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BOETHIUS AND STOICISM

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Around 422, owing to accusations of treason, Boethius was imprisoned by Theodoric, king of the Ostrogoths, and sentenced to death. A few years later he was executed – an unseemly end for a man devoted to learning and the public good. As a young scholar, he had grand plans to translate all of Plato's dialogues and Aristotle's treatises into Latin – with commentaries to boot![1] As a politician, he espoused ideals inspired by the books he had studied, especially Plato's *Republic*. Sitting in prison, however, and condemned to death, Boethius was sick with grief, his unfinished projects and high ideals only exacerbating his sorrow.

Is it too far-fetched to imagine that in this situation Boethius yearned to confront his lot more like a Stoic – untroubled, objective, self-sufficient? This may seem unlikely, given the criticisms he levels at the Stoics in works written prior to his imprisonment. But in the face of death, Boethius finds a place for Stoicism in life. We see this in the *magnum opus* he wrote during his imprisonment, the *Consolation of Philosophy*, which recounts a dialogue between the Prisoner (i.e. Boethius as a character in his own work) and Philosophy, a mysterious lady who appears to him in his cell. Under her care, the Prisoner recovers from grief by achieving a Stoic attitude – a crucial stage in his convalescence, though one he passes beyond on the way toward full intellectual health. And so, although in this work Boethius still considers Stoicism to be philosophically constricting, he has nonetheless learned how it may prove indispensable in one's intellectual development.

In the *Consolation*, then, Boethius arrives at a twofold judgment – a "mixed review" – of Stoicism. That he remains critical of Stoicism is evident in the opening pages. When Philosophy first appears, her clothes are described as tattered; for "the hands of certain violent men tore this garment and carried off little portions as each was able" (*Cons.* 1.1, 23–24). Philosophy recalls her own persecution, especially in the persons of Socrates and Plato, who clothed her beautifully with courageous perseverance. Since then, however, Philosophy has not fared well:

> After [Plato], the crowds of Epicureans and Stoics and the rest, each for their own part, were struggling to go and capture his inheritance and to drag me away screaming and resisting, as if I were part of their loot. Doing so, they tore apart this garment which I had woven with my own hands, and they went off with little pieces they had snatched from it, believing that the whole of me had gone off with them. Because a few traces of my outfit were seen in these pieces, their imprudence regarded me as their kin, and not a few of them strayed off into the errors of the profane multitude.
>
> (Cons. *1.3, 21–30)*

The Stoics mistake a small part of Philosophy's garment for the whole of her. Instead of possessing the fullness of philosophy, as did Plato and Aristotle, the Stoics possess only a portion of its appearance. Stoicism is philosophically superficial and incomplete.[2]

This severe take on Stoicism must be qualified, however, in light of a subsequent passage in Book 1, in which Philosophy relates how not only Greek philosophers suffered for her sake, but Roman ones as well. The three Romans she names – Canius, Seneca, and Soranus – were all Stoics (*Cons.* 1.3, 31–7). The pieces of her garment that they snatched sufficed for facing adversity under tyranny in an exemplary fashion.[3] Something about Stoicism, then, is able to fortify human beings in times of distress.

This mixed review makes sense in the *Consolation*; for there Stoicism is presented as a necessary stage within the Prisoner's philosophical development. Though it be superficial and incomplete, it is also indispensable. This dual characterization, moreover, illuminates Boethius's criticism of Stoicism in earlier works;[4] for it helps us see what those critiques are ultimately driving at, namely, the philosophical superficiality and incompleteness of Stoicism, which compares poorly with the multidimensional, expansive thinking Boethius finds in Plato and Aristotle.

In what follows we explore Boethius's works chronologically in order to elucidate his twofold judgment of Stoicism. Beginning with references to the Stoics in his logical works[5] and then turning to the *Consolation*, we delineate the intelligible contours of Stoicism as Boethius sees it, including the positive impetus Stoicism provides toward a philosophical apprehension of reality as well as its innate inadequacy for attaining the full measure of wisdom available to us through philosophical inquiry.

Boethius's criticism of Stoicism in his logical commentaries

Boethius's primary aim in his logical works is to hand on the Aristotelian tradition of logic. Consequently, he spends little time explicating Stoic logic. Clearly he is familiar with Stoic logic, and he finds much of it wanting.[6] The Stoics appear explicitly in five works written prior to the *Consolation*: his two commentaries on Porphyry's *Isagoge*,[7] his commentary on Aristotle's *Categories*, his second commentary on *On Interpretation*, and his commentary on Cicero's *Topics*. We pass over the two commentaries on the *Isagoge*, since in them he mentions the Stoics only to set them aside.[8] Exploring relevant passages from the other three works brings to light the philosophical shortcomings Boethius perceives in Stoicism.[9]

In his commentary on Aristotle's *Categories*, Boethius alludes to the Stoics on a few occasions, although he does not explicate their positions in detail. The context in which he mentions the Stoics and the basis of his disagreements with them suggest what is on Boethius's mind. Each reference to the Stoics occurs in his comments on chapter 10, where Aristotle distinguishes various types of opposites. Boethius remarks that Peripatetics and Stoics have diverse views concerning opposites, especially regarding whether "opposite" is univocal (i.e. whether it can be defined in a single way that covers all cases of opposition; *In Cat.* 4, 264C–D). According to Boethius, the Peripatetics rightly follow Aristotle by distinguishing different types of opposition, whereas the Stoics, despite their longiloquence regarding logical matters, forego such distinction-making in favor of a simplified, either–or notion of opposition.

Boethius recalls the Stoics' either–or account of opposition when discussing contrariety later in the chapter. He alludes critically to the Stoic account of virtue and vice as contraries that lack any in-between condition. According to the Stoics, "indifferents" stand between virtue and vice as things open to being used either virtuously or viciously, such as wealth, power, beauty, and the like. The Stoics' account fits with another position of theirs that Boethius points out, namely, that virtue is knowledge (*In Cat.* 4, 277A). Accordingly, one either knows what is right to do with indifferents or does not – the latter a virtuous condition, the former a vicious one. Boethius thinks such a picture lacks sufficient nuance. For him the contrariety of virtue and vice leaves open the possibility of in-between conditions in which one is neither fully virtuous nor fully vicious, and he articulates the logic operative in contrariety thus understood. Like hot and cold, virtue and vice are truly opposed. Yet just as tepidity stands between hotness and coldness, so certain dispositions stand between goodness and badness or justice and injustice, even if we lack names for these in-between conditions (*In Cat.* 4, 268B–269A).

But why address an issue of moral psychology in a commentary on a logical work?[10] Here we set aside any attempt to answer this question fully.[11] It suffices for our purposes to recognize that the Stoics are squarely on Boethius's mind inasmuch as their crude account of opposition obscures the contrariety of virtue and vice. Instead of beginning with the patent reality of in-between moral dispositions – not to mention in-between natural conditions, such as tepidity – and working out the logic of contrariety therefrom, the Stoics impose an either-or notion of opposition on moral reality, thus ignoring the nuances of human character. The Stoics, in other words, "logicize" reality by squeezing it into simplified categories. From Boethius's perspective, this approach is superficial; it stops at the mere naming of virtue and vice as opposites and fails to capture the intelligible variability discoverable in our experience. The function of logic is not to impose categories upon reality, but to allow reality to manifest itself more clearly by adequating our thinking and speaking precisely to its intelligible contours. Hence Boethius consistently rejects the logicizing tendency of the Stoics in favor of the nuanced realism of Aristotelian logic.

In his second commentary on *On Interpretation*,[12] Boethius calls attention to another problem in Stoic thinking, namely, a failure to distinguish adequately between sensitive and intellectual cognition and, consequently, not deploying this distinction to account for the meaningfulness of human language. The Stoics seem to speak metaphorically about how in human thinking a form is impressed upon wax or chiseled into marble or written on paper (*2 In Periherm.* 1.1, 33,20–35,21), and yet how are such descriptions metaphorical if the Stoics do not distinguish essentially between sensitive and intellectual cognition? Boethius is aware that this disagreement goes beyond signification and concerns human cognition in general; for it has to do with the intellect's capacity to know reality in a manner that transcends the individuating conditions of matter so as to grasp things universally and signify this in the spoken and written word. As Boethius sees it, the Stoics' corporealistic view of reality blots out such a picture of human cognition. Hence "what the Stoics say about this matter should be passed over" (*2 In Periherm.* 1.1, 24,19–20).

Boethius also criticizes the Stoics in his comments on chapter 9 of *On Interpretation*, which deals with the truth and falsity of propositions about the future. Boethius thinks the Stoics are mistaken not only regarding the determinate character of future events, but also in their interpretation of Aristotle. The Stoics hold that all things come about by fate, i.e. governing causes acting in such a manner that what does not come about was not in fact able to happen (*2 In Periherm.* 3.9, 197,10–198,4). In this view, what is possible is coextensive with what has not yet come about but will come about in accord with fate. Boethius rejects this. With

Aristotle and the Peripatetics, he holds that openness (i.e. the potentiality that a particular event comes-about-or-does-not-come-about) belongs to some aspects of the future, owing not merely to human freedom, but also to the character of material realities.

Again, Boethius is aware that the disagreement here has more to do with the nature of reality in general than with the truth or falsity of certain propositions. As Boethius puts it, "Neither unfittingly nor inconsistently did Aristotle, when speaking about propositions, put off a disputation concerning higher realities and concerning things perhaps not pertaining to the logical art" (*2 In Periherm.* 3.9, 198,10–14). Following suit, Boethius neither expands on what Aristotle says about "higher realities" nor tells how Aristotle might respond to the Stoics, although he considers the Peripatetic accounts of chance, freedom, and material nature to be better than those of the Stoics. Boethius is dissatisfied with the flat corporealism of the Stoics – in this instance insofar as it results in a fatalistic understanding of reality.

Boethius connects the Stoics' fatalism with their mistaken reading of Aristotle. Aristotle's acceptance of openness in the future, owing to both human freedom and natural realities themselves, fits well with how Aristotle explicates "the mode of propositions concerning the future" (*2 In Periherm.* 3.9, 198,4–8). Every proposition about a future contingent event is either true or false, says Aristotle, although its truth or falsity is not yet definite. Indeed, the indefinite character of the truth or falsity of a proposition about a future contingent befits the event's openness either to come about or not to come about. The Stoics do not see it this way, no doubt because they are at odds with Aristotle concerning "the higher realities." Hence they interpret Aristotle through the lens of fatalism. Aristotle claims that propositions about future contingents are *either* true *or* false, but the Stoics "judged them to be [in Aristotle's view] *neither* true *nor* false" – and, Boethius adds, "they judged falsely" (*2 In Periherm.* 3.9, 208,6–7). Boethius explains:

> For Aristotle does not say that both are neither true nor false, but that each of them is either true or false, yet not in that definite way in which propositions about the past or present are. Rather, there are two sorts of declarative statements: there are some in which it is not the case that either the true or the false might be found, but in which one [of the contradictories] is definitely true and the other definitely false; in others, one [of the contradictories] is true and the other false, but indefinitely and in a way open to change – and this is so by its very nature and not only in relation to our ignorance and awareness.
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> (2 In Periherm. *3.9, 198,7–18)*

In fact, Boethius continues, if every such proposition were definitely true or definitely false, then one would have to hold that all things come about out of necessity – as do the Stoics.

Boethius's comments amount to this: the Stoics know they disagree with Aristotle, and yet the position they attribute to Aristotle is one in which he simply denies what the Stoics hold. The Stoics hold that one of a pair of contradictories about future events is true and the other false; in their minds, then, Aristotle must hold that neither of the contradictories is true or false. For the Stoics, Aristotle's rejection of fatalism amounts to a rejection of a key principle of logic itself, the so-called principle of bivalence. This misconstrual of Aristotle, according to Boethius, stems from the Stoics' claim that all things come about out of necessity, while chance, freedom, and the indeterminacy of material nature disappear. Boethius thus connects the Stoics' non-dynamic understanding of reality to a one-dimensional notion of propositional truth: one contradictory is true, the other false, period; and one either knows which one is true or does not know, period.

In Boethius's mind, Aristotle offers a better way to understand the future as well as propositional truths about it – one that befits his non-fatalistic, dynamic understanding of reality. If truth consists in the conformity or adequation of intellect and reality, then in order to be true the intellect must be adequate also to the very dynamism of reality. Boethius captures this by saying that propositions about future contingents are indeed either true or false, but not in a definite way; thus our intellects remain in truth precisely when we are holding such propositions in an indefinite manner (i.e. as not definitely true or false). Furthermore, achieving truth about the future in this manner is our way of participating in the truth about it in the mind of God. For, as Boethius says, "God knows future things as arising, not out of necessity, but contingently, in such a way that he is not unaware that something else is able to come about" (*2 In Periherm.* 3.9, 226,9–12). Hence Boethius thinks in a multidimensional way about the future, with respect to which we have propositions that are either true or false, the possibility of an indefinite stance toward those propositions, and an infallible divine perspective that does not eradicate, but in fact establishes the contingency inherent in human freedom and material nature. Such is the discerning mode of thinking that Boethius does not find in the Stoics, who are inclined to impose distinctions and categories on reality too simplistically so as to make it more manageable.

In his commentary on Cicero's *Topics*, Boethius mentions the Stoics twice.[13] The second time has to do with the Stoics' notion of fate. Because it adds little to what was just said, we leave it aside here.[14] The first time, though, is worth exploring. It occurs when Boethius comments on a passage in which Cicero maintains that logic should treat both judgment and discovery, although the Stoics focus solely on the former. Boethius concurs with Cicero, asserting that the Stoics treat logic narrowly (*In Cic. Top.* 1.9, 1045A) compared with Aristotle's more complete treatment (*In Cic. Top.* 1.9, 1047C). Cicero is right, moreover, to point this out:

> Cicero justly rebukes the Stoics especially because they leave off discovery, which is prior in nature and more powerful in use: prior in nature, because it cannot come about that a discovery be judged unless that discovery first exists; more powerful in use, because a bare discovery, expressed naturally with art set aside, is much more useful when defending a case one has undertaken than giving an unarmed and tacit judgment after having been mute while another did discovery.
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> (In Cic. Top. *1.9, 1047D)*

The first of these points gets at the fact that the Stoics neglect human experience and its nuances, to which discovery is more proximate than judgment. This omission not only undercuts the intellect's progress toward truth at the knees, but also renders it practically ineffective, which is Boethius's second point. For in leaving off discovery in their logic, the Stoics fail to do the work it takes to bring someone else to see what they already see. The picture of the Stoic that Boethius draws here, therefore, is that of a distant and critical observer who expects others simply to see what he or she has seen and to draw conclusions accordingly.

In all these commentaries, therefore, Boethius's attitude toward the Stoics is basically unfavorable. At best, Stoic thinking provides a helpful foil to his own. Their logical teaching does not allow them to express adequately the intelligibility of what we experience. And inadequacies in their logic tally with inadequacies in their moral, epistemological, and metaphysical thinking. As we will see, Boethius retains his critical attitude toward Stoicism in the *Consolation*, and yet he works to make room for it in the Prisoner's intellectual

convalescence. Thus he supplements his negative evaluation of Stoicism present in earlier works by recognizing its potential contribution to one's overall philosophical growth.

The presence of Stoicism in the *Consolation*

In the *Consolation*, Boethius does not focus on Stoicism in its own right; he enfolds it, rather, into the overall philosophical development that the Prisoner undergoes.[15] By embracing Stoicism as useful, Boethius enables the reader to recognize the positive aspects of Stoicism along with its limitations. In what follows, instead of attempting to identify every implicit reference to Stoicism in the *Consolation*, we attempt to sketch out the "essence of Stoicism" as Boethius sees it, especially in the first half of the work. The goal is to bring to light the twofold judgment of Stoicism at which Boethius arrives, namely, that Stoicism is partial and superficial, philosophically speaking, and yet may be indispensable in one's overall philosophical progress.

Boethius likens the Prisoner's intellectual progress in the *Consolation* to a process of healing aided by a physician's intervention. The Prisoner's first identification of Philosophy is as his "physician" or "healer" (*Cons.* 1.3, 3), although this medical motif is introduced in the work by Philosophy herself. For when Philosophy first appears, she announces: "It is time for medicine rather than complaint" (*Cons.* 1.2, 1). Philosophy carries out a diagnosis of the Prisoner by encouraging him to reveal the cause of his pain as well as his views of human nature, God, and the purpose of reality. Near the end of this exchange, the Prisoner declares that he is a "rational, mortal animal, and nothing more" (*Cons.* 1.6, 34–5), and in this Philosophy discovers the key to her diagnosis. "I now know … the greatest cause of your sickness," she tells her patient. "You have ceased to know what you yourself are" (*Cons.* 1.6, 36–8).

Forgetfulness of one's true self is no trivial illness, and so there will be no quick cure. Philosophy decides she must treat the Prisoner in stages, which she prescribes thus:

> Because a great tumult of emotions broods over you, and pain, anger, and grief draw you apart in diverse ways, you are now of a mind that stronger remedies do not yet touch you. Hence we will use gentler remedies for a short while, so that what has become hardened into a tumor while these troubles were affecting you may by a more coaxing touch become softened to receive the power of sharper medicine.
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> (Cons. *1.5, 36–9; cf. 1.6, 53–9)*

The initial "gentler remedies" to which Philosophy refers are analogous to anesthesia, inasmuch as in Books 1 and 2 Philosophy numbs her patient to the apparent goods and evils of fortune. Philosophically speaking, this process consists in persuading the Prisoner toward Stoicism as a first stage in his intellectual convalescence.

To glean the "essence of Stoicism" as Boethius sees it, then, we must look to Books 1 and 2. In Book 1, Philosophy lays a psychological foundation for the Prisoner's adoption of Stoicism, while in Book 2 she brings him to embrace a Stoic worldview in a more principled manner. Along these lines, then, Boethius paints a living picture of Stoicism as it comes to be present in the Prisoner.

"Canine spiritedness": a psychological foundation for Stoicism

When the *Consolation* opens, poetic Muses are tempting the Prisoner to write self-pitying dirges, and he is all too willing to comply; for he is wallowing in his sorrow. By the end of

Book 1, however, the Prisoner has escaped this self-indulgent, concupiscible attitude toward his situation and taken on a vigorous, irascible one – an attitude that, on the basis of several allusions to Plato's *Republic*, can be aptly named "canine spiritedness." By understanding the Prisoner's turn toward spiritedness in light of the *Republic*, we gain insight into the foundations of Stoicism that Philosophy lays in the Prisoner's soul.

When Philosophy arrives on the scene, she dismisses the poetic Muses who are tempting the Prisoner to write self-pitying dirges. In earlier days, she reminds him, he reaped the fruits of reason by seeking the causes of things, both in the heavens above and here below (*Cons.* 1.2m). Why has he cast aside the *arma*, the weapons, with which she equipped him in his youth (*Cons.* 1.2, 4–6)? Her mention of weapons is the first indication of the change in the Prisoner's soul that Philosophy wants to effect, namely, to become spirited toward his situation rather than complacent. This new attitude arises in the Prisoner while he uncovers his wound to Philosophy by narrating the history of injustices that led to his imprisonment (*Cons.* 1.4). Recounting his pain sparks the Prisoner's spiritedness, giving rise to anger. In his lengthy account, moreover, the Prisoner alludes to the *Republic* a few times, including an explicit allusion to the philosopher-king, an idea he was attempting to embody in his own political career. The standard of Plato's philosopher-king both informs and fuels the Prisoner's spirited narrative. In addition, upon completing his account, he remarks, "When I *barked out* these things in prolonged pain, Philosophy stood with calm countenance, moved in no way by my complaints" (*Cons.* 1.5, 1–2, emphasis added). This odd verb – *delatravi*, "I barked out" – brings to the forefront those passages in the *Republic* in which Plato employs the image of a dog to exemplify his understanding of spiritedness – passages that illuminate the current disposition of the Prisoner's soul.

In Book 2 of the *Republic*, Socrates identifies the requisite features of the guardians of the city he is founding in speech. These guardians must be ready for war, since that is why they were introduced (see 373d–374e).[16] Physically, they must have sharp senses, speed, and strength; emotionally, they must have *thumos*, spiritedness, which "makes every soul fearless and invincible in the face of everything" (375b). They should not, however, exercise universal aggression; instead, "they must be gentle toward their own and cruel to enemies" (375c), a disposition found in "the disposition of noble dogs," who are "as gentle as can be with their familiars and people they know and the opposite with those they don't know" (375e). In this Socrates discerns an incipient philosophic trait: such a dog distinguishes people it encounters on the basis of knowledge, namely on whether it is familiar with them or not (376b). Hence guardians, who ought to possess such "canine spiritedness," must also be lovers of learning; consequently, Socrates hastily infers, they must be philosophic (376b–c).

The Prisoner's self-justifying narrative is driven by this sort of canine spiritedness. He does not lash out at the world in general; no, he narrows his scope and mounts a self-defense, a defense of his life, his actions, his principles. Such spiritedness, if it stays on the level of the emotions, often bears bad fruit, and so Philosophy does not receive the Prisoner's spirited account too sympathetically. Indeed, as the Prisoner tells us, "When I had barked out these things in prolonged pain, Philosophy stood with calm countenance, moved in no way by my complaints" (*Cons.* 1.5, 1–2). Yet Philosophy wants to put the Prisoner's thumotic disposition to good use. The Prisoner is now reinvigorated. He is defending himself and his actions, attaching himself to what is his own and hostile toward all that is alien. Indeed, there are elements of rational discernment in his making such distinctions. Philosophy sees the canine spiritedness in him as dispositive toward a deeper healing. Hence in Book 2 she expands his canine spiritedness to a rational level, transmuting it into an intellectual and volitional stance toward all reality that can rightly be called Stoic.

Stoicism: anesthetic to apparent goods and evils

Philosophy draws on the Prisoner's canine spiritedness in bringing him toward Stoicism. By means of argumentation, she universalizes the realm of otherness to include everything that can be encountered intellectually, thereby sublimating emotional hostility into volitional apathy. Canine spiritedness provides a pattern on the emotional level that can be recapitulated on the rational level as a "worldview," an approach to reality in general. This worldview consists of three principles at the heart of Stoicism as Boethius sees it: first, human nature is powerless and possessionless in a world characterized by fortune; second, the goodness or badness of each thing that comes from fortune consists in its being deemed to be such; and third, nothing that comes from fortune should be thought to be intrinsically good. These principles correspond with three features traditionally associated with the Stoic: *ataraxia* (an emotionally untroubled state), *apatheia* (an untouchable objectivity), and *autarchia* (self-sufficiency). By administering the anesthesia of Stoicism to the Prisoner – first on the level of the emotions, then on the level of opinion, and finally on the level of reason – Philosophy progressively numbs him to all that the world has to offer. Thereby the Prisoner acquires an untroubled, untouchable objectivity that allows him to be self-sufficient in the face of his apparently unhappy situation.

Philosophy first causes the Prisoner to feel powerless and possessionless in a world characterized by fortune. She does so by personifying *fortuna*, fortune, a female prodigy whose many disguises Philosophy understands (*Cons.* 2.1, 5–6).[17] Fortune has not changed her nature in the Prisoner's case. "Rather," Philosophy tells him, "regarding you she has preserved her own constancy in her very mutability" (*Cons.* 2.1, 29–30). Because the Prisoner willingly enjoyed the things of fortune previously, he has no right now to complain of bad fortune. "You have given yourself to be ruled by fortune; you must comply with the customs of the lady," Philosophy asserts. "Indeed, do you endeavor to hold back the impetus of the turning wheel? Yet, you dullest of all mortals, if it begins to stand still, fortune ceases to be" (*Cons.* 2.1, 55–9). The Prisoner himself has defined the human being by mortality, thus binding human existence essentially to the wheel of generation and corruption – and yet he expects a mode of existence more stable than the coming-to-be and passing-away of mortal things? Did not he, like all of us, come forth naked from his mother's womb? Indeed, if there be any necessary aspects of human existence, dependency and poverty are among them. Raising no objections to Philosophy's case, the Prisoner implicitly grants that all the things of fortune are in fact other and not his own.

Philosophy tells the Prisoner that her words are "poultices" or "compresses" intended to ease his pain (*Cons.* 2.3, 9–11). The Prisoner is in fact temporarily assuaged, having taken pleasure in the sweetness of Philosophy's rhetoric. Philosophy's compresses are effective – but only superficially, since she appeals to the Prisoner primarily on the level of emotion. Yet this serves Philosophy's purposes, for it pushes the Prisoner inward. As he acknowledges, "For the wretched there is a deeper sense of evils, and so when these [words] cease to sound, inner grief weighs down the soul" (*Cons.* 2.3, 7–9). This numbness, however, is not enduring. It has not yet reached the rational level of the soul as a form of intellectual and volitional apathy. That requires a more penetrating anesthetic.

Before achieving rational numbness, though, the Prisoner requires treatment on the level of opinion; for, as Philosophy tells him, "That you suffer the punishment of false opinion, you cannot rightly impute to things" (*Cons.* 2.4, 6–7). His false opinion consists in the empty names that he gives to things, especially the name "fortunate happiness" that moves him. This name is empty because it lacks a referent that is whole, unified, and enduring. "Who is possessed of a happiness so composed that he does not dispute with the quality of his state

from some side?" Philosophy asks. "For the condition of human goods is an anxious thing that never comes about as a whole and never survives as everlasting" (*Cons.* 2.4, 38–41). The best one can achieve in this life, then, is happiness that is partial and passing. "Therefore," Philosophy asserts, "no one easily accords with the condition of his fortune; for there is present in each case something that the inexperienced do not know and at which the experienced shudder" (*Cons.* 2.4, 48–50). If one truly expects more from fortune, and at the same time grasps the anxious condition of fortune's goods, fear alone can result.

Quelling such fear requires thinking and naming realities correctly, considering them with utter objectivity not swayed by how one is affected by them. This means forming the opinion that "nothing is miserable except when you deem it so, and, conversely, every lot is blessed by the equanimity of the one who tolerates it" (*Cons.* 2.4, 58–9). Hence the goodness or badness of each thing that comes from fortune consists in its being deemed to be good or bad. Philosophy impresses this opinion upon the Prisoner by correcting how he names the things of fortune, since his appraisal of their value is governed by this naming. The numbing effect of this new opinion improves upon the fleeting emotional numbness to the things of fortune achieved earlier. It affects a deeper capacity of his soul, the one that connects his sense experience of reality to names.

When in possession of this opinion, the Prisoner can apprehend each reality he encounters objectively so as not to be touched by it. Yet possession of this opinion remains insecure until it is buttressed by cogent argumentation. Hence Philosophy endeavors to numb the Prisoner to the things of fortune on a rational level. She does so by offering demonstrations that nothing coming from fortune should be thought to be intrinsically good. This knowledge in the Prisoner enables him to stand apart from reality, self-sufficient in an act of objectifying, neutralizing thought.

Philosophy first gives specific arguments concerning riches, beauty, honors, power, and the rest, that none of these should be deemed good in itself. She concludes by offering a general argument that recapitulates the basic structure common to each of the specific ones, which runs thus:

> Now neither are riches able to extinguish insatiable avarice, nor does power make a man in control of himself whom vicious desires hold tightly with chains that cannot be loosened; and dignity conferred on the shameless does not make them dignified, but rather prolongs them as undignified and shows them to be such. Why does it come about thus? Because you rejoice to call things that stand otherwise by false names, which are easily refuted by the effect of the things themselves. And so neither those riches nor that power nor that dignity can be rightly called such. In the end, concerning all of fortune from which nothing is to be sought, one may conclude this: it is manifest that nothing of native goodness is present in it, since it does not always join itself to good things and does not make good those to whom it has been joined.
> (Cons. *2.6, 56–9*)[18]

Through this argument Philosophy reaches a universal conclusion by reasoning from principles. In fact, the structure of Philosophy's argument is easy to spell out in the form of a Barbara syllogism:

All things that do not always make good those to whom they are joined have nothing of native goodness.
All things of fortune do not always make good those to whom they are joined.
Therefore, all things of fortune have nothing of native goodness.

Through such argumentation, then, Philosophy reaches the rational level of the Prisoner's soul and makes him numb to all that comes from fortune.

Notice, however, that Philosophy's argument never transcends its logical dimensions. The conclusion she reaches – that all things of fortune have nothing of native goodness – derives from the universalizing capacity of thought itself. Indeed, if a thing is good or bad only inasmuch as it is deemed to be such, then isn't the right conclusion not that the things of fortune are not intrinsically good, but that the things of fortune should not be *thought* to be intrinsically good? Philosophy might respond that she does offer a reason grounded more in reality than in thought alone; for she says that calling something good is shown to be false by the effect of the thing itself. But what is the criterion for not calling something good? The criterion Philosophy offers is that of strict universality: a thing of fortune is good if and only if it *always* makes good that to which it is joined. Lacking such universal beneficiality, a thing of fortune must be intrinsically indifferent. Philosophy's conclusion ultimately derives, then, neither from actual moral experience of the things of fortune nor from metaphysical insight into the nature of these realities, but from the universalizing capacity of thought itself.

In Book 2, then, Philosophy helps the Prisoner achieve an untroubled, untouchable condition of objectivity – a condition very similar to that of a Stoic sage. Perched at a distance, he is a self-sufficient measurer of the realities he encounters, able to neutralize them by thinking them indifferent.[19] Yet Philosophy holds the Prisoner back from full-fledged Stoicism. For the Prisoner's friends – which appear to be the greatest of external goods, according to Aristotle[20] – do not fall into the realm of otherness to which Boethius is anesthetized. Philosophy carves out a place for the Prisoner's wife in particular: "She lives, I say, and preserves her breath for you alone, though hating this life, and in this one thing even I concede that your happiness is diminished: that she melts in tears with desire and pain" (*Cons.* 2.4, 19–22). Since Philosophy admits that the Prisoner's happiness should be diminished by his wife's suffering, her suffering must be something intrinsically bad and not just bad because he deems it such. This implies in turn, of course, that his wife's well-being is intrinsically good and not just good because the Prisoner deems it such.

The exceptional character of friendship comes to the foreground again at the end of Book 2 – and, not coincidentally, it is when Philosophy first includes the notion of wonder in her treatment of the Prisoner. "I am eager to say something *wonderful*," she tells him, "and for that reason I am scarcely able to unfold its meaning in words. For I reckon that adverse fortune is more profitable to human beings than prosperous fortune" (*Cons.* 2.8, 5–8, emphasis added). On the surface, the wonder here – that something adverse is more beneficial than something prosperous – seems to lie in its apparent unreasonableness, or at least in its paradoxical character. Probing more deeply, however, Philosophy reveals the real source of wonder behind this, namely, the ultimate reason why adverse fortune is more beneficial: "In the end, happy fortune draws men out of the way by enticements, but adverse fortune often draws them back by a hook to return to true goods" (*Cons.* 2, 8.15–17). How does adverse fortune do this? It does it by revealing who one's true friends are; it does so, in other words, by allowing one to recognize the intrinsic goodness of a friend. Thereby one is drawn out of the neutralized realm of worldly things in order to recognize and appreciate true goods: other persons with whom one is friends. The Prisoner's experience of friendship, then, invites him to surpass the Stoic attitude he had achieved by beginning to wonder at something *intrinsically* good and not good simply because he deems it such.

Friendship, therefore, is a human phenomenon that implodes the dividing barrier between what is one's own and what is other; for the friend is an other who is another self. This wonderful reality touches Boethius's intelligence. It allows him to see that the self – the

allegedly self-enclosed, self-sufficient self on which he has been focused – actually extends beyond itself and joins with what is other. Thus the self exists in actual communion with another, the friend. Fittingly, then, Philosophy concludes Book 2 with a poem extolling *amor*, love, which holds things together, ruling the earth, the sea, and the heavens, and uniting by sacred bonds those men and women who are open to its impulses (*Cons.* 2.8m). Ultimately *amor* – love, *erôs* – energizes Boethius to surpass Stoicism by wondering at and appreciating philosophically the intrinsic, self-diffusive goodness of reality, beginning with those others who are other selves.

Stoicism: thinking within the horizon of "a rational, mortal animal, and nothing more"

When Philosophy carries out her diagnosis of the Prisoner in Book 1 of the *Consolation*, she ascertains the "greatest cause" of his sickness: he has ceased to know what he is. She determines this immediately after the Prisoner asserts that he is "a rational, mortal animal, and nothing more." Like a good physician (and teacher), Philosophy must begin where her patient (and student) is; she must begin to restore his intellectual health, in other words, from within the parameters of his own self-understanding. And, in fact, this is precisely what Philosophy does during the first stage of her treatment by drawing the Prisoner out of a debilitating self-pity toward a confident self-sufficiency. Her labors result, moreover, in the Prisoner's appropriation of Stoicism. From the details, then, we can gather the following about the essence of Stoicism as presented in the *Consolation*: Stoicism is the worldview at which one arrives when thinking philosophically within the parameters of one's self-understanding as "a rational, mortal animal, and nothing more."

This account of Stoicism brings into focus the achievement that Stoicism is, in Boethius's eyes, as well as its inherent limitations. Within the self-limiting horizon of "a rational, mortal animal, and nothing more," human beings exercise rationality (the basis of their *differentia specifica*) within the space delineated by their animality (the basis of their *genus*). Put more loosely, when exercising rationality within these parameters, a human being looks "downward and inward," not "upward and outward," with the aim of achieving as much as possible a self-established, untroubled management of the things one encounters in the world. One achieves this chiefly by retreating within and erecting ramparts, as it were, thereby defending oneself from all that is "other" and neutralizing it, because any reality that one encounters – or, put in the terms of the *Consolation*, each thing of fortune – carries within itself the capacity to disturb one's inner peace and thus to put into question one's self-sufficiency. Understood along these lines, then, Stoicism is the philosophic expression of thinking that takes place within such parameters and in such a mode, and this is what Stoicism can achieve, as Boethius sees it.

Appending "and nothing more" to his self-definition, however, indicates the Prisoner's closed-mindedness and, in turn, suggests the inherent limitations of Stoicism. In light of what transpires later in the *Consolation*, moreover, this self-imposed limit on reason's interests and speculative capacity reveals itself to be at the core of the Prisoner's problematic self-understanding. Can reason transcend the limits of the corporeal world and perhaps even relate to a divinity who is not defined necessarily in relation to that world? And, if so, what self-understanding provides the adequate horizon for actualizing the full range of reason? Simply raising these questions takes us beyond the Stoic outlook that the Prisoner achieves through Philosophy's initial "gentler remedies." In fact, these questions point us toward the "stronger medicines" that Philosophy administers to her patient in the latter half of the

Consolation. By means of this more penetrating treatment, the Prisoner is led by wonder, on the one hand, to affirm the intrinsic goodness of reality and, on the other, to recognize his own capacity to participate in a divine mode of existing and knowing. In other words, in addition to thinking within the parameters of rational animality, the Prisoner is invited to think within the parameters of a being who is potentially divine by participation. Thereby the Prisoner is enabled to achieve a genuinely metaphysical outlook, one that allows him to see beyond his own self-interest and glimpse his life in the light of God's ever-present providential causality. Stoicism, as Boethius understands it, could never attain such a perspective.

The Prisoner's problems remain with us. We still question the meaning of our lives as well as the way in which the injustices we have suffered shape our fate. In doing so, Boethius suggests to us in the *Consolation*, we may do well initially to retreat within, to exercise reason "objectively," to "neutralize" all that we encounter, and thereby to take a stand, unfazed and self-sufficient, over against reality. We would do well, in other words, to become Stoic. Indeed, in human terms, it would be difficult to describe more precisely the ambitions of reason exercised also in the empirical-scientific mode, the mode most readily accepted today as proper to reason and the one that not a few philosophers endeavor to imitate as closely as possible. But the *Consolation* also suggests that Stoicism is ultimately impoverished; for, as Boethius sees it, Stoicism is unopen to wonder at what is other and incapable of making sense of the phenomena of human friendship and love.[21] In the *Consolation*, then, the Stoic mode of thinking is surpassed in order to address adequately the all-too-human condition in which we rational animals find ourselves – and in order to explore the possibility of metaphysical insight into the nature of reality and its divine cause. Perhaps we would do well, then, to take seriously Philosophy's teaching in the first half of the *Consolation* both by embracing the achievement that Stoicism was and can continue to be and by surpassing this mode of a purely objectifying reason through the affirmation of the intrinsic goodness of the realities we encounter, especially other persons. Doing so could put us on a path toward the convalescence of reason that the Prisoner apparently needed as he sat in his prison cell, the same sort that may be required of us in order to overcome our own modes of philosophical self-imprisonment.

Notes

1 For Boethius's announcement of this project, see *2 In Periherm.* 2.3, 79,9–80,9. Boethius was in fact very productive as a translator and commentator. "What Boethius finally accomplished was much less, but in certain ways also more, than this very ambitious plan. Boethius almost certainly translated all Aristotle's logical works (though the translation of the *Posterior Analytics* did not survive into the Middle Ages) and Porphyry's *Isagoge*. He did not, however, translate any other Aristotle or any works by Plato" (Marenbon 2003: 18). Citations of Boethius's works, both in-text and in the notes, are abbreviated as follows: *Cons.*, *De consolatione philosophiae*; *In Cat.*, *In Categorias Aristotelis commentaria*; *In Cic. Top.*, *In Ciceronis Topica*; *2 In Periherm.*, *In librum Aristotelis Perihermeneias commentariorum editio secunda*; *1 In Isag.*, *In Isagogen Porphyrii commentorum editio prima*; *2 In Isag.*, *In Isagogen Porphyrii commentorum editio secunda*. Citations will include the section, page numbers, and line numbers (if available) from the edition being used (see Boethius 1847a, 1847b, 1880, 1906a, 1906b, 2001). All translations of Boethius's texts are mine.

2 Indeed, in light of these passages, we can see why one might arrive at the judgment that in Boethius's eyes "the Stoics … in general are considered to be pseudo-philosophers" (Marenbon 2003: 154).

3 Each of these Romans, like Boethius, suffered under the reigning authority: Canius was executed by Caligula; Seneca was forced to commit suicide by Nero; and Soranus was condemned to death by Nero and committed suicide. Canius is mentioned again at 1.4, 9; Seneca, at 3.5, 28–36. Soranus is not mentioned again.

4 Colish articulates the following as a way to understand Boethius's appropriation of the Stoic tradition in the earlier works: "Boethius tends to appropriate and to apply the Stoic doctrines that interest him

in the light of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic teachings. At the same time, and while this practice is often unacknowledged by Boethius it is a critical feature of his importance as a transmitter, he occasionally Stoicizes in significant ways his treatment of the philosophers to which he gives his primary allegiance" (Colish 1985: 267). (For a similar articulation, see Marenbon 2003: 65.) Colish's idea that Boethius "Stoicizes" his treatment of the philosophers adds an intentionality that was likely absent from Boethius's mind. Suto's attempt to summarize how the Stoics make their way into Boethius's thinking and writing seems more accurate: "Even though he denounces the Stoics, as well as the Epicureans, for what he sees as serious mistakes on their part, he does, however, employ quite a few terms of Stoic provenance. He perhaps uses many of these terms without knowing that they came from the Stoics, since his only direct source of the Stoics is probably the works of Seneca. However, indirect sources include the Greek Aristotelian commentators and some Latin writers, especially Cicero. These authors had already incorporated Stoic notions into their writings without mentioning their roots" (Suto 2012: 232). See Suto 2012: 231–3 for many of the Stoic terms and notions that likely made their way into Boethius's thinking in this manner.

5 Boethius wrote a commentary on the *Categories*, translated and wrote two commentaries on *On Interpretation*, and translated and wrote two commentaries on the *Isagoge*. It is thought, moreover, that he translated all of Aristotle's logical works. In addition, he commented on Cicero's *Topics* and wrote treatises concerning a variety of logical issues. For an overview of the scope of Boethius's logical works, see Barnes 1981: *passim*, as well as Chadwick 1981: 108–73. Boethius also wrote theological treatises, but there is nothing in them that bears in any important way on his stance toward Stoicism. As Colish puts it, "From the standpoint of the Stoic tradition [Boethius's] theological treatises and his translations of the Greek authorities on arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music can be disregarded. None of these works shows any trace of Stoicism. It is, rather, to Boethius's logical commentaries and his *Consolation* that we must look for his understanding and use of Stoicism" (Colish 1985: 268).

6 "Boethius knew Stoic logic, but he did not think to expound it. Indeed, he is generally dismissive of Stoic views; when his sources discuss Stoic doctrine, he often decides to pass it by ... We may regret the omission; but Boethius's decision was, in its context, a sensible one" (Barnes 1981: 83). Colish, for one, disagrees with the way Barnes puts this, asserting that Barnes "argues unpersuasively that Boethius was completely dismissive of Stoic logic" (Colish 1985: 269 n. 64).

7 The first edition of Boethius's commentary on the *Isagoge* was based on a Latin translation done by Marius Victorinus, which is not extant. Dissatisfied with Victorinus's rendering, Boethius translated the *Isagoge* himself and did a second edition of commentary.

8 In the first edition, Boethius sees himself as following Porphyry's lead in setting aside the Stoics. In the opening lines of the *Isagoge* Porphyry says he is presenting the Peripatetic account of genus, species, and the like. Boethius remarks that in saying this Porphyry is setting aside the Stoics, despite the fact that the Stoics endeavored to treat these same matters. See *1 In Isag.* 1.10, 10–12. Hence the Stoics are never mentioned again in this edition of the commentary. In the second edition, the Stoics come up by way of a passage from Cicero's *Topics*, which Boethius quotes favorably. Cicero points out a deficiency in the Stoics' approach to logic compared with Aristotle's, namely, that the Stoics elaborate solely on the part of logic that deals with judgment (*dialektikê* or *viae iudicandi*) and leave behind the part that deals with discovery (*topikê* or *ars inveniendi*), even though the latter is of greater use and prior in the order of nature. See *2 In Isag.* 1.2, 10–12; see also Marenbon 2003: 58. Through Cicero, then, Boethius suggests that the Stoics do not dig deeply enough in their logical teaching. Their logic is one-dimensional, focusing only on the ways of judgment and ignoring the art of discovering – a point to which we return later when we consider *In Cic. Top.*

9 We will go through these works in chronological order. On the order of Boethius's works, see especially De Rijk 1964; also, Suto 2012: xix.

10 Colish is critical of Boethius in this regard when she makes the following summary statement: "In his first two sets of logical commentaries [i.e. on the *Isagoge* and the *Categories*], then, Boethius adduces the Stoics only to criticize them, and on points not always pertinent to Stoic logic. The most telling note ... is his attack on the Stoic understanding of vice and virtue, not on the grounds of its psychological implausibility but because of its failure to square with the logical relations he posits between affirmation and negation" (Colish 1985: 270). As I hope both to have shown previously (Walz 2011) and to show in this paragraph, I think more is at work when Boethius refers to the Stoics in these two editions of commentary.

11 An adequate answer would compel us to inquire into the sort of work the *Categories* is and why Boethius's apparent tangent fits well within a commentary on this work more so than one on some other work in the Organon. Boethius is very attentive to such nuances in Aristotle's works, but spelling this out would take us too far afield at this point.

12 Boethius wrote two editions of commentary on *On Interpretation*. The first is shorter and focuses on giving a step-by-step account of the work. The second is longer and delves much more into the details of the work and various interpretations of the text.

13 For a more detailed account of how Boethius's *In Cic. Top.* contributes to our understanding of Stoic logic, see Stump 1987.

14 This takes place at *In Cic. Top.* 5, 1146C–D, where Boethius simply lays out Cicero's understanding of the Stoic account of fate.

15 For a more particular comparison between the *Consolation* and a Stoic text, namely, Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations*, see Relihan 2007: 69–74.

16 References to the *Republic* are based on Plato 1968. Stephanus numbers from that edition will be cited.

17 For a detailed account of the notion of *fortuna* in the *Consolation*, see Frakes 1988: 30–3.

18 Philosophy's argument here mirrors the classical presentation of the Stoics' argument in Diog. Laert. 7.103: "For just as heating, not chilling, is the peculiar characteristic of what is hot, so too benefiting, not harming, is the peculiar characteristic of what is good. But wealth and health no more do benefit than they harm. Therefore wealth and health are not something good. Furthermore they say: that which can be used well and badly is not something good. But wealth and health can be used well and badly. Therefore wealth and health are not something good" (LS: 354, 58A). Furthermore, the Stoics' argument appears to find its roots in Plato's *Euthydemus* (278e–281e).

19 A fruitful comparison can be made between Boethius's presentation of Stoicism in the *Consolation* and the following account of Stoicism from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*: "In thinking I *am free*, because I am not in an *other*, but remain simply and solely in communion with myself, and the object, which is for me the *essential* being, is in undivided unity my being-for-myself; and my activity in conceptual thinking is a movement within myself ... This freedom of self-consciousness when it appeared as a conscious manifestation in the history of Spirit has, as we know, been called Stoicism. Its principle is that consciousness is a being that *thinks*, and that consciousness holds something to be essentially important, or true and good only in so far as it *thinks* it to be such ... What alone has importance is the difference posited by *thought*, or the difference which from the very first is not distinct from myself ... [W]hether on the throne or in chains, in the utter dependence of its individual existence, its aim is to be free, and to maintain that lifeless indifference which steadfastly withdraws from the bustle of existence, alike from being active as passive, into the simple essentiality of thought ... Freedom in thought has only *pure thought* as its truth, a truth lacking the fullness of life. Hence freedom in thought, too, is only the Notion of freedom, not the living reality of freedom itself ... To the question: *What* is good and true, it again gave for answer the contentless thought: The True and the Good shall consist in reasonableness. But this self-identity of thought is again only the pure form in which nothing is determined" (Hegel 1977: 120–2).

20 "But it seems absurd, when people assign all good things to the happy person, not to grant him friends, which seem to be the greatest of external goods" (Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 9.9, 1169b8–10; trans. Aristotle 2002: 174–5).

21 For an account of how one might make sense of the phenomena of love and friendship from a Stoic perspective, see Stephens 1996.

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