards the One, True, and Highest Good, which is the source of his ultimate happiness. Lady Philosophy's task, therefore, was to show Boethius that he was mourning the loss of things that would not bring him happiness. She tells Boethius:

All these paths that we think may lead to happiness are false trails and cannot take us to where we want to go. And I shall demonstrate, they lead in wrong and even wicked directions. Do you want to pile up large sums of money? Where will you get it, if not from those who have it? You want honors? How will you obtain them except by begging for them from those who can bestow them, thereby becoming not the proud man you wanted to be, but a suppliant, a mendicant? You want power? You will lie awake at night worrying about your subjects' treachery. You want glory and fame? You will be the toy of vicissitude, trying to figure out the mood of the people and drawn this way and that by their fickle preferences. You want pleasure? You become the servant of your body, which you know to be both frail and base. There are those who take pride in their bodies, but why? (Boethius, 2008, p. 77)

Lady Philosopher further explains:

The human body can be beautiful, but its beauty passes like that of spring flowers. And think of Aristotle's observation that if we had the keenness of sight of Lynceus the Argonaut and could see through surfaces, the beauty even of an Alcibiades would be a disgusting heap of guts and organs. It isn't the human body, then, that is attractive, but only the weakness of human vision that makes it seem so. And anyway, however beautiful a human body may be, that beauty can be utterly destroyed in the course of a three-day fever. So, we see that all these things do not provide the happiness they promise, nor can they lead us to any kind of perfection, singly or in combination. They cannot make men happy. (Boethius, 2008, p. 78)

In addition, Lady Philosophy refuses to accept that the false goods so frequently and mistakenly pursued in place of the True Good provide even the partial happiness they promise. Her refusal to concede this point distinguishes Boethius's argument from those of his predecessors, including Plato, Aristotle, and Augustine, as well as from those of his successors. To ignore Boethius on this point is to miss *The Consolation's* unwavering spiritual advice and genuine wisdom that it has to offer its readers in the 21st century. Boethius's renunciation of the self-deception that beclouds his soul created a spiritual condition that enabled him to see himself and the world clearly in their beauty and misery and to see them truly in the light of love, the force that governs the universe. What does Boethius then tell us in the difficulties and uncertainties of our time? The uncertainties of the 21st century, like in Boethius's situation, enable us to renounce the self-deception that beclouds the real vision of ourselves and of the world and focus our souls more on the desires that are ordered, structured, and oriented towards the One, True, and Highest Good, which is the source of our ultimate happiness. Again, the prevailing situation that has proved helpless enables us to refuse to accept that the false goods so frequently and mistakenly pursued in place of the True Good provide even the partial happiness they promise. Finally, today's *Consolation*

readers should put themselves in the shoes of the prisoner, developing their knowledge of dialectical argument and progressing method from the expression of opinion to the recognition of truth.

### Conclusion

Although Aristotle and Augustine were well known and their texts helped shape the university curriculum until about 1600, no other philosophical texts could compete with Boethius's treatises in terms of their wider audience. The importance of Boethius cannot be overemphasised in history. His commentaries, texts, and *Opuscula*, including his *Consolatione*, formed the basis of academic learning from the 6th to the 13th centuries and even beyond. His writings and a positive disposition to contribute to the academic learning of his period not only supported the teachings of the Church and provoked philosophical debates but also changed the mindset of generations of scholars. Unfortunately, despite their importance, these texts no longer seem to have a broad philosophical appeal today and are now the preserve of scholarly medievalists. However, if read carefully, their hidden features and complexities can open their appeal to contemporary readers. Scholars in antiquity were as resourceful and intellectual as we are today. Their writings could act as a remedy for the modern mind's narrow-mindedness. Their texts have also shaped virtually every Western education. Even though modern readers find the medieval world in which Boethius lived strange and naive due to advances in science and technology, their works should be read and encouraged to correct the mistakes and illusions of our own period. These literatures offer new insights into the problems of the present and enlightenment to confront, bear, and hopefully transcend the current challenges, because they contain living voices from the past that are still speaking to us today. In my opinion, as Lewis's (1944) *apologia* also suggests, "old books" like the medieval texts should be read and treated more as existential exhortations than as antiquated admonitions. These texts should be brought to confront the modern-day problems because they are a "clean sea breeze of the centuries blowing through our mind" (Lewis, 1944, p. 754).

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