Boethius on time, eternity, providence and philosophy as a way of life

Born sometime between 475 and 480, Boethius made it his life's work to provide the Latin-speaking world with complete access to Greek philosophical instruction. To do so, he set out to do nothing less than translate into Latin and comment upon all of Aristotle and Plato. He was not able to complete this plan, however, partly because he got sidetracked into writing a number of other important treatises, on music, astronomy, geometry, and theological issues, and partly because his life was cut short when he was accused of treason in 524 under the reign of Theodoric[1], thrown in jail and condemned to death[2]. It seems to have been in prison, or perhaps merely under house arrest[3], that Boethius wrote his most famous work, the *Consolation of Philosophy*. Here, following an ancient philosophical and literary tradition, he mobilized the resources of philosophy to provide comfort for someone in a difficult position. Yet this consolation was addressed not to a friend, acquaintance or family member, but to himself[4]. Unlike most of the Greco-Roman tradition of consolation, however, Boethius' *Consolation* is staged as a dialogue, written in prose interspersed with verse, between the imprisoned Narrator — Boethius himself — and a female personnification of Philosophy.

Few ancient works have been subject to such divergent modern interpretations. Although its title and content seem to place it squarely within the literary genre of the consolation[5], some influential commentators have claimed that the *Consolation of Philosophy*

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[1] In 493, Theodoric defeated the Herulian Odoacer – who had deposed the last Roman Emperor Romulus Augustulus in 476 – and established himself as ruler over Ravenna. Under Theodoric's reign, Boethius became consul in 510, then magister officiorum in 522.

[2] More specifically, he came to the defense of the senator Albinus, accused of treason in 524 for corresponding with the Byzantine emperor Justin. Boethius seems to have been tried and convicted *in absentia* at Rome, perhaps on the basis of forged letters, and executed, perhaps by being clubbed to death, in Pavia; cf. Tränkle 1973.

[3] Scheible, for instance (1971, 3), doubts that such a work could have been completed without access to a library.

[4] This was not unheard-of in the Greco-Roman tradition of consolations; cf. Gruber 178, 27; Erler 1999, 116; Chadwick 1981, 224; Bechtle 2006, 267.

[5] I adopt Donato's definition of a consolation as "a text that (i) manifests the author's awareness that language has therapeutic power and (ii) tries to heal by employing whatever argument, register of language, or linguistic device the author deems appropriate for the case at hand". Donato's work, valuable for its analyses of the first part of the *Consolation* and for its account of the history of consolation as a literary genre, virtually ignores the contemporary philosophical context and must therefore be supplemented by the works of Baltes, Erler, and Beierwaltes. In particular, Donato's denial (p. 14 n. 49) of the relevance of the doctrine of

is fact a parody of a consolation[6]. In particular, the philosophical arguments of the work's second half are held to be deliberately feeble, in order that the reader may conclude that philosophy is ultimately unable to provide consolation[7]. I believe that this viewpoint is profoundly wrong-headed, and based on inadequate knowledge of the literary genre of the consolation and, above all, of the nature and structure of the Neoplatonic philosophical curriculum at the end of Antiquity. In what follows I'll argue that Boethius' *Consolation* is an excellent example of the ancient conception of philosophy as therapy for the soul: as such, it uses both rhetorical techniques and rational arguments in a way that echoes the progressive nature of the Neoplatonic philosophical curriculum. In the second part of this paper, I'll discuss the three main arguments Boethius uses to try to resolve the apparent conflict between divine prescence and human free will, paying particular attention to the way he mobilizes Neoplatonic definitions of time and eternity.

1. Boethius on philosophy as therapy

That philosophy was often considered as capable of providing therapy for the soul has been pointed out in a number of important publications[8]. This was especially true of the Hellenistic period, in which the various Schools concentrated their attention on teaching students how to achieve happiness during their earthly existence. It has been argued that in Neoplatonism, the emphasis shifts from this world to the next, in that the main concern is henceforth how to ensure the soul's flight from the sensible and return to its intelligible homeland[9]. Far from being discarded, however, the Hellenistic teaching on how to ensure terrestrial happiness, including the notion of philosophy as therapy of the soul, were preserved, but relegated to the status of a preliminary ethical instruction to be administered to students before they embarked on the properly philosophical study of Aristotle and Plato.

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anamnêsis is, I believe, quite mistaken; cf. e.g. Schmidt-Kohl 1965, 18ff, citing Cons. 3.c.11.15-16.

[6] From a formal viewpoint, the *Consolation's* mixture of poetry and prose is held to be more characteristic of Menippean satire, while its various parts seem so different that some have thought the work was a clumsy combination of two or three quite different sources.

[7] Most influentially, this is the view of John Marenbon (2003a, 146-163; 2003b; 2005). See also Relihan 2007, and the critical discussion of these views in Donato 2012.

[8] Cf. Voelke 1993; P. Hadot 1995; and the literature cited by Druart 2000, 25.

[9] Erler 1999; cf. Theiler 1964.

In the Neoplatonic schools of Boethius' time[10], students began by receiving a pre-philosophical ethical training, based on such works as the Pythagorean *Golden Verses*, the *Manual* of Epictetus[11], or the speeches of Isocrates and Demosthenes. Only after completing this training did they advance to the study of logic, in the form of Porphyry's *Isagoge*, followed by Aristotle's *Organon* in the order in which we read it today. The student then moved on to what was sometimes called the "Lesser Mysteries" of philosophy, viz. Aristotle's works on physics and psychology (*De Caelo*, *Physics*, *De anima*), culminating in his *Metaphysics*, before moving on to the "Greater Mysteries" in the form of a selection of Plato's *Dialogues*, culminating in the *Timaeus* and, as the ultimate metaphysical revelation, the *Parmenides*.

Boethius' *Consolation* contains, as it were, an illustration of this Neoplatonic philosophical curriculum in action. In the person of the Narrator, who, although he is a philosopher, has forgotten almost all he learned as result of his personal misfortunes[12], we have an example of a philosophical beginner who must first be purified of his mistaken beliefs and the consequent emotions of bitterness, self-pity, lethargy and despair. The fact that he is a professional philosopher, however, allows Philosophy to give him an accelerated course, as it were, and introduce him, after he has begun to recall his philosophical knowledge by the middle of the book, to some of the more difficult and advanced questions of metaphysics, culminating in the discussion of the relation between divine omniscience and human free will. It is likely that the *Consolation* as we have it is incomplete, and that the missing final part would have described the Narrator's ultimate philosophical liberation, consisting in his return to the intelligible Fatherland and/or the vision of God in which, for Boethius as for Augustine, ultimate happiness consists[13].

Following an ancient philosophical tradition, Philosophy begins her therapy with easier, more elementary philosophical remedies before moving on to more heavy-duty and difficult philosophical considerations[14]. The work's first part corresponds to what's been called

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[10] On this curriculum, see I. Hadot *et al*., 1990.

[11] The first part of Simplicius' commentary on this work, like the first part of the *Consolation*, is devoted mastering one's emotions; cf. I. Hadot 1996; Erler 1999, 114-115.

[12] In the words of Druart (2000, 26), he is "a slightly disabled learner" of philosophy.

[13] On the incomplete nature of the *Consolation* as we have it, cf. Tränkle 1977; Baltes 1980, 333ff. Contra: Lerer 1985, 232ff. On happiness in Augustine, cf. Beierwaltes 1981.

[14] Donato 2012, 28, citing Cons. 1.5.11-12; 1.6.21; 2.1.7-9; 2.3.4; 3.1.4. As Druart points out (2000), the same distinction between lighter/easier and weightier/more difficult remedies is to be found in al-Kindī's *Art of dispelling sorrows*.

a "praeparatio platonica"[15], in which philosophical *topoi* culled from a variety of philosophical schools[16], usually the form of brief, easily memorizable sayings, are used to provide a preliminary ethical purification before the student, in this case, Boethius as Narrator, is ready to be initiated into more difficult philosophical arguments. In the book's second half, then, Philosophia uses a combination of arguments that are by no means lacking in rigor or persuasiveness, in order to come up with a solution to the age-old problem of the apparent conflict between human free will and divine omniscience that is as philosophically respectable as any that have been suggested. It is, moreover, a solution that receives some support from the findings of contemporary physics.

The work begins with the Narrator[17] complaining to Philosophy about the main cause of his suffering: his loss of his freedom, possessions, and good name, and the injustice of a world in which evil men are allowed to prosper, while good men – here of course the Narrator is thinking primarily of himself —are forced to submit to all kinds of undeserved indignities, from loss of possessions and honors to exile, imprisonment and even death. The Narrator asserts that he has no doubt that the world and all the events that occur within it are governed by God and His divine Providence[18], but this apparent triumph of injustice almost makes him doubt the goodness of the divine economy.

The Narrator must be cured of this wallowing in self-pity, which has led him to forget himself[19]. Thus, after he has been allowed to unburden himself by complaining about his problems, Philosophy begins the process of consolation which will restore him to the

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[15] Erler 1999.

[16] On this "paraenetic eclecticism" (P. Hadot 1995, 124), cf. I. Hadot 1969, 3 n. 18; 21 n. 71; 44; 54 n. 86; 82-83.

[17] I will henceforth describe the personage who recounts the Consolation in the first person singular as "the Narrator", in order to distinguish this literary persona from the historical Boethius.

[18] This knowledge is the sign that the Narrator still retains a *scintillula* of the divine knowledge he enjoyed as a pre-incarnate soul, and which will allow him, by means of the *redux ignis*/ *anagôgos erôs*, to rise back up out of his current fallen state toward the intelligible, and then the *summum bonum* (*Cons*. I.6.3-20; cf. Baltes 1980, 326), homeland of the soul.

[19] Cf. I.2.6; I.6. 18 (*oblivio sui*); Baltes 1980, 325. This is almost certainly the meaning of Philosophy's brusque dismissal of the Muses, who have been inspiring the elegiac poem in which Boethius pours forth his sorrows.

philosophical knowledge he had once acquired but now, under the stress of prison and imminent death, has forgotten[20].

For a Neoplatonist, this forgetfulness is crucial. While the soul's initial descent into the body is not generally considered a misfortune or a sin[21], its involvement with the material world and consequent subjection to the passions, which lead it to forget its divine origin, is held to be morally culpable as well as disastrous. Only by turning within[22] can the soul remember its divine origin and thus begin the arduous upward path back to its intelligible homeland.

2. Boethius and the Neoplatonic theory of innate ideas

The background here is the Neoplatonic doctrine according to which the pre-existent soul enjoys contemplation of the intelligible world as it accompanies the chariots of the gods in their journies around the *hyperouranios topos* (*Phaedrus* 247a)[23], but then becomes dissatisfied and turns its attention toward the lower regions of matter and the sensible world. In the instant it does so, the soul is provided with a vessel (Greek *okhêma*[24]) made of a pneumatic substance intermediate between air and fire, which allows it to be transported through the celestial spheres[25] and also serves, during its earthly existence, as the intermediary between soul and body. Finally, when the soul reaches earth it is "sown" within a body (in caelum terramque seris, *ibid*.), which, owing to the darkness and heaviness it derives from matter, obstructs the soul's memory, so that it can no longer recall the visions of the intelligible world it enjoyed prior to its incarnation, nor can it perceive order in the world

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[20] Cf. 1.2.3-5; 1.6.7-20; 3c.12; 4.1, etc., Donato 2012, 14.

[21] Cf. Theiler 1966, 289ff, citing especially Synesius, *De insomniis*, 8, 3, vol 1, p. 283 Lamoueux/Aujoulat; Pfligersdorffer 1976, 141.

[22] On the importance of self-knowledge, cf. Theiler 1966 217f.; P. Hadot 1968, I, p. 91 n. 1; Simplicius, *In EE*, 30, p. 302, 32ff. ed. I. Hadot (1996): τὸ Γνῶθι σαυτὸν τοῦ θεοῦ παράγγελμα ... ὃ καὶ ἀρχὴ καὶ τέλος πάσης ἐστὶ φιλοσοφίας καὶ εὐζωΐας. Cf. Ambrose, *De Isaac*, 4, 11 (perhaps following Porphyry, cf. Dörrie 1964): ea [sc. anima] insurgens de corpore ab omnibus fit remotior atque intra semet ipsam divinum illud, si qua insequi possit, scrutatur et quaerit.

[23] The seat of God, according to Boethius (Cons.4.c.1.16ff.; 3c.2.17f).

[24] Cf. Boethius, *Cons*. 3.c9: levibus curribus; Ambrose, *De Isaac* 8, 67: currilia illa animarum.

[25] In Porphyry's version of this theory, which was common to Gnosticism, Hermetism and the *Chaldaean Oracles*, the soul acquires specific features of its character in each of the plentary spheres. Cf. Chase 2004.

(5.c3.8ff.)[26]. Yet all is not lost: although it is buried deep within the body, the soul retains a spark of divine fire or light, which Boethius refers to as the *semen veri* (3.c11.11); *redux ignis*, or *scintillula animae* (I.6.20)[27]. This spark needs only to be revived by means of teaching, as if by blowing air on warm ashes (*uentilante doctrina* 3.c11.11-12).

This inner spark of truth (*semen veri*), which Boethius describes as our inner fortress (4.c3.33ff.), and to which the sage withdraws in times of trouble, constitutes the center of man and of the soul (4.c3.34ff; 3.c11.11-14). It is the locus of happiness (2.4.22), our proper good (2.5.24), truth (3.c11.1ff.; 5.c3.20f.; 5.c4.24ff.), freedom (2.6.7), peace, and security (2.c4.19f.; 2.6.7). As the obligatory starting-point for our metaphysical ascent back to the source of our being, it represents our unbroken link with the intelligible world.

The question of how we can remain in contact with the intelligible even in the state is which the soul is incarnated in a terrestrial body was one that always preoccupied Neoplatonists. Plotinus solved it by his doctrine of the undescended part of the soul: although our lower or vegetative soul, seat of such psychological faculties as sensation, representation, memory, and discursive thought, comes down from the intelligible world at the moment of incarnation and is thenceforth present throughout the body, the higher part of the soul, intellect (*nous*) or intuitive thought, always remains above in the intelligible world (cf. *Enneads* 9 (VI, 9), 5, 7-9)[28].

Plotinus' successors almost unanimously rejected this view, and to replace it Plotinus' student Porphyry seems to have reactivated the Stoic doctrine of innate ideas as modified by Antiochus of Ascalon and later by the *Chaldaean Oracles*. A good summary of this doctrine

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[26] The Neoplatonists often symbolize this state of forgetfulness by speaking of the drink of forgetfulness offered to souls as they enter the material world; cf. Theiler 1966, 289f. This forgetfulness is made worse, during the soul's terrestrial existence, by the "twin founts" of pleasure and pain: cf. Synesius *Hymn* I, 658f. ἰδίων τ' ἀγαθῶν ἔπιεν λάθαν; Porphyry, *De abstinentia* I, 33: δύο πηγαὶ ἀνεῖνται πρὸς δεσμὸν τῆς ψυχῆς ἐνταῦθα, ἐξ ὧν ὥσπερ θανασίμων πωμάτων ἐμπιμπλαμένη ἐν λήθῃ τῶν οἰκείων γίγνεται θεαμάτων, ἡδονή τε καὶ λύπη.

[27] Cf. Augustine, *Contra acad*. 1.3; *De ord*. 1.1.3; *De trin*., 10.3.5: An aliquem finem optimum, id est securitatem et beatitudinem suam, uidet *per quandam occultam memoriam* quae in longinqua eam progressam non deseruit, et credit ad eundem finem nisi se ipsam cognouerit se peruenire non posse? Cf. Porphyry, *On abstinence*, 3.27.

[28] On this doctrine, cf. Sorabji 2004, vol. 1, 3(e), 93ff.

is provided by a work ascribed to Boethius but now usually considered pseudonymous, the *De diis et Praesensionibus* (Text 1)[29].

In post-Porphyrian Neoplatonism, it is this divine spark or inner seed[30] that provides the link between the fallen, incarnate human soul and the intelligible world. In Proclus, it develops into the doctrine of the "One within us", which is itself a development of the Chaldaean concept of the "flower of the intellect" (*anthos noou*), a faculty of the soul that allows contact with the ineffable[31].

In the *Consolation*, therefore, Philosophy will attempt to fan the smothered spark of the Narrator's soul, reviving his memories of his pre-incarnate intellectual visions by words which, to quote Simplicius (Text 2), "uttered forth from the [teacher's] concept (*ennoia*), also move the concept within [the soul of the student], which had until then grown cold"[32].

After the introductory first book, Philosophy's consolation takes place in three stages from books 2-5[33].

1. in Cons. 2.1-4, the Narrator's soul is purifed of its false beliefs.

2. Stage two has two further subdivisions. In the first (Cons. 2.5-8), the Narrator's innate natural concepts are awakened and brought to light; while in the second (Cons. 3.1-8), these concepts are purified and made to appear as starting-points for further progress.

3. Finally, from Cons. 3.9 to the end of the work, the Narrator learns the doctrines which are to perfect his soul.

3. Boethius on Providence and Fate

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[29] Stangl (1893) declared the work to have been written as a completion of Boethius' lacunary *Commentary on Cicero's Topics*, probably in the first half of the twelfth century. I know of no more recent study of the *De diis et Praesensionibus*.

[30] Cf. Synesius, *De Insomniis* 4, 40 (*endothen sperma*) Dion 9, 16.

[31] On this doctrine, see, for instance, Gersh 1978 119-121, with further literature; Beierwaltes 1985, 275f.

[32] Cf. Hoffmann 1987.

[33] Baltes 1980, 326-327, who shows the parallel to the scheme utilized in the *Didaskalikos* of Alcinoos (2nd-3rd cent. CE). For an alternative analysis, cf. Courcelle 1943, 280: 1. in book two, Boethius is brought back to the self-knowledge of which he'd been temporarily deprived; 2. from book three to halfway through book four, he is reminded of the proper end of things. Finally, 3. from the last part of Book four to the end of Book five, he is informed of the nature of the laws that govern the world.

Throughout the first four books of the *Consolation*, Philosophy uses a mixture of rhetorical persuasion and philosophical *topoi*[34] to console the Narrator and reassure him that despite appearances to the contrary, there really is a benevolent, divine Providence behind the apparent injustices of life's events. Yet the problem of the suffering of the just and the flourishing of the unjust[35] has not yet been solved. Beginning with the second half of book IV, therefore, Philosophy discusses the themes of providence, fate, and free will. An initial distinction is to be made between providence and fate: Providence, characterized by simplicity and simultaneity, is the plan in the divine mind that embraces everything at once, while fate is the way in which that plan unfolds in the sensible world, subject as it to time and space. Providence is to fate and being is to becoming[36]. Like spheres[37] rotating around a pivot, where the central sphere approaches the simplicity of the center and acts as a pivot for the rest, while those farthest away from the center sweep out greater distances, so the closer beings are to the simple center of providence, the more they are removed from the intricate chains of fate. For Boethius, the main goal of this image seems to be to emphaisize that while all things subject to Fate are also subject to Providence, the reverse does not hold true. Fate is characteristic only of the spatio-temporal world, so that the possibility remains open to mankind, by rising up to the level of Intellect, to free himself from Fate[38].

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[34] Philosophy's consolatory *topoi* include a discussion of the nature of Fortuna; the ordinary, unsurprising nature of what is happening to him; a reminder of his previous successes and honors; and the ultimate insignificance of such honors. Cf. Donato 2012.

[35] A question that is discussed as the sixth of Proclus' *Ten problems concerning Providence*.

[36] Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* 3.3, 5.14-25 = Sorabji 2004 4b1; Proclus, *On Providence*, 10, 13-14 = Sorabji 2004 4b5; Sharples 1991, 29-31.

[37] Boethius Cons. 4.6.15: Nam ut orbium circa eundem cardinem sese vertentium etc. Guillaumin (2002, 172, 64) is categorical: "Il s'agit bien de «cercles», *orbes*, et non pas de sphères". Yet when Boethius quotes Parmenides (Cons. 3.12.37: "sicut ... Parmenides ait ... rerum *orbem* mobilem rotat"), he clearly renders the Greek σφαῖρα by *orbis*. As far as 4.16.15 is concerned, modern translators seem virtually unanimous: Lazam (1989) and Vanpeteghem (2005) translate *orbium* by "cercles", Moreschini (1994) by "circonferenze", Chitussi (2010) and Dallera (1977) by "cerchi", Gegenschatz/Gigon by "Kreise". It is also true that Boethius' closest immediate model, Proclus, *Ten doubts concerning providence*, 5, 23ff., speaks of a *kuklos*. Yet I believe Boethius has deliberately modified his Greek model and chosen to speak of spheres: only spheres, not circles, rotate around an axis (*cardo*).

[38] Liberation from fate was a main goal of Hellenistic religion and philosophy

In fact, we having the following analogies[39]:

under jurisdiction of *prouidentia*		under jurisdiction of *fatum*
center	:	sphere
being	:	becoming
eternity	:	time[40]
providence	:	fate
intellect	:	reason

In each of these cases, the items listed in the right-hand column can be viewed as an unfolding, development or emanation of the items in the column on the left; viewed in another way, the left-hand column represents a condensed version of the right-hand column.

We have here a kind of résumé of the late Neoplatonic doctrine of emanation. Entities are conceived as existing in concentrated, unextended, point-like form in the intelligible world, before being "unwound" like a ball of thread, "unrolled" like a carpet, or "unfolded" like a sheet of papyrus, into the temporally and spatially extended form they assume in the sensible world[41].

4.Boethius on predestination and free will.

4.1, Aristotle on future contingents

[39] Boethius, Cons. 4.6.15-17; cf. Bächli 2001, 22; Bechtle 2006, 271.

[40] On the relations between being and eternity on the one hand, and time and the sensible world on the other, cf. for instance Proclus, *In Tim*., 3.28.11-14.

[41] For Proclus (*In Parm*. 1217, 17f.; *In Tim*., 3.26.23f.; 43, 17), primary time, which he calls first (*prôtistos*), absolute (*apolutos*), and without relation (*askhetos*), remains itself immobile, before it develops (*anelittôn*) into the time that is counted. For Simplicius, *In Phys*., p. 1155, 15f. Diels, time and temporal things "unwind (*ekmêruetai*) their integrality in accordance with motion and coming-into-being", cf. Damascius *De princ*. I, 4, 23; 141, 25; 158, 7; 164, 15; 214, 17; 282, 23; *In Parm*., 89, 5-13; 151, 28; *On time, space, and number*, quoted by Simplicius in his *Corollarium de tempore*, *In Phys*., 9, p. 780, 30 Diels. In addition to *ekmêruô*, other Neoplatonic terms designating this process include *anelittô*/*anelixis*; *anaptussô*/*anaptuxis*. Cf. Boethius, Cons. 4.6., where providence is defined as temporalis ordinis *explicatio*.

The Narrator now finds himself confronted by a question similar to the one that arises in the case of contemporary block time theory. If the entire future course of events is already laid out and already "exists" in a sense that is arguably just as strong as the sense in which the past and present exist, the problem arises of what becomes of human free will. If there is to be free will, we usually think that what seem to us to be our freely chosen decisions must have some causal efficacy: they must make a difference in the world, and if we had chosen to take some decisions other than the ones we actually did, we believe that the world would have turned out differently, to however slight an extent. Yet if the future *already* exists, how could our future decisions possibly change it? Similarly, says the Narrator, if God is omniscient, He knows everything that will happen, including the thoughts, desires, inclinations and decisions of my own mind. If he knows *already*, for instance, that I will get up at 8:AM tomorrow, how could I be free to choose to sleep until noon?

This is, of course, a version of the famous problem of future contingents, set forth most influentially by Aristotle in ch. 9 of his *De interpretatione*. Aristotle's argument goes something like this: all assertoric statements are either true or false. But if we apply this universally valid principle to the case of individual future events, that means that the statement "There will be a sea-battle tomorrow", is also true or false right now. If that statement is true now, however, then it seems to be *necessarily* true that there will be a sea-battle tomorrow; while if the statement is *false* now, then it seems to be *impossible* for there to be a sea-battle tomorrow. In either case, there is no room for chance here – everything is pre-determined or fore-ordained – and therefore none for free will. The occurrence or non-occurrence of the sea-battle tomorrow is already predetermined, and there's nothing we can do about it. Aristotle solves the problem, at least to his own satisfaction, by stating that while it is necessary now that either (p) there will be a sea-battle tomorrow or (~pb) there will not be a sea battle tomorrow, i.e. in modern logical notation

$$N (p \vee \sim p)$$

Yet it is not the case that it is necessary now that (p) be true, and it is also not necessary that (~p) be true, i.e.

$$\sim(Np) \wedge \sim(N\sim p)$$

Mountains of books have, of course, been written on this chapter of Aristotle's *De interpretatio*ne[42]. In Antiquity, the Stoics accepted that the proposition 'there will be a sea-battle tomorrow' is true today, so that occurrence/non-occurrence of the sea-battle is already fixed now, while Epicurus maintained the statement is neither true nor false. Against these and other views, Boethius, following Ammonius, will argue that statements about future contingents are true or false, but are so indefinitely (Greek *aoristôs*)[43].

4.2. Boethius on divine omniscience vs. human free will

To solve the conflict between divine omniscience and human free will, Boethius will, the final book of the *Consolation*, make use of three principles, all of which he takes from earlier or contemporary Greek philosophy, although it can be argued that his own particular way of combining them makes his solution original and distinct. These are

1. The distinction between absolute and conditional necessity;

2. The principle that the nature of knowledge is determined by the nature of the knower, rather than by the nature of the thing known[44]; and finally

3. The notion that all of time is present to God is as the present is to us; in other words, that God experiences all of time, past, present, and future, simultaneously, or that God lives in an eternal present.

Let's go over Boethius' three principles in order.

4.2.1. The distinction between absolute and conditional necessity[45]

Boethius distinguishes between two kinds of necessity[46]. Absolute necessity is that which is involved in statements like "the sun will rise tomorrow" or "all living beings have a heart", or "all men are mortal": they are true independently of any condition, such as when

[42] For contemporary interpretations, see Gaskin 1995, Blank *et al*. 1998, Seel 2001.

[43] Sharples 2009, 211.

[44] Scholars refer to this as either the Iamblichus principle or the Modes of Cognition principle. Cf. Ammon. In DA 135.14-137.1 = Sorabji 2004 3a10; Huber 1976, 40ff.

[45] Cf. Obertello 1989, 95ff.; Weidemann 1998; Bechtle 2006, 274f.

[46] Weidemann 1998 has, I believe, convincingly refuted the idea (Sorabji 1980, 122) that Boethius' distinction between simple and conditional necessity amounts to the distinction between necessitas consequentiae and necessity consequentis.

they are uttered or who utters them. Other propositions are true with only conditional necessity: "Socrates is sitting down", for instance, or "Plato is going for a walk" is necessarily true while (and only while) Socrates is in fact sitting down and Plato is in fact going for a walk. The same is true for phenomena like chariot races: the drivers' skillful maneuvers are necessary while I am observing them, but they were not necessary beforehand, since they are the result of the drivers' free will.

This argument is in fact based on an adaptation of the Aristotelian definition of knowledge: if I *know* something, then the object of my knowledge *necessarily*[47] is the way I know it to be, simply because that's the way knowledge (Greek *epistêmê*, Latin *scientia*, Arabic *'ilm*) is defined - at least in one of its many Aristotelian senses[48].

Another Aristotelian text that is important in this regard is this one from the *De interpretatione* (19a23-6):

> That what is is when it is, and what is not is not when it is not, is necessary[49].

For Aristotle, of course, there can be *epistêmê* in this strict sense, the sense, that is, in which such knowledge is always true (APo II, 19, 100b18), only of universals[50]. Indeed, the reason why knowledge is bereft of falsehood is that it is *necessary* for things to be in the way knowledge understands them to be[51].

The reason this distinction is important is as follows: the Narrator reasons that (1) necessarily, if an event p will happen, then God foresees it (N(p⟶F(G, p)); and (2)

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[47] As Weidemann points out (1998, 198), Boethius's addition of the modal operator "necessarily" transforms Arist.'s consequentiality relation of *being* into a consequentiality relation of *necessity*.

[48] "It is impossible for that of which there is knowledge in the absolute sense to be otherwise <than it is>," says Aristotle in the *Posterior Analytic*s (I, 2 71b9-15), which led Thomas Waitz to comment (II, 302) that "veram scientiam non darsi nisi eorum quae aeterna sint nec umquam mutentur".

[49] Τὸ μὲν οὖν εἶναι τὸ ὂν ὅταν ᾖ, καὶ τὸ μὴ ὂν μὴ εἶναι ὅταν μὴ ᾖ, ἀνάγκη.

[50] Cf. *Metaph*. K. 1. 1059b26; 2, 1060b20; B 6 1003a15; M 9 1086b5.10; 1086b 33; *Anal. pr*. 31 87b33, *De an*. 2.5417b23; *EN* 7, 6, 1140b31; 1180b15. This is perhaps why the Narrator begins by speaking not of knowledge but of opinion, only to slip into talking about knowledge by virtue of the (Platonic!) equivalence true opinion = knowledge

[51] Cf. Cons. 5.3.21: Ea namque causa est cur mendacio scientia careat, quod se ita rem quamque habere necesse est uti eam sese habere scientia comprehendit.

necessarily, if God foresees p, it will happen (N(F(G, p)⟶p)). Note that the necessity here bears upon the entire implication: it is a *necessitas consequentiae*. It has been argued[52] that Boethius now makes a simple logical mistake, inferring from (1) and (2) that (3) if p, then necessarily God foresees P (p⟶NF(G, p), and (4) if God foresees p, then necessarily p (F(G, p)⟶Np), where in both the latter cases the necessity bears upon the consequent (*necessitas consequentis*).

I believe this analysis is mistaken. Boethius does believe both 3) and 4) are true, but they are true only *conditionally*, where the condition is God's knowledge. In other words, the necessity imposed by God's knowledge of a future event is of the same kind as that which necessitates that Socrates be sitting when I know he is sitting: such conditional necessity imposes no constraint upon Socrates, but simply concerns the nature of knowledge[53]. As Boethius will claim, such future events can be said to be necessary with regard to God's knowledge but free with regard to their own nature.

These considerations go some way toward explaining the key point of how God can know future events, which are by their nature indeterminate, in a determinate way. The reason why this seems counter-intuitive to us is that we believe there can only be knowledge of things that are certain, so that if God has certain knowledge of future events they must aleady be decided. Yet this view presupposes at least two assumptions: that knowledge is determined by its object, and that God's knowledge of the future is like ours. Boethius's additional two principles will attempt to undermine both these assumptions.

4.2.2. The principle that the nature of knowledge is determined by the nature of the knower.

Like his opponents the Stoics, the great Peripatetic philosopher Alexander of Aphrodisias had considered it axiomatic that modes of knowledge are conditioned by the

[52] Graeser 1992; Marenbon 2003a, 533ff.

[53] In the words of Bächli 2001, it is an “epistemological necessity”.

objects of their knowledge[54]. In the case of future contingents, it follows from this principle that the gods can possess only an open, uncertain, or indeterminate knowledge of future events, which are by their nature open, uncertain, and indeterminate. The Middle Platonists and Chalcidius agreed that God or the gods can have only a contingent knowledge of what is contingent[55].

According to such Neoplatonists as Proclus and Ammonius, the most immediate influences on Boethius[56], it is because we assume that the gods' knowledge is like ours that we end up with either the Stoic view that everything is determined in advance, or the Peripatetic view that providence extends only as far as the sphere of the moon. According to Ammonius, since all things are present to the gods in an eternal now[57], their providence, like their creative activity, is exercised without the change implied by ratiocination or deliberation, but by their very being (*autôi tôi einai*). Since their own nature is determinate, they know all things, including future contingents, in a determinate way. Boethius, then, following his Greek sources, concludes that "all that is known is comprehended not according to its power, but rather according to the faculty of the knowers"[58].

4.2.3. The notion that God lives in an eternal present

Now that it has been established that knowledge is determined by the knower, Boethius moves on to deducing God's mode of cognition from His nature. Here we come to Boethius' definition of eternity, perhaps the most famous and influential ever formulated in the Western tradition: Eternity is the perfect possession, all at once, of unlimited life (Text

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[54] Huber 1976, 13f., citing Alexander, *De Fato*, 200, 15ff.

[55] Porphyry also seems to have held this view in his lost *Commentary on the Timaeus*, if we can trust the testimony of Proclus, *In Tim*. I, 352, 11-13 = fr. XLV Sodano. Yet this testimony seems hard to reconcile with such indisputably Porphyrian works as *Sentence* 33, which implies that the ontological status of the knower determines its knowledge, and *Sentence* 10 (cf. Hankey 2001, 128). There seem to be two options: either Proclus is distorting Porphyry's view, or Porphyry's *Commentary on the Timaeus* is an early work, written prior to Porphyry's studies under Plotinus. Chalcidius seems to rely on Porphyry's Commentary; cf. De Boeft 1970, 146.

[56] Cf. Proclus, *De decem dubitationibus*, 7; De prov., 64, 1-4 Ammonius, *In de interpretatione*, 132, 6ff.; 135, 16-19

[57] Ammon., *In De int*., p. 133, 25: ἀλλὰ πάντα παρ' αὐτοῖς ἐν ἑνὶ τῷ νῦν ἐστι τῷ αἰωνίῳ ἱδρυμένα.

[58] Boethius, Cons. 5.4.25; cf. 5.4.38; Huber 1976, 40ff.

3)[59]. This definition can be better understood, Philosophy claims, by comparison with temporal things: whatever lives in the present proceeds, when it is present, from the past to the future, and nothing constituted within time can equally embrace the complete extent of its life. Temporal beings cannot yet apprehend the future, while they have already lost the past. Even in today's life, Philosophy continues, you mortals live in no more than that mobile, transitory moment. Whatever is subject to time, even if, as Aristotle thought was true of the world, it never begins nor ends, should not be called eternal, for its does not embrace all at once the extent of its life, albeit infinite: it doesn't yet possess the future, and it no longer possesses the past. What does deserve to be called eternal is what comprehends and possesses the entire fulness of unlimited life, lacking nothing future nor past: in full possession of itself, it must always both remain present to itself, and have present to itself the infinity of mobile time. People are wrong to conclude from Plato's statements that this world had neither beginning nor end that this makes the world co-eternal with its creator[60]: it's one thing to lead a life through an unlimited period, as Plato says of the world, and quite another to have equally embraced the total presence of limitless life, as is proper to the divine mind. The world cannot properly be called eternal, therefore, but should be called perpetual[61].

5. Boethius on the eternal now

God, Boethius continues, is not greater than created things by the mere quantity of time, but by the property of his simple nature. Time's infinite motion tries vainly to imitate the presential status of immobile life, but cannot equal it, so that it sinks from immobility into motion, and into the infinite quantity of past and future. Unable to equally possess the complete plenitude of its life, temporal beings strive to fill this void by the fact that it they never cease accumulating an unending series of transitory instants. Perhaps we can use a modern analogy: let's assume Bill Gates is not just rich, but infinitely rich. Then time's attempt to equal eternity would be analogous to, and as futile as, trying to equal Bill Gates' infinite wealth by saving, say, a penny a day. Nevertheless, since time bears within it, in the

[59] Aeternitas igitur est interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta possessio

[60] Origen was accused of making the creation coternal with God: cf. Methodius, *On generated things*, ap. Photius, *Library*, 302a30ff.

[61] On this distinction, cf. Chase 2011, 127-130.

guise of the present moment, a kind of image of eternity's eternal present, it lends to whatever it touches the appearance of existence[62].

To understand this notion, we need to bear in mind the basic structure of the Late Neoplatonic theory of time. Beginning with Iamblichus, the Neoplatonists proposed a three-level hierarchy, in line with the doctrine of the triple universal, according to which each Intelligible Form or Idea has three phases: unparticipated, participated, and in the participants[63]. Corresponding to the unparticipated Form is Eternity (Greek *aiôn*), followed by two kinds of time: corresponding to the participated Form, an intellectual time that is stable, motionless, and partless, and generative; and corresponding to the participants, the time we experience in the sensible world, which is generated and constantly flowing.

As Sambursky explains, this inferior time flows from the future into the past along the sides of a triangle (Table 1), and only at the vertex of the triangle does the flowing now that constitutes our present moment touch the immobile Intellectual time which is a direct emanation from, and therefore image of eternity. This is, as it were, the metaphysical background for Boethius' assertion that the now represents our only point of contact with eternity, an idea he shares with Damascius, for whom the present instant is a "trace of eternity" (*ikhnos aiônion*) at which eternity comes to be with time (*en khronôi to aei on estin*)[64].

Since, according to Boethius' second principle, every nature understands what's subject to it according to its own nature, and God's nature is always eternal and praesential, it follows that his knowledge remains in the simplicity of his presence, embracing the infinite extent of the past and future, considering everything in his simple cognition as if it were happening now[65]. The presence by which God discerns everything should be characterized not so much as foreknowledge (*praescientia*) of the future as knowledge of a never-deficient instant; it should be called providence (*pro-videntia*) rather than foreknowledge, where the

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[62] Consol. 5, 6, 12: huius exigui uolucrisque momenti, quae quoniam manentis illius praesentiae quandam gestat imaginem, quibuscumque contigerit id praestat ut esse uideantur.

[63] Cf. Iamblichus, *In Tim.*, fr. 60 Dillon; Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, prop. 24

[64] Damascius, *In Parmenidem*, II, $12^{3}.c^{1}$, vol. III, p. 189, 20 Westerink-Combès. Similarly, although more colorfully, Meister Eckhart describes the now as "a taste of eternity" (*Nû...ez ist wol ein smak der zît*, cf. *Werke*, ed. N. Largier et al., 2 vols., Frankfurt a.m. 1993, vol. 2, p. 48). For the concept of the eternal now in the philosophy of Proclus, cf. Roth 2008..

[65] Cf. Cons. 5.c2.11-12: quae, sint, quae fuerint, veniantque/uno mentis cernit in ictu.

prefix *pro-* can be interpreted as a kind of spatial priority rather than a temporal one[66]. From his supratemporal vantage point, God sees all the temporal events in the world's history at once, like clothespins on a laundry line or the slices of a sausage or a loaf of bread. The events we see as occurring in succession, one after another, or in *taxis* (to speak in Aristotelian terms), God sees as simultaneously present and separated only by their *thesis* or position.

We see here several themes that are present *in nuce* in Plotinus, and are more fully developed in such post-Plotinian thinkers as Iamblichus and Damascius:

1. in order to overcome time and perceive eternity, we must eliminate the difference between them: that is, we must convert space into time[67]. In our everyday phenomenal experience, space is characterized, as Aristotle affirms, by position (*thesis)* or the fact that all its parts are simultaneously present; time by order or succession (*taxis*), i.e. the fact that no two of its parts exist simultaneously. In contrast, Boethius' near-contemporary Damascius taught that we can learn to perceive "integral" or "intellectual time", which exists simultaneously as a whole[68].

2. One way to achieve this perception of time as simultaneously existent is to concentrate on the present moment. Indeed, as the "nows" or instants of phneomenal time surge forth from the future, only to disappear into the past, there is an instant at which they touch immobile, stable, intellectual time, which is itself an emanation of eternity. Thus, in the midst of time, we can experience a glimpse of eternity thanks to the present moment, which is not point-like, according to Damascius, but is divisible and has a certain extension (*diastêma*).

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[66] Cf. Cons. 5.6.17: Unde non praeuidentia sed prouidentia potius dicitur, quod porro a rebus infimis constituta quasi ab excelso rerum cacumine cuncta prospiciat. Boethius is very fond, particularly in Book 5, of the term *prospicio* in the sense of "look forward or into the distance, look our, look, see" (Lewis & Short s.v. I) for designating the divine vision. Cf. Cons. 5.2.11: Quae tamen ille ab aeterno cuncta prospiciens prouidentiae cernit intuitus; 5.3.4: Nam si cuncta prospicit deus neque falli ullo modo potest; 5.3.28: ..diuina mens sine falsitatis errore cuncta prospiciens; 5.4.33: ...illo uno ictu mentis formaliter, ut ita dicam, cuncta prospiciens. As Bächli points out (2001, n. 83), Boethius uses the verb prospicere "mit Bezug auf den quasi-zeitlosen 'Blick von oben'". On the spiritual exercise of the "View from above" in ancient philosophy, cf. Hadot 1995, 238-251

[67] Likewise, in a mystical narration by the Iranian philosopher Qāzī Sa'īd Qummī, "succession becomes simultaneity, and time becomes space, as a function of that sublimation which brings it to a more and more subtle state" (Corbin 1969). It is, of course, a basic postulate of Einsteinian special relativity that temporal coordinates can be transformed into spatial ones.

[68] Cf. Galpérine 1980.

Thus, while Boethius seems mainly to follow Plotinus, perhaps through the intermediary of Porphyry, as far as his doctrine of time and eternity is concerned, the *Consolation* nevertheless shows traces of familiarity with post-Plotinian developments of that doctrine, particularly those of Iamblichus and Damascius.

6. Boethius and Relativity

I believe that Boethius' use of the principle that God lives in an eternal present involves notions very close to those mobilized in the current debate in the philosophy of time between eternalists, or advocates of the Block time view, and presentists, who defend the objectivity reality of the flow of time. For the Block-timers, who take seriously the view of reality as a four-dimensional continuum set forth by Einstein and Minkowski, all the moments of time exist simultaneously, so that the past continues to be, while the future already is, just as real as the present. Presentists, in contrast, subscribe to the common-sense view that time flows: only the present is real, while the past is no longer and the future is not yet real. In a nutshell, Boethius will argue that God views reality from the block time perspective (which, of course, also corresponds to an objectively true picture of reality), while we humans see things from a presentist perspective.

It is only the element of time that introduces what seems to be a contradiction between God's universal foresight and our free will. In other words, is only because we imagine that God fknows our future acts and thoughts *beforehand* that we believe, since only what is certain can be known, that our acts and thoughts are already determined. Boethius' ingenious solution will consist in denying that God *fore-knows* or *fore-sees* anything at all[69]. Since the future tense does not apply to him or tohis knowledge, he sees all things as if they were present, and since the mere fact of our observing human actions in the present imposes no necessity on such acts, neither does God's omniscient vision and knowledge of all our acts and thoughts necessitate them. God sees all the moments of the world's history, and hence, all the moments of our lives, spread out before him at once. If he distinguishes between, say, my decision to rob a bank tomorrow and my actual robbing of the bank, it is not because one event is “later” than another, but because they occupy different positions in the series of spacetime events, all of which are simultaneously present to God's vision. It is in this sense

[69] Cf. Cons. 5.6.16-17: praevidentiam...non esse praescientiam quasi futuri sed scientiam numquam deficientis instantiae rectius aestimabis.

that one might say that God sees the world the way Einstein and Minkowski taught us to see space and time in the first decades of the 20th century: the world consists not of a three-dimensional space and a separate one-dimensional time, but of a four-dimensional spacetime manifold, consisting of spacetime events. Although God does not see these events as *temporally* prior or posterior to one another, he can perceive their causal, logical, and ontological anteriority or posteriority. Likewise, as Boethius argues, he can tell which events are necessary (the sun's rising), and which are contingent (my going for a walk), just as a human being simultaneously observing necessary and contingent events in the present is able easily to distinguish them. This is what allows Boethius to conclude that God's foreknowledge (*praevidentia*) should in fact be called pro-videntia, where the prefix pro- connotes priority in space, not time. If we could raise ourself up to this Gods-eye view, we would see that there is no conflict between divine omniscience and our free will, since God's supratemporal vision introduces no necessity into contingent events. Our idea that there is such a conflict is, almost literally, an optical illusion, caused by the fact that we cannot help but think in terms of temporality.

Boethius' view of God's ontological state as an eternal present, developed primarily from Plotinus' theory of time an eternity as presented in *Ennead* 3.7, is thus the crowning jewel in the argumentative apparatus Boethius uses to solve the conflict between divine foreknowledge and human freedom of the will. There is no such thing as divine praescientia (foreknowledge): God sees all things in an eternal present, whereby he distinguishes between past and present events not by their chronological order or occurrence, but their casual anteriority or posteriority. His knowledge of events that seem to us future is therefore no impediment to our freedom, any more than my observation of a man crossing the street imposes any necessity on him. To be sure, if I know that he is crossing the street, then it is necessary that he be crossing the street, but this kind of factual, conditional, or epistemological necessity, based as it is on the Aristotelian definition of knowledge and the fact that things must necessarily be as they are when they are, imposes no constraints on the man in question. As I observe the man walking and a contemporaneous sunset, I know immediately that the former is a free act originating in his volition, while the latter is a necessary event. Likewise, God's vision observes all our thoughts and acts, past, present and future, as if they were present, but unlike our human vision it imposes no necessity on what it observes, and like our own vision, God's vision is perfectly capable of distinguishing, among the phenomena it observes, between the necessary and the contingent.

It has been objected[70] that this characterization of divine knowledge entails that I know something God does not know: I know which events are past and which are future. But this seems to me to be false. First of all, on Boethius' view, the past-present-future distinction has no objective reality but is a mere illusion caused by our limited conceptual apparatus. Alternatively, if we wished to say that this division is objectively real, it is so only in the sense that the distinction between "x is standing to my left" and "y is standing to my right" is real: these are mere relations that depend on my individual perspective at a given instant. Likewise, what I consider past and future depends merely on my perspective as a temporal being. To claim that God is unaware of such relational properties does not seem to present a serious challenge to his omniscience.

I submit, moreover, that God is not even unaware of the past-present-future distinction. As we have seen, Boethius' conception of divine vision corresponds rather closely to the way reality should be view from the perspective of relativistic physics, that is, as a four-dimensional spacetime continuum. Here, the history of the world and of any individual object can be envisaged as a world-tube, where each instant or event can be viewed as a three dimensional slice of the tube. Given that any moment or event can be identified on the tube by a series of four coordinates, it would be easy for God to situate my instantaneous existence in my Paris study at, say, 12:43 on May 2, 2013. But it would be just as easy for him to deduce that an event x, which can be situated at a point on the tube corresponding to my study at 12:32 on May 1, would be in what *I consider* the past, and that an event occurring in the same place at 12:32 May 3 would be in what *I consider* the future. True, God would not "know" that a given event is past or future, because such alleged facts are not genuine objects of knowledge but at best mere relational properties, and and worst optical illusions. Similarly, if a stick partially submerged in water looks bent to me, we would not say that an omnisicent God "knows" that the stick is bent, but that He knows that the stick looks bent *to me*.

7. Conclusion

Far from being a parody or a conglomeration of unconvincing arguments thrown together any old way, Boethius' *Consolatio* represents a meticulously crafted whole. It its first half, it shows how philosophy, which is a way of life rather than a mere series of abstract arguments, can be used as therapy of the soul. It does this by providing an illustration of the

[70] Sorabji, in Blank et al 1998.

Neoplatonic philosophical curriculum in action, whereby, after an initial moral purification from false ideas and opinions, the philosophy student's innate ideas are gradually awakened and reactivated, thus reandering the student's soul capable of undertaking the return to its intelligible homeland. In the work's second half, the narrator, now restored to his status as an advanced student of philosophy, is presented with a coherent series of arguements intended to show that divine omniscience does not jeopardize human free will. This is done by a skillful interweaving of the distinction between absolute and conditional necessity, the principle that knowledge is conditioned by the knower rather than the object of knowledge, and the principle that God's eternal subsistence grants Him a cognitive mode whereby He sees past, present and future as given simultaneously in an eternal present.

Finally, lest this latter point be dismissed as mere Neoplatonic mysticism, I have argued that it corresponds to the view that seems to be a virtually inescapable consequence of special relativity. As a number of contemporary scientists, historians, and philosophers of science have concluded, if Einstein and Minkowski are right, the passage of time we seem to experience is in fact an illusion, and reality must be represented from the perspective of block time, in which all spacetime events, regardless of whether they seem to us to be past, present, or future are, as it were, laid out in advance and endowed with equally objective existence. Boethius speaks of the possibility of raising ourself up to this Gods-eye view of things[71], and he is echoed by the theoretical physicist Thibault d'Amour:

> The structure of the theory of relativity suggests that if one could free oneself from the thermodynamic and biological constraints that condition us, in everyday life, to live reality in the form of a “temporal flux”, one could, by analogy, “super-live” our life “in a block”, as a part of the four-dimensionsal space-time block of Minkowski.

[71] Boethius, Cons. 5.5.12: Quare in illius summae intellegentiae cacumen si possumus erigamur. Bächli (2001, 45f & n. 102) argues on the basis of 5.5.11: Si igitur uti rationis participes sumus ita diuinae iudicium mentis habere possemus, that human beings possess the intellectus as an inherent faculty: “Nach Boethius verfügen wir als vernünftige Wesen über ein «Kriterium» (iudicium) zur Beurteilung des göttlichen Geistes”. But he's basing himself on the reading *possumus* at p. 154, 45 Moreschini, a reading supported only by ms. N = Neapolitanus = Napoli, Bibl. Naz. G IV 68 post correctionem: mss.O^2 M L Ha T N W C V^2 H A and B have possemus, while mss. O K T F V H^2A^2G have possimus. Moreschini rightly prints possemus, a subjunctive which indicates an unlikely possiblity. Thus, Boethius is not claiming we can have such a faculty (habere *possumus*), but discussing what would happen if we could or did have it (habere *possemus*).

To give some idea of what such a perception might be, I'd like to compare two texts, one attributed to Mozart[72], the other by Boethius:

My brain catches fire, especially if I am not disturbed. It grows, I develop it more and more, ever more clearly. The work is then finished in my skull, or really just as if, even if it is a long piece, and I can embrace the whole in a single glance, as if it were a painting or a statue. In my imagination, I do not hear the work in its flow, as it must appear in succession, but I have the whole in one block, as it were. What a gift! Invention, elaboration, all that happens within me as in a magnificent, grandiose dream, but when I manage to super-hear the assembled totality, that's the best moment...it is perhaps the greatest benefit for which I must thank the Creator.

For as a craftsman, taking beforehand in his mind the form of the thing to be made, carries out the effect of his work, and leads through the orders of time what he had seen simply and in the mode of the present, so God arranges the things that are to be made singly and stably through providence, but he administers the very things he has arranged through fate in a multiple, temporal way73.

In his genius, Mozart (or his plagiarizer) was able to view his finished work all at once (cf. Boethius' *uno ictu*[74]) in his mind, in a manner completely independent of temporal succession. Similarly, Boethius' craftsman first perceives the whole of his product simply and in a manner characteristic of the present (*praesentarie*), then sets about realizing this preconceived image in space and time. Boethius' God acts in an analogous same way: From the summit (*cacumen*) of his lofty vantage-point, God perceives, through his providence, the totality of the world's occurrences as simultaneously present. He then realizes this divine plan

[72] Cited by Jean and Brigitte Massin, *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*, Paris: Fayard, 1970, p. 474. The authenticity of this text, first published by Rochlitz in 1815, is subject to caution. I thank M. Thibault d'Amour for pointing out this reference to me.

[73] Boethius, Cons. 4.6.12: Sicut enim artifex faciendae rei formam mente praecipiens mouet operis effectum et quod simpliciter praesentarieque prospexerat per temporales ordines ducit, ita deus prouidentia quidem singulariter stabiliterque facienda disponit, fato uero haec ipsa quae disposuit multipliciter ac temporaliter amministrat. Cf. Proclus, *On Providence*, 12, 65: "Your machine, which uses cylinders, pulleys and corporeal materials, did not exist corporeally in your foreknowledge, but here imagination contained, in an incorporeal and living way, the logos of what was to be, whereas the machine came into being corporeally, put together out of inner knowledge which was not such. If this is how things are in your creation, what would you say of the fore-knowledge of the gods, in which pre-exists what is, for us, is ineffable, truly indescribable and impossible to circumscribe...the gods know divinely and intemporally what depends on us, and we act as we naturally tend to do, and what we choose is foreknown to them, not by the term in us, but to the one in them".

[74] The Latin *uno ictu* almost certainly corresponds to the Greek *haplêi epibolêi*. On the meaning of this expression in Proclus, cf. Roth 2008, 318f.

in the spatio-temporal order by means of Fate, or the inexorable chain of causes and events. Yet fate has no access to the innermost citadel of human freedom: while my act of walking may be determined by cause and effect, my decision go for a walk is completely free of all determinism[75].

While most contemporary advocates of the block-time view seem content to accept that this perspective implies a universal determinism, Boethius suggests a possible way out. Only time[76], or rather the notion of time, gives us the impression that divine omniscience implies predestination, with its concomitant assumptions of determinism and lack of human freedom. Through the study of the Late Neoplatonist philosophical curriculum, perhaps with the addition of divine grace, Boethius believes we can achieve the "View from above" that would allow us to view reality as it truly is in itself: timeless and eternal. Should we reach this goal, we will see that the alleged conflict between divine prescience and human free-will was as illusory, albeit just as persistent, as time itself.

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[75] Bächli 2001, 37f.; Bechtle 2006, 272-273

[76] Sorabji (1998) argues that it is the irrevocability of the gods' knowledge that implies that my future acts are already determined. As he points out, however, the notion of irrevocability seems tied to that of the irreversibility of time's flow: take away the latter and the former would seem to disappear.

Text 1

Pseudo (?)-Boethius, De diis et praesensionibus, in I. C. Orellius - I.G. Baiterus, eds., M. Tulli Ciceronis Scholiastae, I, Turici: Typis Orellii, Fuesslini et Sociorum, 1833, p. 390. 35-391, 24. Stangl	
duobus enim constamus, anima et corpore. Anima immortalis est. Si immortalis est, a divinis descendit. Si ergo a divinis descendit, cur omnium virtutum habitu perfecta non est? Quod quale sit, ab eiusdem philosophiae adytis eliciatur. Anima enim necdum in contagionis corporeae indumento evoluta, in illa absolutissimae puritatis suae specula omnium rerum peritiam perfectissime considerat. Postquam autem in hoc luteum corpus obruitur, acies eius terrenae admixtionis tenebris caligosa ab illa suae ingenitaeque visionis claritudine caecatur. Latet tamen introrsum semen veri, quod excitatur ventilante doctrina[77]. Aiunt enim nullo modo fieri posse, ut a pueritia tot rerum atque tantarum insitas atque quasi consignatas in animis notiones, quae ennoias vocant, habemus, nisi animus ante, quum incorporaretur, in rerum cognitione viguisset. Neque ea plane videt animus, quum repente tam insolitum tamque turbulentum	For we consist of two things, soul and body. The soul is immortal. If it is immortal, it descends from the divine things. But if it descends from the divine things, why is it not perfected by the possession of all virtues? Let the state of this matter be drawn from the very sanctuaries of philosophy. For the soul, before it is wrapped in the garment of bodily contact, examines in that watchtower of its absolute purity the knowledge of all things most perfectly. However, once it sinks into this body of clay, its sharp vision, obscured by the darkness of earthy mingling, is rendered blind to the clarity of its inborn vision. However, the seed of truth lies hidden within, and is awakened as it is fanned by instruction. For they say it can by no means happen that from childhood we have notions, which they call *ennoias*, of so many and such great things inserted and as it were sealed upon our souls, unless our soul flourished in its cognition of things before it was

[77] Cf. Boeth. Cons. 3.c11.11-12: Haeret profecto semen introrsum veri/quod excitatur ventilanti doctrina

domicilium immigravit: sed quum se recollegit atque recreavit per aetatis momenta, tum agnoscit illa reminiscendo. Postquam enim quodam crasso corporis tegimine irretita anima et circumfusa quandam sui oblivionem subierit, quum deinde studio ac disciplina detergeri coepit atque nudari, tunc in naturae suae modum animus revertitur atque revocatur ... Quod totum evidentius declarat Socrates in illo libro, qui Menon inscribitur, pusionem quendam interrogans quaedam geometrica de dimensione quadrati. Ad quae sic ille respondit, ut puer: et tamen ita faciles interrogationes sunt, ut gradatim respondens eodem perveniat, quasi geometrica didicisset. Ex quo effici vult Socrates, ut discere nihil aliud sit nisi recordari. Quam rem multo accuratius ille explicat in sermone, quem habuit eo die, quo excessit e vita.	incarnated. Nor does the soul fully see these things, when it suddenly entered such an unaccustomed and turbulent abode; yet once it collects itself and becomes refreshed in the course of the ages of life, then it recognizes them by remembering. For after the soul is ensnared and enveloped by some thick cover of the body and undergoes some forgetfulness of itself, when thereafter it begins to be wiped clean and denuded by study and instruction, then the soul reverts and is called back to the manner of its nature...Socrates declares all this more clearly in the book entitled *Meno*, asking a certain little boy some geometrical questions about the dimensions of a square. He answers them like a child, yet the questions are so easy that by answering little by little he reaches the same result as if he had learned geometry. Socrates will have it that follows from this that learning is nothing other than remembering. He explains this must more accurately in the speech he gave on the day in which he left this life.

Text 2

Simplicius, In Cat., p. 12, 18ff. Kalbfleisch.	
ψυχὴ δὲ πρὸς μὲν νοῦν ἐστραμμένη τὰ αὐτὰ δευτέρως ἔχει, ὅτε καὶ γεννητικούς, ἀλλ' οὐ γνωστικοὺς μόνον ἔχει τοὺς ἐν αὐτῇ	As for the soul, when it is turned towards the Intellect, it possesses the same things [sc. as the Intellect] in a secondary way, for then the rational principles (*logoi*) within it are not only cognitive,

(20)	20
λόγους, ἀποστᾶσα δὲ ἐκεῖθεν καὶ τοὺς ἐν αὐτῇ λόγους τῶν ὄντων χωρίσασα καὶ διὰ τοῦτο εἰκόνας αὐτοὺς ἀντὶ τῶν πρωτοτύπων ποιήσασα διέστησεν ἀπὸ τῶν πραγμάτων τὴν νόησιν, καὶ τοσούτῳ μᾶλλον, ὅσῳ καὶ τῆς πρὸς τὸν νοῦν ὁμοιότητος ἀπέστη, καὶ λοιπὸν ἀγαπᾷ σύμφωνα τοῖς πράγμασιν προβάλλεσθαι τὰ νοήματα. πεσοῦσα δὲ εἰς γένεσιν καὶ λήθης ἀναπλησθεῖσα	but generative. Once, however, the soul has departed from there [sc. the intelligible world], it also separates the formulae (*logoi*) within itself from beings, thereby converting them into images instead of prototypes, and it introduces a distance between intellection and realities. This is all the more true, the further the soul has departed from its similarity to the Intellect, and it is henceforth content to project (*proballesthai*) notions which are consonant with realities. When, however, the soul has fallen into the realm of becoming, it is filled with forgetfulness78
(25)	25
ἐδεήθη μὲν ὄψεως, ἐδεήθη δὲ ἀκοῆς πρὸς ἀνάμνησιν· δεῖται γὰρ τοῦ ἤδη τεθεαμένου τὴν ἀλήθειαν διὰ φωνῆς ἀπὸ τῆς ἐννοίας προφερομένης κινοῦντος καὶ τὴν ἐν αὐτῇ τέως ἀπεψυγμένην ἔννοιαν· .... ἀπὸ γὰρ νοήσεων προϊοῦσαι	and requires sight and hearing in order to be able to recollect79. For the soul needs someone who has already beheld the truth80, who, by means of language (*phônê*) uttered forth from the concept (*ennoia*), also moves the concept within [the soul of the

78 The theme of forgetfulness goes back ultimately to Book 10 of Plato's *Republic* (621a-c), with its myth of the plain of Lêthê.

79 *Pros anamnêsin*. The reference is to the Platonic doctrine of *anamnêsis*, the recollection of the knowledge we had when, prior to our incarnation, we accompanied the chariots of the gods and enjoyed direct communion with the intelligible Forms. Cf. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 248c, *Republic*, Bk. 10, 621a-c; Ammonius, *In De Interp*. p. 38, 8-17.

80 That is, according to Ph. Hoffmann (1987, pp. 83ff.), the philosophy teacher. Cf. Proclus, *Commentary on the First Alcibiades*, §235, 8-10 Westerink = vol. 2, p. 285 Segonds.

(13.) νοήσεις καὶ αὐταὶ κινοῦσι προσεχῶς καὶ συνάπτουσι τὰς τοῦ μανθάνοντος ταῖς τοῦ διδάσκοντος, μεσότητες ἀμφοῖν γινόμεναι. αἱ δὲ νοήσεις οἰκείως κινηθεῖσαι ἐφαρμόττουσι τοῖς πράγμασιν, καὶ οὕτως γίνεται ἡ τῶν ὄντων γνῶσις καὶ ὁ αὐτοφυὴς ἔρως τῆς ψυχῆς ἀποπίμπλαται.	student], which had until then grown cold81...For intellections (*noêseis*) which proceed forth 13,1 from other intellections82 also cause motion immediately, connecting the learner's intellections to those of the teacher, by becoming intermediaries (*mesotêtes*) between the two. When intellections are set in motion in an appropriate way, they fit realities, and thus there comes about the knowledge of beings, and the soul's innate *eros*83 is fulfilled.

Text 3

Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, 5.6.2-8	
[5.6.2] Deum igitur aeternum esse cunctorum ratione degentium commune iudicium est. [5.6.3] Quid sit igitur aeternitas consideremus, haec enim nobis naturam pariter diuinam scientiamque patefacit. [5.6.4] **Aeternitas igitur est interminabilis uitae tota simul et perfecta possessio**. Quod ex collatione temporalium clarius liquet.	[5.6.2] That God is eternal, therefore, is the common judgement of all those who live according to reason. [5.6.3] Let us consider, therefore, what eternity is, for this will make clear to us at the same time the divine nature and <the nature of> divine knowledge. [5.6.4] **Eternity, then, is the perfect possession, all at once, of unlimited**

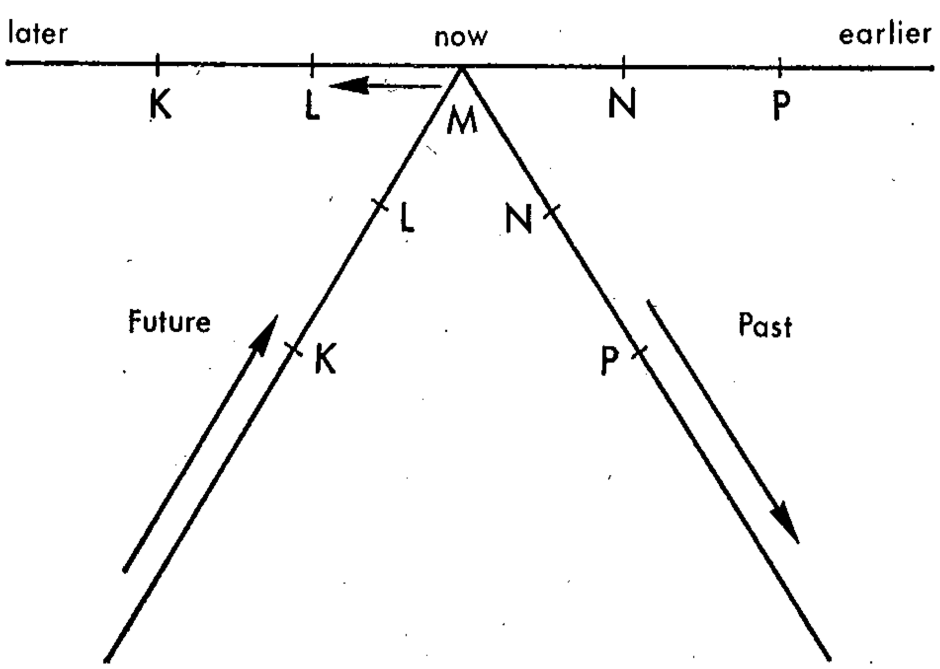
81 On the *logoi* in the soul - portions of the *nous* which is the substances of the intelligible Forms - as a spark buried in ashes, the rekindling of which constitutes the process of learning, cf. Philoponus, *Commentary on Aristotle's De anima*, p. 4, 30ff. Hayduck.

82 Sc. those of the teacher.

83 On the soul's innate *erôs* for knowledge - derived ultimately from Plato's *Symposium* - cf. Proclus, *Theol. Plat.*, I, 25, vol. I, pp. 109, 10 - 110, 8 Saffrey/Westerink; *In Tim.*, vol. I, p. 212, 21-22 Diehl.

[5.6.5] Nam quicquid uiuit in tempore id praesens a praeteritis in futura procedit nihilque est in tempore constitutum quod **totum uitae suae spatium pariter possit amplecti**, sed crastinum quidem nondum apprehendit hesternum uero iam perdidit; in hodierna quoque uita non amplius uiuitis quam in illo mobili transitorioque momento. [5.6.6] Quod igitur temporis patitur condicionem, licet illud, sicuti de mundo censuit Aristoteles, nec coeperit umquam esse nec desinat uitaque eius cum temporis infinitate tendatur, nondum tamen tale est ut aeternum esse iure credatur. [5.6.7] Non enim totum simul infinitae licet uitae spatium comprehendit atque complectitur, sed futura nondum, transacta iam non habet. [5.6.8] Quod igitur interminabilis uitae plenitudinem totam pariter comprehendit ac possidet, cui neque futuri quicquam absit nec praeteriti fluxerit, id aeternum esse iure perhibetur idque necesse est et sui compos praesens sibi semper assistere et infinitatem mobilis temporis habere praesentem.	**life**. This will become more clear by comparison with temporal things: [5.6.5] for whatever lives in time proceeds, when present, from the past into the future, and nothing constituted within time can **embrace equally the entire extent of its life**, but tomorrow's extent it cannot yet grasp, while yesterday's it has already lost. Even in today's life, you live no more broadly than in that mobile, transitory moment. [5.6.6] Therefore, whatever is subject to the condition of time, even if, as Aristotle thought of the world, it never began to be, nor shall it cease, and its life extends along with the infinity of time, is nevertheless not yet such as to be rightly believed to be eternal. [5.6.7] For it may be that it does not comprehend and embrace, all at once, the extent of infinite life, but the future it does not yet have, and what is completed it has no longer. [5.6.8] Therefore, that which comprehends and possesses equally the entire fullness of illimitable life, that for which nothing of the future is lacking, nor has anything of the past flowed away, this is rightly agreed to be eternal, and it is necessary that, present and master of itself, it must always both attend itself and have present the infinity of mobile time.

Table 1



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