

BOETHIUS (480-524)

Marks the moment where the classical and the medieval come together:

- Represented that combination of civic servant and philosopher of the classical era – replaced in the Middle Ages by the theologian, with associations with the Church rather than the state.
- Works to apply classical philosophical approaches and truths to the investigation of the revealed truth of Christianity, thus mingling Classical and Medieval concerns and values – what the Renaissance Christian Humanists later would pursue.
- Significant role in the early medieval discussion of universals (Platonic, Aristotelian key writings weren't available at the time, so what he offered was very important)
- Very popular throughout the MA; from Boethius' time to the 18th century one of the most popular theological texts, among laypeople. King Alfred translated it into Old English, and Chaucer translated Boethius, as did Elizabeth I.
- Next to Augustine, Boethius was the most decisive formative influence on pre-13 c. Christian thought.
In part, because Boethius was the source the 11-12 c. had for Aristotle: Boethius translated Aristotle's logical works, offered commentary on them.

Associated in his day with:

Neoplatonism

- Roman, 3-4 c. CE, strong influence on religious thought of MA, especially via Augustine; mingled ideas of Plato and Aristotle and Stoics.

three key points, all of which we see in Boethius:

- ultimate nonmaterial nature of reality
- possibility of gaining real knowledge about the world and its basic laws
- unity, goodness, and sacredness of the universe

Stoicism

- popular 3 c. BCE-2 c. CE; prior to Boethius; praised throughout the MA, especially Seneca
three key points
 - belief in rational self-control and adherence to the laws of nature
 - based on individual's duty to preserve dignity and reason.
 - wisdom is not regretting happenings outside personal control, seeing that the whole course of nature follows Providence.

Boethius was also influential to MA because of his appeal to the medieval Scholastic thinkers:

Scholasticism flourished in MA, following Boethius and particularly after the opening of the universities in 12c (Bologna, Paris, Oxford), from which the name comes

- Especially important was the flood of new Latin translations of classical philosophers, including all of Aristotle, made from Greek and Arabic, 1150-1200. This was assimilated by the universities in the 13c.
- Fundamental principle was rational consistency with the Christian faith as taught in Scripture and as understood by the living Church of Rome through the writings of Latin and Greek Fathers.
- As Augustine said, “Understand so you may believe, believe so you may understand”
- Based on close, detailed reading (*lectio*) of a given text and the open discussion (*disputatio*) in strict logical form of a relevant question (*quaestio*) arising from the text.
- Urged use of dialectics in examining Christian doctrine.
- Basic philosophy was Aristotelian, because the greatest books in philosophy were believed to be his.
- Flourished to the 16c, with its Golden Age in the 13c: Dominican and Franciscan schools; Thomas Aquinas, especially, but also William of Occam (14c.) and Duns Scotus.
- Followed Boethius’ application of methods of philosophy to religious truths: his treatises formed the foundation for their logical doctrines; they borrowed his use of technical philosophic terms for the solution of theological issues, his rigorous demonstrations, and his distinction between faith and reason.
- While Boethius never refers directly to scripture or any Christian writings, he does draw freely on Aristotelian and Stoic teachings.

CONSOLATION OF PHILOSOPHY

Generic medley:

- The consolation was a philosophical genre by this point, a “moral medication,” a cure for a particular woe – hence the image of Lady Philosophy as doctor.
- Imitates as well the dialectic of the Platonic dialogue – but in the form of a sacred dialogue, so that Socrates is replaced by a divine figure, Lady Philosophy.
- Menippean satire form: alternating prose with verse

Some points about the text to bear in mind:

- This allegorical depiction of Lady Philosophy represents the medieval fascination with allegorical manifestations of abstractions, such as Dame Nature in *Parliament of Fowls* and the Seven Deadly Sins, who made regular appearances (as in *Piers Plowman*).
- In Book I, section VI, we get to the Socratic pursuit of logical conclusions: First, through the belief that all is guided by reason, and then by looking at the purpose, the end result, the goal to which everything is guided (teleology) – as well as the source of being or existence (ontology).
- The Wheel of Fortune is not original to Boethius but it was certainly popularized for the MA by him. Indeed, the wheel itself represents the medieval notion of tragedy

- True happiness is that which makes one self-sufficient, strong, worthy of respect, glorious and joyful. The supreme, perfect good IS true happiness; God is to the highest degree (there is none superior) infused with supreme and perfect goodness; so true happiness/good is—can only be— found in God.
- It's all a matter of perspective, of interpretation, of adjusting one's values.
- Providence (divine reason itself) is the plan of the progress of things subject to change, their causes, their order and form received from the unchanging mind of God, which includes all things at the same time.
- Fate, then, is that very plan, as thought of with reference to all things, whose motion and order Providence controls; it is the planned order, the medium through which Providence binds all. It controls the motion of different things in different times and places. Fate is that which is coming into being, while Providence is that which is.
- As a whole, it is Providence, considered in God's mind; when dissolved, unfolding in time, it's Fate. Because humans are stuck in time, in place, they cannot contemplate this larger order.
- Boethius raises idea of chance, and Lady Philosophy says chance exists not in the usual sense of random events, but rather only if it refers to something done for a purpose (from Aristotle) and yet for certain reasons something other than what was intended happens. What results is not mere chance in the usual sense but the fruition of two distinct events, each with its own cause, in conjunction.
- God is eternal, and his knowledge transcends temporal change and abides in his presence; he sees all things as if they are happening in the eternal present, for all is present to him; he is not trapped in time the way humans are, so his knowledge is not FOREknowledge.
- It boils down to a matter of perspective, as in Providence v. Fate: in reference to God's sight of them, events happen necessarily as a result of the condition of divine knowledge; seen in themselves, they do not lose the absolute freedom that is their nature.