Timaean Double-Circle Spiral Structure in the *Consolatio Philosophiae*

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1. Poetry in the Consolatio: An Introduction

The *Consolation of Philosophy* opens with Boethius as Prisoner,[1] falsely convicted of and imprisoned for treason,[2] venting his despair in self-pitying poetry (IM1). Suddenly the tall figure of a woman appears in his cell. Eyes flashing, she upbraids the "poetic Muses" (*poeticas Musas*, IP1.7) from whom the Prisoner has passively been taking dictation. Denouncing them as "theatrical harlots" (*scenicas meretriculas*) unworthy of one trained in philosophical thought, she commands them to leave the Prisoner to *her*, Philosophy's, care. At first glance, this so-called "banishment of the Muses" appears to echo Plato's expulsion of the poets in *Republic* II, implying that the *Consolatio*'s poetry is subordinate or even peripheral to the philosophical "argument" of the work, tacitly identified with the prose chapters. At best, such reasoning runs, the poetic sections serve to reinforce the preceding content; at worst, they are a reluctant concession to the Prisoner's (and reader's) intellectual limitations, providing decorative "refreshment" to break up long stretches of what *really* matters: abstract philosophical argument.

This reading, however, ignores several salient features of IP1 and the *Consolatio*. Firstly, in the very same breath with which Philosophy drives out the "poetic Muses," she substitutes her *own*

1 Since "Boethius" is the name of both a character in the narrative and the author, to avoid confusion I will refer throughout to the character Boethius as "the Prisoner" and to the author as "Boethius." When I refer to "Philosophy" (with a capital P) this will always indicate the character (as opposed to "philosophy").

2 Though we of course cannot know with certainty that the accusations against the historical Boethius were false, it is integral to the Prisoner's narrative (as literary character) that he has been falsely imprisoned.

Dionysius, Vol. XXXVIII, December 2020, 36-70.

"Muses" which are to care for and heal the Prisoner.[3] We might take this to mean some other, non-poetic sort of Muse, were it not that Philosophy's *very next action*, after sitting down on the Prisoner's bed, is to recite a poem of her own (IM2); indeed, she herself will go on to sing all but four of the *Consolatio's* poems, which alternate with the prose chapters throughout. Poetry is clearly a necessary element of the Prisoner's cure and, though it may play a smaller or larger role at any given moment, it is never jettisoned as no longer relevant. Indeed, the evident care that Boethius lavished upon the *Consolatio*'s poetry (comprising thirty-nine poems in a dazzling variety of Greek and Latin meters) hardly suggests that it is peripheral. What Philosophy is objecting to in IP1 is thus not "poetry" *per se* but rather a particular poetic *attitude*: imitative and unreflective, cultivating "art for art's sake" rather than in the service of philosophy.

Nonetheless, the poetry of the *Consolatio* has by and large been neglected in the literature. Where they are treated, the poems are largely mined for textual and philosophical "content," ignoring even the most basic *poetic* considerations, e.g. meter.[4] Two recent streams of inquiry within the Dalhousie Classics tradition have proven a happy exception to this trend. Blackwood's groundbreaking 2015 monograph emphasizes the importance of the *aural* in the *Consolatio*'s poetry. To understand the *Consolatio* only as abstract philosophical argument is to ignore a vital dimension of the text: its effect upon the reader's physical and emotional state, for "if the human being is inescapably embodied, then the only route to salvation is an embodied one." The *Consolatio's* poems are thus "therapeutic medicine in a text of an explicitly aural character […] in which literary form takes

3 *Meisque eum Musis curandum sanandumque*. Boethius, *De Consolatione Philosophiae; Opuscula Theologica*, ed. Claudio Moreschini (Monachii: Saur, 2000), 6. All subsequent Latin quotations from the *Consolatio* are from the same edition.

4 This includes even commentaries ostensibly devoted to the *Consolatio*'s poetry: e.g. Helga Scheible, *Die Gedichte in der Consolatio Philosophiae des Boethius* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1972); Gerard O'Daly, *The Poetry of Boethius* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

on theurgical power."[5] Nearly simultaneously, Curran lays out the philosophical basis for how this theurgical dimension might operate.[6] Taking up the anapestic dimeter series previously investigated by Magee[7] with the addition of IIIM9 (hexameter), he argues that these five poems constitute a progressive series of theurgical exercises in the form of circles. Circular imagery appears throughout the *Consolatio* and is associated with divine and cosmic action (e.g. the perpetual orbits of the stars and planets) as well as with a return to God as source, evidenced in passages such as IIIM2.37-8, where all created things display order insofar as they "link the end to the beginning and make themselves a stable circle."[8] Curran contrasts IM5 (spoken by the Prisoner) with IIIM9 (spoken by Philosophy); though both are prayers, the former falls short of embodying perfect circular motion (ascribing it to the heavens but not the human world) and so proves ineffectual. The latter, however, recognizes that *all* created things circle back to God as their final end, and is thus effectual; drawing the Prisoner into its own rotary motion, it facilitates in turn the pure circular motion within him that will make possible his return to God.

In this paper, I hope to pull together and further deepen these two strands of thought. I will begin by demonstrating how the rhythmic pattern of IIIM9 reveals not a simple circle, but rather a double-circle spiral: a "microcosmos" reflecting its Timaean content and incorporating rectilinear and helical as well as circular motion. I will then discuss how the Prisoner's narrative motion in

5 Stephen Blackwood, *The* Consolation *of Boethius as Poetic Liturgy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 19-20.

6 See Martin H. Curran, "The Immaterial Theurgy of Boethius" (MA thesis, University of Dalhousie, Halifax, 2012), Faculty of Graduate Studies Online Theses; and Martin Curran, "The Circular Activity of Prayer in Boethius' *Consolation*," *Dionysius* 29 (Dec 2011), 193-204.

7 John Magee, "Boethius' Anapestic Dimeters (Acatalectic), with Regard to the Structure and Argument of the *Consolatio*," in *Boèce ou la chaine des savoirs: Actes du colloque international de la Fondation Singer-Polignac: Paris, 8-12 juin 1999*, ed. Alain Galonnier (Louvain and Paris: Peters, 2003), 150.

8 *Quod fini iunxerit ortum/stabilemque sui fecerit orbem.*

the *Consolatio* similarly traces a double-circle spiral path, which–unlike the simple circle, which leads back to its precise point of origin–returns upon itself while simultaneously preserving, rather than annihilating, the distance travelled. In the first half of the *Consolatio*, the Prisoner seeks to abandon the world of rectilinear human *ratio* to ascend to circular Divine *intellegentia*; however, this not only proves unsustainable but threatens to negate both his free will and his continued individual existence. Falling back into the rectilinear human world, he must ascend again, this time raising *ratio* to the level of Divine *intellegentia*. This blended mode of return to God, helical rather than circular, preserves and perfects the individual identities of created beings while granting them participation in the circular motion characteristic of divine activity: what Hankey calls an *inclusive perfection*.[9]

2. IIIM9 and the Timaeus: Circle, X, and Spiral

Even those scholars who largely dismiss the *Consolatio*'s poetry have tended to recognize IIIM9 as significant. Both its meter (dactylic hexameter, associated with epic) and its content (a hymn to God as creator of the cosmos) lend it an inherent *gravitas*; this, combined with its roughly central position in the work,[10] has led most commentators to regard it as in some sense "pivotal."[11] The evident similarity between IIIM9's content and the cosmological account in Plato's *Timaeus*, further strengthened by the explicit

9 See Wayne J. Hankey, "'*Complectitur Omnem*': Divine and Human Happiness in Aristotle and in Aquinas' *Summa theologiae*," *Kronos* VII (2018), 187-205. "Inclusive perfection is the end as return to source, or beginning, but with this difference, the beginning as end includes what is traversed between the source and the end" (199).

10 In terms of textual extent. Structurally, however, it is off-center, as it comes twenty-fourth out of thirty-nine poems.

11 E.g. "Dieser Hymnus ist in gewissem Sinne der Angelpunkt der 'Consolatio'." Werner Beierwaltes, "Trost im Begriff: Zu Boethius' Hymnus 'O Qui Perpetua Mundum Ratione Gubernas'," in *Communicatio Fidei: Festschrift für Eugen Biser Zum 65. Geburststag*, ed. Eugen Biser *et al.* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 1983), 243. Blackwood (*The* Consolation *of Boethius*, 92) points out that it marks the "turning point" from negative argument (consideration of false goods) to positive argument (what the true good, or true happiness, actually is).

reference to the *Timaeus* at IIIP9.32, has caused it to be termed a "Timaeus paraphrase." As Klingner has demonstrated, however, IIIM9 is not a simple recapitulation of the *Timaeus* in poetry, but rather represents a Neoplatonic *interpretation* of Plato's dialogue, one highly influenced by Proclus' *Commentary on the* Timaeus in particular.[12] Finally, as Philosophy makes clear at IIIP9.32, IIIM9 is simultaneously a *prayer* to God asking for divine assistance to "discover the abode of that highest good": that is, to see God.[13]

The first three quarters of IIIM9 (ll. 1-21) follow the first part of the *Timaeus* (27d-47d) fairly closely,[14] with Neoplatonic influence reflected mainly in subtleties of word choice and imagery.[15] The final quarter (ll. 22-28) of the poem sharply diverges from the Timaean account, and it is here that we see the clearest Neoplatonic influence. In the *Timaeus*, the human soul's final end is to return

12 See Klingner, *De Boethii*, 40-67, and Courcelle, *Late Latin Writers*, 301-4.

13 Klingner analyzes it as a hymn in the ancient Hellenic style, with a tripartite composition of ἐπικλήσεις (invocation, 1-6), ἀρεταλογία (profession of divine works, 6-21), and εὐχαι (petitions, 22-28); Theiler, using a similar division, finds in it the structure of procession (1-20) and reversion (20-28).

14 The main parallels are: i) The cosmos is a corporeal image (*similique in imagine formans*, 8) of an intelligible Eternal Model (*superno exemplo*, 6-7; *mundum mente gerens*, 8); ii) Its creator (*sator*, 2; Gk. δημιουργός) is eternal (*stabilisque manens*, 3), supremely good (*insita summi/forma boni*, 5-6), and, free from jealousy (*livore carens*, 7), wishes all things to be good as possible (4-6, 9); iii) The world's body is formed from the elements of earth, water, air, and fire, bound together by numerical proportion (10-12); iv) Its soul is formed from a threefold mixture of Being, the Same, and the Different (*triplicis...naturae*, 13), split in half with each half formed into a circle (15) which, rotating upon itself, causes the world's body to rotate as well (17); v) The undivided outer Circle of the Same, containing the stars, revolves with a single dominant motion. The inner, subordinate Circle of the Different is divided into harmonic intervals (*consona membra*, 14) containing the planets and, positioned obliquely to the outer circle (forming an *X*), rotates with a double motion (its own and that of the outer circle), each planet moving at a different speed; vi) The intricate helical pattern thus produced is Time: a perpetual image of the eternal Model (2-3); vii) Lesser souls (including humans) are created from the impure residue of the previous ingredients (18); they are "sown" into various planetary and stellar bodies and taught the "law" which governs their life and rebirth (20-21).

15 Klingner, *De Boethii*, 40-67.

to the "companion star" in which it originally dwelt;[16] this is "that most excellent life (ἀρίστου βίου) offered to humankind," by which it will be "supremely happy" (διαφερόντως εὐδαίμονα, 90c). There is no suggestion that the soul's final end and happiness is to see the Demiurge (*tu namque serenum...te cernere finis*, 26-7), nor that he himself is the *vector, dux, semita* (28) by which this return is accomplished; this is instead derived from the Neoplatonic system of procession from and return to God.

It is necessary at this point to discuss motion in the *Timaeus*. As Curran states, circular motion (typified by the circle or sphere) is repeatedly held up as the best sort of motion: a tradition also reflected in Plato's *Laws*, with precedents in Empedocles and Parmenides, in which rotary circular motion is identified with divine or human noetic activity due to its regular, self-similar, and intrinsically complete nature.[17] Hence the Timaean cosmos, being divine, is given "an unvarying movement in the same place, by which the god would always think the same thoughts about the same things,"[18] and orderly noetic thought is the goal of human existence (42a-44c4). However, the *Timaeus* also features two other types of motion. The first, rectilinear motion, is characteristic of

16 πάλιν εἰς τὴν τοῦ συννόμου πορευθεὶς οἴκησιν ἄστρου. (42b)

17 I.e. Empedocles' cosmic sphere and Parmenides' depiction of Being "like the bulk of a sphere well-rounded on all sides" (πάντοθεν εὐκύκλου σφαίρης ἐναλίγκιον ὄγκῳ), quoted in the *Consolatio* at IIIP12.37. For an in-depth discussion of circular imagery in Plato, see Lynn Ballew, *Straight and Circular: A Study of Imagery in Greek Philosophy* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1979), 79-122, and Edward N. Lee, "Reason and Rotation: Circular Movement as the Model of Mind (Nous) in Later Plato," in *Facets of Plato's Philosophy*, ed. W.H. Werkmeister (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1976), 70-102. The relevant passage from *Laws* X explains that reason and rotary motion are both "determined by a single plan and procedure and [...] (a) regular, (b) uniform, (c) always at the same point in space, (d) around a fixed center, [and] (e) in the same position relative to other objects" (898a10-b1: Plato, *Laws*, trans. Trevor J. Saunders, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 1555). Lee argues that this implies not only self-similarity and completeness but an "overcoming of all perspectival limitation, or the cancelling of perspectivity" (81).

18 τὴν μὲν ἐν ταὐτῷ κατὰ ταὐτά, περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν ἀεὶ τὰ αὐτὰ ἑαυτῷ διανοουμένῳ. (40a8-b1)

human souls, which move "forwards and backwards," "to the right and left," and "upwards and downwards"[19] – inferior varieties of motion described as "disorderly, random and irrational."[20] Similarly, human bodies are not circular in form but rather have "length" (μῆκος) and four limbs (44e). This shape, and rectilinear motion in general, is reminiscent of the *X* at 36b which, "dislocating" the rotation plane of the Circle of the Different, causes it to exhibit rectilinear motion relative to the outer reference orbit of the Circle of the Same. The *X* thus signifies incompleteness in the same way the circle typifies completeness and self-similarity; each of the four paths of motion defined by the *X* is *intrinsically incomplete* (since each leads away from the rest of the figure rather than, as in the circle, towards it). Just so, human existence is inherently fragmentary and partial compared to the sempiternal, complete motion of the heavenly spheres. As Philosophy describes at IIIP9.16, human *ratio* operates via a similar process of fragmentation, breaking down into pieces what is simple and undivided; rooted in the linear and temporal mode of human existence, it can only consider propositions successively. In contrast, the circular motion of divine *intellegentia* sees the whole "in a single flash" (*uno ictu mentis*, VP4.33), one free from the limitations of perspective.

Finally, the *Timaeus* also contains *helical* motion: a blended motion embodying both circular and linear (progressive) motion, as it simultaneously returns upon itself *and* yet moves steadily upward,[21] represented by the plane figure of the *spiral*. The planets, intermediate between the divine Circle of the Same and the rectilinear motions of human life, exhibit helical motion: "For [the movement of the Same] gives all these [planetary] circles a spiral

19 εἷς τε γὰρ τὸ πρόσθε καὶ ὄπισθεν...εἰς δεξιὰ καὶ ἀριστερὰ...κάτω τε καὶ ἄνω. (43b)

20 ἀτάκτως μὴν ὅπῃ τύχοι προϊέναι καὶ ἀλόγως. (43b)

21 It is defined by Proclus, in his Euclid commentary, as a continuous circular motion traced around a uniformly-ascending cylinder. Proclus, *A Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's Elements*, trans. Glenn Morrow (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970), 84-88 (103.18-109.5).

twist, because they have two distinct forward motions in opposite senses."[22] Proclus, following Timaeus' assertion that "time really is the wanderings of these bodies [i.e. the planets]" (39d), connects the helix with time,[23] an association strengthened by passages from Plato's *Cratylus,* Damascius, and Julian the Theurgist.[24]

It is important to note that, though the rectilinear and helical motions that characterize the Circle of the Different are repeatedly termed inferior to the perfect rotary motion of the Circle of the Same, this does *not* entail that the former is to be replaced by or transformed into the latter. As Timaeus very clearly states, *both* circles with their characteristic motions and created beings are required to fully image in a corporeal cosmos all the complexity of the intelligible Model; the rectilinear motions of human beings and the helical motions of the planets are no less vital to the cosmos than are the circular orbits of the stars. Similarly, the Prisoner's return to God in the *Consolatio* will not require an abandonment of the human realm in favor of the divine realm, as this would entail a destruction of the Prisoner *as* human. Rather, the Prisoner's human capabilities, most particularly *ratio*, must be "lifted up" to the level of divine *intellegentia*; this helical return preserves the distance travelled and, with it, the Prisoner's humanity.

22 πάντας γὰρ τοὺς κύκλους αὐτῶν στρέφουσα ἕλικα διὰ τὸ διχῇ κατὰ τὰ ἐναντία ἅμα προϊέναι. Adapted from Cornford's translation: Francis Macdonald Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1948), 122.

23 Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's* Timaeus, *Volume V: Book 4: Proclus on Time and the Stars,* trans. and ed. Dirk Baltzly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 20.1-21.7; 40.20-41.2; 80.5-22. See also the discussion in James Miller, *Measures of Wisdom: The Cosmic Dance in Classical and Christian Antiquity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 449-58 and in particular the figure on p. 459.

24 Chronos, the god of time, is described in Plato's *Cratylus* as the god "of crooked counsel" (ἀγκυλομήτης); Damascius, arguing that not all sacred figures need to be "bounded," lists the helix as a "sacred figure"; and Proclus relates that Julian the Theurgist "celebrated time as spiral in form and as both young and old." See Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's* Cratylus, 66:25-7, cited in Stephen Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978), 75; Damascius, *Dub et Sol* 127.20.21, cited in Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 202; Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's* Timaeus, 80.13.

3. IIIM9 AS DOUBLE-CIRCLE TIMAEAN MICROCOSMOS

We turn now to the rhythmic structure of IIIM9, in stichic dactylic hexameter. While the final two feet of each line are fixed (dactyl + spondee), each of the first four feet may be either a dactyl or a spondee, yielding sixteen possible rhythmic patterns, of which Boethius uses twelve. The poem contains 28 lines in total, falling into two halves of 14 lines each. Below I present the text of IIIM9; to the right of each line is shown the scansion pattern of its first four feet, followed by a letter representing its rhythmic pattern, assigned in order of appearance. As can be observed, a complex structure emerges:

1	O qui perpetua mundum ratione gubernas,	SDSD	A
2	terrarum caelique sator, qui tempus ab aevo	SSDS	B
3	ire iubes stabilisque manens das cuncta moveri	DDDS	C
4	quem non externae pepulerunt fingere causae	SSDS	B
5	materiae fluitantis opus, verum insita summi	DDDS	C
6	forma boni livore carens; tu cuncta superno	DSDS	D
7	ducis ab exemplo, pulchrum pulcherrimus ipse	DSSS	E
8	mundum mente gerens similique in imagine formans	SDDD	F
9	perfectasque iubens perfectum absolvere partes.	SDSS	G
10	Tu numeris elementa ligas, ut frigora flammis,	DDDS	C
11	arida conveniant liquidis, ne purior ignis	DDDS	C
12	evolet aut mersas deducant pondera terras.	DSSS	E
13	Tu triplicis mediam naturae cuncta moventem	DDSS	H
14	conectens animam per consona membra resolvis;	SDSD	A

15	quae cum secta duos motum glomeravit in orbes	SDSD	A
16	in semet reditura meat mentemque profundam	SDSD	I
17	circuit et simili convertit imagine caelum.	DDSD	J
18	Tu causis animas paribus vitasque minores	SDDS	I
19	provehis et levibus sublimes curribus aptans	DDSS	H
20	in caelum terramque seris, quas lege benigna	SSDS	B
21	ad te conversas reduci facis igne reverti.	SSDD	K
22	Da, pater, augustam menti conscendere sedem,	DSSS	E
23	da fontem lustrare boni, da luce reperta	SSDS	B
24	in te conspicuos animi defigere visus.	SDDS	I
25	Dissice terrenae nebulas et pondera molis	DSDS	D
26	atque tuo splendore mica; tu namque serenum,	DSDS	D
27	tu requies tranquilla piis, te cernere finis,	DSDS	D
28	principium, vector, dux, semita, terminus idem.	DSSD	L

The first half of the poem begins with the rhythmic pattern SDSD (A) and "travels away" from it through other patterns in the course of the first seven lines; it then returns to A (line 14) over the next seven lines, like a circle returning to its exact origin. The second half also begins with A (line 15), hinting that it will follow a similar course, yet it soon diverges. The rhythmic pattern C, which dominated the first half (4 occurrences), is here nowhere to be found; in its stead new patterns appear (I, J, and K). In the penultimate three lines a "climax" is observed, with pattern D repeated three times in a row (lines 25-27), and in the final line an entirely new pattern is observed: L, which is in fact a close variant of A, with the first two feet transposed. The second half of IIIM9 is thus best represented *not* by a simple circle, but rather a helix or spiral which returns, not to its exact origin, but to a slightly altered origin. Together, the two can be visualized as a double-circle spiral structure, graphically represented as follows (Figure 1):

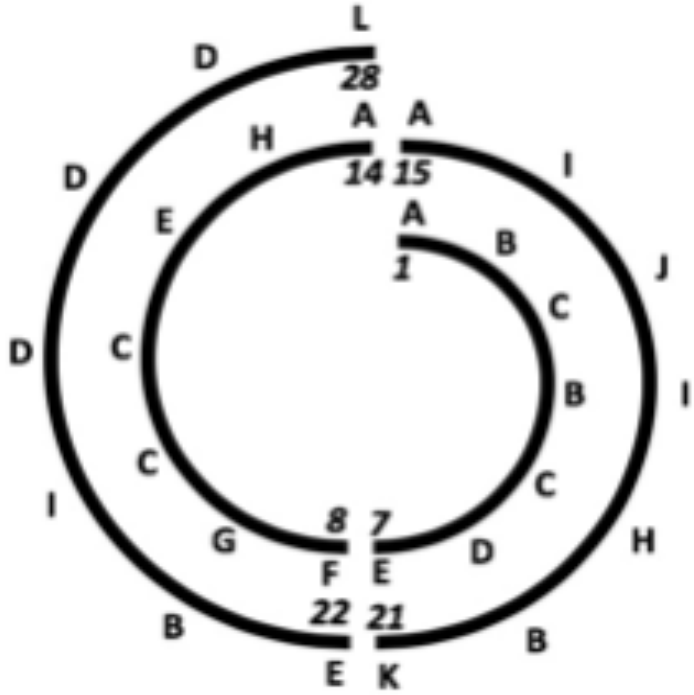

Figure 1: The Double-Circle Spiral Structure of IIIM9

Could this pattern simply have emerged by chance? Several pieces of evidence argue strongly against this possibility. Firstly, the rhythmic pattern A falls precisely at the beginning and ending of the first half and the beginning of the second half, and is observed nowhere else in the poem; this suggests Boethius deliberately reserved it to clearly delineate the two "circles." Secondly, the climax at 25-27 (further discussed below), with the same pattern repeated three times, is extremely unlikely to be a chance occurrence. Finally, it is surely significant that an entirely new pattern (L), a slight transformation of A, replaces it at the end of the poem. It should also be pointed out that Boethius was by no means the first ancient poet to conceal a hidden structure within a poem.[25] This line of argument is particularly compelling

25 Various Hellenistic poets created "pattern poems" by varying

given that the double-circle form I have described clearly mirrors the Timaean content of IIIM9: it is "cut" into two halves precisely where the World Soul is described as "cut" in the poem, and each half given a circular (or, for the second half, quasi-circular) shape. The first half, returning to its exact origin, neatly corresponds to the Circle of the Same; the second half, returning to a modified origin, to the Circle of the Different. It should also be noted that each half contains 14 lines, an exact multiple of 7, recalling the seven circles into which the Circle of the Different is divided (*Timaeus* 36d). IIIM9, then, does not merely describe the creation of the cosmos; rather, it *is* a Timaean cosmos in miniature, a *microcosmos* mirroring in both form and content its Model, the Timaean World-Soul. Boethius, as author, could then be said to correspond to the Demiurge as creator: a possibility supported by Neoplatonic theories of literary criticism and which I explore further in my recent thesis, with rich implications for the IIIM9's and the *Consolatio*'s self-similarity on multiple levels.[26]

The climax in 25-27 calls for further discussion. D is built upon a twice-repeated adonic rhythm, or dactyl + spondee (– ◡ ◡ | – –); together with the fixed two-foot ending; this yields a hexameter line repeating the adonic rhythm three times in succession. Furthermore, this pattern "fuses" on either side with the four-foot adonic ending of line 24 and the two-foot adonic beginning of line 28 to create an astonishing *twelve successive repetitions* of the adonic rhythm:

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the number of letters in each line to form shapes on the page: a technique (*technopaignion*) which the fourth-century Latin poet Publilius Optatianus took to new heights, creating a dazzling series of poems (the *carmina figurata*) containing hidden acrostic structures known as *versus intexti.* See Margaret Graver, "*Quaelibet Audendi*: Fortunatus and the Acrostic," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 123 (1993): 219-45; J. Stephan Edwards, "The Carmina of Publilius Optatianus Porphyrius and the Creative Process," in *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History, Vol. XII,* ed. Carl Deroux (Bruxelles: Latomus, 2005), 447-66, https://www.somegreymatter.com/carmina.htm.

26 See Cristalle N. Watson, "Boethius the Demiurge: Timaean Double-Circle Spiral Structure in the *Consolatio*" (MA thesis, University of Dalhousie, Halifax, 2020), Faculty of Graduate Studies Online Theses.

1 2
(...īn tē cōnspĭcŭ) | ōs ănĭm | ī dē | fīgĕrĕ | vīsūs
3 4 5
Dīssĭcĕ | tērrē | nǣ nĕbŭ | lās ēt | pōndĕră | mōlīs
6 7 8
ātquĕ tŭ | ō splēn | dōrĕ mĭ | cā; tū | nāmquĕ sĕr | ēnūm,
9 10 11
tū rĕquĭ | ēs trān | quīllă pĭ | īs, tē | cērnĕrĕ | fīnīs,
12
prīncĭpĭ | ūm, vēc | (tōr, dū | x, sēmĭtă, | tērmĭnŭs | īdēm.)

This "adonic climax" – in musical terms, an *ostinato* – recalls IM7, composed of thirty adonic lines. Blackwood comments on the effect of this "single focused rhythm": "a consistency that is both soothing and exhortative, both steady and enlivening."[27] The result is a "rhythmic medicine" that, through its "steady, yet invigorating rhythmic beat," has the power to actually *calm* the prisoner rather than simply advising calm. The climax in IIIM9 has a similar function: an urgent and unrelenting demand for the divine aid necessary to see God, which, through its repeated adonic rhythm, has the theurgic power to help bring about this very vision.

Line 28 also merits discussion. In addition to the main caesura (/ /) in the third foot and a lesser caesura (/ /) in the second foot, there is a strong fourth-foot diaresis (| |) where the end of a word (*semita*), along with a pause in the sense, coincides with the end of the foot:

prīncĭpĭ | ūm, / / vē | ctōr, / / dūx, sēmĭtă, | | tērmĭnŭs | īdēm.

Termed a *bucolic diaresis*, it is associated with pastoral poetry, such as the *Idylls* of Theocritus and the *Eclogues* of Virgil.[28] The effect here is one of a pause or "breath" which falls before the final two words of the line, emphasizing them: *terminus idem*. Boethius was known by his contemporaries as the author of a *carmen bucolicum*; thus this bucolic diaresis may serve as a *sphragis*, or poetic "signature." If so, Boethius' incorporation of a reference to his human life and work into the midst of a line depicting the

27 Blackwood, *The* Consolation *of Boethius,* 74-8.

28 R.G.M. Nisbet, "The Style of Virgil's *Eclogues*," *Proceedings of the Virgil Society* 20 (1991): 8-9.

ultimate vision of God hints that the ascent to the divine does *not* involve leaving behind one's humanity – a theme which we will see treated at length in the second half of the *Consolatio*.

We have seen that the rhythmic structure of IIIM9 reflects the structure of the Timaean cosmos it describes. Does this structure have any significance for the larger *Consolatio*, or is it simply an isolated curiosity? In fact, the narrative arc of the *Consolatio* reveals a similar spiral path traced by the Prisoner in his philosophical journey, which falls into two halves, each containing a fall from a former pinnacle followed by an ascent to a new pinnacle: the Circle of the Same (IP1-IIIP12) and the Circle of the Different (IIIM12-VP6). IIIM9 is thus not simply a microcosmic image of the Timaean cosmos; rather, it itself in turn serves as Model, providing a structural paradigm for the movement of the *Consolatio* as a whole.

4. IIIM9 as Model for the Consolatio: The Circle of the Same (IP1-IIIP12)

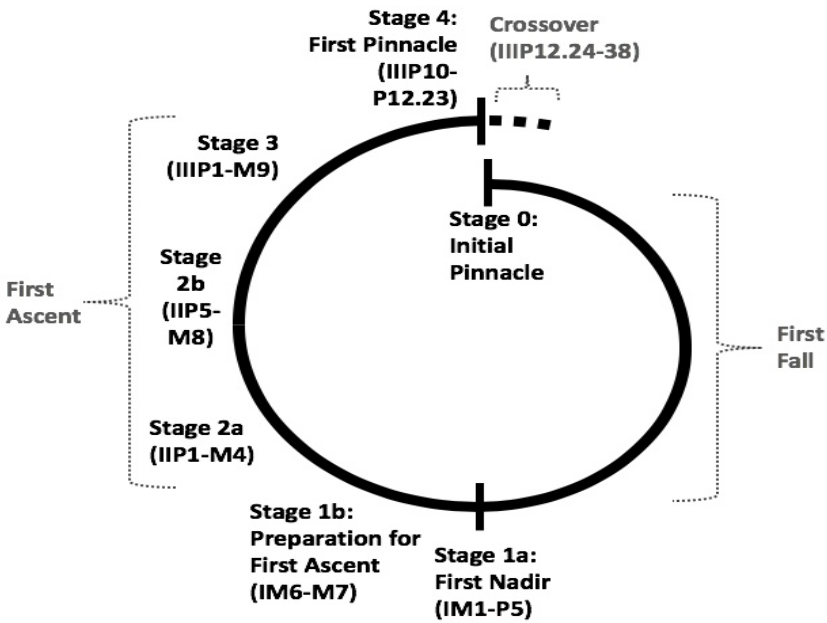

Figure 2: The Circle of the Same in the *Consolatio* Narrative

The *Consolatio* opens with the despondent Prisoner in his cell writing the elegiac poem IM1: a narrative time frame I have labelled Stage 1a, the First Nadir. As is clear from the *Consolatio*'s very first words,[29] this "current" time frame is to be contrasted with a projected *past* time frame: Stage 0, the Initial Pinnacle. The first section of the *Consolatio* (IM1-IP5) thus serves to depict these two time frames and the First Fall that connects them: a situation understood very differently by the Prisoner than by Philosophy. The Prisoner views himself and his circumstances from a passive standpoint; mute and lethargic, he can initially neither reply to nor recognize Philosophy,[30] and when Philosophy prompts him to "bare the wound" in IP4.1, he describes his situation in overwhelmingly physical terms,[31] painting himself as the helpless victim of Fortune and the evil men who conspired against him. Such a situation, he believes, can only be remedied by active divine intervention, prompting him in IM5 to call upon God to rule the earth with the same firm law as the heavens.[32] For Philosophy, however, it is knowledge and the free life of the *mind* that the Prisoner has lost (IM2), and this by his own consent, for nobody else could have driven him from his "homeland" (*patria*) of philosophy (IP5.3); thus he himself has "thrown away his weapons and linked the chain

29 *Carmina qui quondam studio florenti peregi* (IM1.1).

30 He is struck dumb (*tacitus*, IP1.13) and, blinded by tears, does not even recognize Philosophy (IP1.13); stupefied (*te...stupor oppressit,* IP2.4), he remains mute (*elinguem prorsus mutumque*) and lethargic (*lethargum patitur*, IP2.5) in response to her questions.

31 He is, he states, physically imprisoned in unpleasant surroundings (*nihilne te ipsa loci facies movet?* IP4.2), in exile and alone (*has exsilii nostri solitudines*, IP3.3), five hundred miles away (*quingentis fere passuum milibus procul,* IP4.36) from his beloved library (*haecine est bibliotheca?* IP4.3). Furthermore, he has lost his good reputation (*existimatio bona*, IP4.43) and his honors (*dignitatibus exutus*, IP4.45); his material goods have been confiscated and he himself is condemned to death (*morti proscriptionique damnamur*, IP4.36). This is also reflected in the imagery of IM1 with its fixation upon his physical state (*fletibus ora rigant...funduntur vertice cani...tremit effeto corpore laxa cutis...flentes oculos*).

32 *Et quo caelum regis immensum/firma stabilis foedere terras* (IM5.47-48).

that binds him."[33] However, with the help of Philosophy's healing "medicines," the Prisoner can and will regain what he has lost.

A preparatory phase (Stage 1b) follows, in which Philosophy lays the groundwork for the Prisoner's first ascent. Asking him a series of questions to diagnose his condition, Philosophy finds that he is suffering from an illness of forgetfulness. Though he remembers that God is the origin and governor of all things, he has forgotten their end and does not understand *how* they are governed (IP6.19). Secondly, he has forgotten what he himself is, stating himself to be "a rational, mortal animal" (*rationale animal atque mortale*), "nothing more" (*nihil...aliud*): not an inaccurate, but rather an incomplete, definition. Philosophy's task will be to build upon his limited conception to come to a more complete understanding of both God and himself. First, however, he must be made sufficiently receptive to her teaching, for at the moment he is distracted by "a tumult of different emotions" (IP5.11);[34] this is accomplished by Philosophy singing two poems (IM6 and IM7) with simple, repetitive rhythms that calm him and focus his attention.[35]

The Prisoner is now ready for the first ascent. In Stage 2a (IIP1-M4), Philosophy employs the "gentle medicines" (IIP1.7-8) of rhetoric, alternating with verse to help the Prisoner understand the inherently inconstant nature of Fortune. Next, in Stage 2b (IIP5-M8), Philosophy leads him through the apparent goods bestowed by Fortune – earthly wealth, power, honor, and fame – showing that each is extrinsic to the true self and not worth possessing. In contrast, Stage 3 (IIIP1-M9) outlines how wealth, honor, power, fame, and pleasure are not in actual fact worthless but rather partial and deceptive goods: they each promise happiness, but cannot on their own deliver it. Rather, the real good is that which unifies in itself *all* of these lesser goods, i.e. true happiness, the ultimate

33 *Abiecit clipeum locoque motus/nectit qua valeat trahi catenam* (IM4.17-8).

34 Translation from: Boethius, *Theological Tractates; The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. and ed. by H.F. Stewart, E.K. Rand, and S.J. Tester (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1973), 270.

35 Blackwood, *The* Consolation *of Boethius*, 69-78.

good or *summum bonum*: that is, God, who cannot be found except by divine aid sought through prayer, hence the need for IIIM9.

This first ascent reflects the Circle of the Same on several counts. Firstly, the process is directed entirely by a single speaker, Philosophy; the Prisoner is still too passive and intellectually weak to exert any real influence. Nearly all of the prose material is comprised of monologues by Philosophy, and she sings all seventeen of its poems; the Prisoner listens and either assents or (less frequently) raises brief objections which she answers at length. We see that each step of the ascent is carefully planned, as Philosophy repeatedly says what she will do before carrying it out (IP6.21; IIP1.7-8; IIP5.1; IIIP1.3-4). Hence the first ascent is a planned, unified process operating through a consistently unifying logic, by which apparent goods are carefully examined and demonstrated to be parts of the true good, and which deliberately tends toward a single goal: true happiness, that is, God, who is also unity itself.

The first pinnacle which follows (IIIP10-P12.23) likewise exemplifies the Circle of the Same, both in its subject matter and in the consistently unifying motion by which it operates. In IIIP10 we see that God, the principle of all things, is himself the highest good; the highest good is true happiness; therefore true happiness is found in, indeed *is*, God. For a human being to be happy, they must thus acquire divinity such that they are, by participation, a god. IIIP11 demonstrates that one and the good (and thus God) are the same; all things strive after unity; therefore God is the end of all things. In IIIP12, we learn by what sort of governance God rules the universe: God is self-sufficient and thus disposes all things by himself, the good; since all things seek the good, all things are ruled voluntarily. "It is therefore," Philosophy concludes, "the highest good which rules all things firmly, and sweetly disposes them"[36] – a statement which pleases the Prisoner by its very wording (a reference to the Biblical Book of Wisdom) even more than by

36 *Est igitur summum, inquit, bonum, quod regit cuncta fortiter suaviterque disponit* (IIIP12.22); translation here and in the next passage from Tester.

its content. Delighted and seemingly at peace, he exclaims that "the folly which tortured me so cruelly is ashamed" (IIIP12.23).[37]

5. "Crossover" (IIIP12.24-38) and Second Fall (IIIM12)

The naïve reader might be forgiven for thinking that the *Consolatio* is now nearly finished. Yet no sooner has the Prisoner declared himself satisfied than Philosophy proposes a new approach: "Would you like us to clash together our arguments [*rationes*], for perhaps out of a conflict of this kind some fair spark of truth will fly out?"[38] She continues: God has power over all things; there is nothing that God cannot do; but God cannot do evil; therefore evil is nothing (*malum igitur...nihil est*). To the Prisoner, suffering firsthand the all-too-apparent consequences of human evil, this conclusion seems preposterous; in a speech thick with sarcasm, he accuses Philosophy of circular reasoning.[39] This reminder of his personal misery sends him into a second fall clearly evidenced by the first lines of IVP1, as discussed below.

Why does Philosophy propose this "clash of arguments," an image recalling the Timaean *X*? Blackwood explains: "The problem with the conclusion of the preceding prose passage – that God rules all things sweetly by disposing them towards the good – is that it seems to lead to the total collapse of human freedom. The prisoner, though he does not yet know it, has assented rather abstractly to a proposition that will seem to imply the obliteration of his every mode and activity...By awakening his earthly grief while instructing him to look above, Philosophy heightens the tension between the prisoner's (subjective) perception of the temporal world and the realm of (objective) divine simplicity in the world

37 *Ut tandem aliquando stultitiam magna lacerantem sui pudeat* (IIIP12.23).

38 *Visne rationes ipsas invicem collidamus? Forsitan ex huius modi conflictatione pulchra quaedam veritatis scintilla dissiliat* (IIIP12.25); translation from Tester.

39 *Ludisne, inquam, me inextricabilem labyrinthum rationibus texens, quae nunc quidem qua egrediaris introeas, nunc vero quo introieris egrediare, an mirabilem quendam divinae simplicitatis orbem complicas?...Atque haec nullis estrinsecus sumptis, sed ex altero altero fidem trahente insitis domesticisque probationibus explicabas* (IIIP12.30, 35).

above."[40] Just as the Circle of the Same and Circle of the Different are set at oblique angles to one another and thus not resolvable into a single plane, so two truths – Divine unity, goodness, and power on the one hand, and human experience of suffering, evil, and free will, on the other hand, – each appear undeniable, yet, to human *ratio*, mutually irreconcilable. To assert the unity, power, and goodness of God in an absolute sense is to leave behind, both intellectually and emotionally, the reality of the human world; the Prisoner must be brought back to earth, even if the fall that results is a painful one. This final section of IIIP12 thus acts as a "crossover" stage, transitioning out of the first circle of the narrative into a new, more difficult, and more complex circle: the Circle of the Different.

A brief counterfactual puts this into clearer perspective. If Boethius *had* chosen to end the *Consolatio* after IIIP12.23, what would be the implications for Philosophy's cure of the Prisoner and for the *Consolatio* as a whole? Since human beings are made happy by the acquisition of divinity (IIIP10), what does this acquisition involve? If we take at face value, as Curran does, the repeated admonitions in IIIM2 and IIIM11 to turn oneself and one's motions into a circle, as well as the prayer in IIIM9 to "rise to God's august seat" and the Parmenides quote at IIIP12.37[41], it would seem to consist in entirely leaving behind the human realm of *ratio* (typified by fragmentary rectilinear motion) to rise, by means of prayer, to the divine realm of *intellegentia* (typified by unified circular motion). Thus the Timaean microcosm of the *Consolatio* would remain incomplete, composed of a single circle (the Same) with a pure rotary movement.

Why is this not in actual fact the solution adopted? Is it that human beings cannot sustain such a complete union with the divine, or is there something essential in the human realm itself that not only cannot but *should* not be transcended? In fact, both are true. The Prisoner's inability to consistently hold on to the unified vision of the Divine is evidenced by his reflexive, very

40 Blackwood, *The* Consolation *of Boethius*, 133.

41 πάντοθεν εὐκύκλου σφαίρης ἐναλίγκιον ὄγκῳ.

human reaction to "evil is nothing." However, it is also the case that Philosophy directs her healing medicines throughout the *Consolatio* to the fully embodied Prisoner, including his rational, emotional, and sensitive faculties as well as his intellect. Her goal is to console the Prisoner *as* human, not to facilitate an escape from, and with it a destruction of, his humanity. Reason, *ratio*, must be restored, along with the Prisoner's emotional and sensitive faculties;[42] the human is to be "lifted up" (VP5.12), not simply subsumed into the Divine. The motion needed here is thus not the purely circular motion of the divine, nor the purely rectilinear motion of the human world, but the composite motion of the spiral.

Interlude: Orpheus and The Second Fall (IIIM12)

This "clash of arguments" is further developed in the poem (IIIM12) that follows, the longest and, as Blackwood writes, "perhaps the...most difficult" poem of the *Consolatio*.[43] Though technically part of the Circle of the Different, it hangs suspended between the "clash" of IIIP12 and the new beginning of IVP1, illustrating vividly the problems raised while simultaneously reawakening the Prisoner's deep anguish that he has temporarily forgotten. A retelling of Orpheus and Eurydice, IIIM12 depicts a hellish nightmare of a cosmos in which divine *amor* deliberately ordains human suffering, prayer is ineffectual, and free will and the good have no meaning.

IIIM12 has generally been interpreted as an allegory, one suggested by the last seven lines:[44] "Orpheus" is the Prisoner,

42 See Wayne J. Hankey, "Placing the Human: Establishing Reason by its Participation in Divine Intellect for Boethius and Aquinas," *Res philosophica* 93, no. 4 (October 2018): 596-600.

43 Blackwood, *The* Consolation *of Boethius*, 128.

44 *Vos haec fabula respicit/Quicumque in superum diem/Mentem ducere quaeritis./ Nam qui Tartareum in specus/Victus lumina flexerit,/Quidquid praecipuum trahit/Perdit, dum videt inferos.* Tester translates these lines thus: "To you this tale refers, / who seek to lead your mind / into the upper day; / For he who overcome should turn back his gaze / Towards the Tartarean cave, / Whatever excellence he takes with him / He loses when he looks upon those below." It should be noted in particular that "your mind" here is an interpolation; the Latin reads simply *mentem* ("a / the mind").

"Eurydice" is his mind, "Hades" is the mental darkness into which he has fallen, and the "upper day" the vision of the highest good, God, to which he aspires. The Prisoner's "turning" in IIIP12 from the vision of the divine as perfect unity to "look back" upon the divided world of human experience and his own suffering is thus a catastrophic failure prohibiting further ascent. However, there are pressing reasons why this interpretation will not do. As Blackwood comments, "the poet comes through on Orpheus' side"; the *maior lex* of love makes Hades' condition impossible to fulfill.[45] Secondly, the Prisoner's "looking back" in IIIP12 clearly does *not* prohibit further ascent, as Books IV and V demonstrate. Finally, Philosophy, the great poet of the *Consolatio*, herself resembles Orpheus even more closely than the Prisoner does. It is she, and not the Prisoner, who has voluntarily descended from the "highest heaven" (*supero cardine*, IP3.3) to the living hell of the dungeon cell where the Prisoner has been forcibly confined; it is *she* who seeks to lead his mind toward the upper light,[46] and she who causes the Prisoner to "look back" in IIIP12. Hence a more nuanced, non-allegorical, interpretation is in order, summarized here and explored at greater length in my thesis.[47]

Three major themes in IIIM12 simultaneously draw upon and subvert the imagery of the first ascent, revealing its inherent two-sidedness. Firstly, there is the language of coercion,[48] previously used in relation to the divine in IM6 and IIM8;[49] here, though, it is transformed from a reassuring coercion which maintains the cosmic harmony into an oppressive coercion that

45 Blackwood, *The* Consolation *of Boethius*, 132.

46 This interpretation is further supported by the Prisoner's first words of IVP1: *O, inquam, veri* ***praevia*** *luminis...* ("O, you who **lead the way** to the true light...").

47 Watson, "Boethius the Demiurge," 93-101.

48 IIIM12: *coegerat*, 9; *subegerant*, 16; *impotens*, 24; *dominos*, 28; *captus*, 30; *vincimur* and *arbiter*, 40; *coerceat*, 44; *victus*, 56.

49 IM6: *coercuit*, 18; IIM8: *imperet*, 8; *coerceat*, 10; *regens*, 14; *imperitans*, 15; *frena*, 16; *dictat*, 27; *regitur regat*, 30.

negates the possibility of human freedom. Secondly, there is the repeated use of the word *amor*, also prefigured in IIM8.15 and elsewhere; here, however, the issue is not that divine *amor* does *not* rule in human hearts, but rather precisely that it *does* rule Orpheus, compelling him to turn and in doing so to destroy both Eurydice and himself (51).[50] Thirdly and most importantly, there is cyclic or repetitive motion, particularly manifested in the fatal "looking back" (*lumina flectere*, 46). This references and subverts the language of Platonic conversion; the same circular motion which in IIIM2 and elsewhere promised happiness and a return to God is now recast as tragic and destructive.

Orpheus, conquered by *amor*, looks back at Eurydice; Philosophy causes the Prisoner to glance back at, and thus fall back into, the embodied human world of his suffering. To consistently hold onto the vision of the Divine attained in IIIP10-12 thus demands a complete control of the mind which no human possesses. Even more devastatingly, this very turning, we are told, was itself specifically *decreed* by the divine *amor* of God's governance. Indeed, if the divine *amor* truly "sweetly disposes all things," we must accept it also sweetly disposes Ixion's whirling wheel and Tantalus' unquenchable thirst, as well as the Prisoner's own downfall, imprisonment, and impending execution. Prayer is rendered useless, for if God determines all things from the beginning, nothing can possibly be changed or averted. This devastating conclusion is made no more palatable by stating that "evil is nothing," for if God does all things and yet does only good, does not "good" lose all significance except for simply "the things which God does" – the same circular reasoning the Prisoner protests in IIIP12? It will take the entire second ascent, covering Book IV and V of the *Consolatio*, to fully resolve these problems.

50 As O'Donnell (*Boethius* Consolatio Philosophiae: Commentary) points out, the first i of *occidit* must for metrical reasons be short ("he died"); thus it must refer to Orpheus rather than Eurydice ("he killed her"), which would be redundant with *perdidit* in any case. http://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/boethius/jkok/3m12_n.htm#Metrum%2012.

6. IIIM9 AS MODEL FOR THE CONSOLATIO: THE CIRCLE OF THE DIFFERENT (IIIM12-VP6)

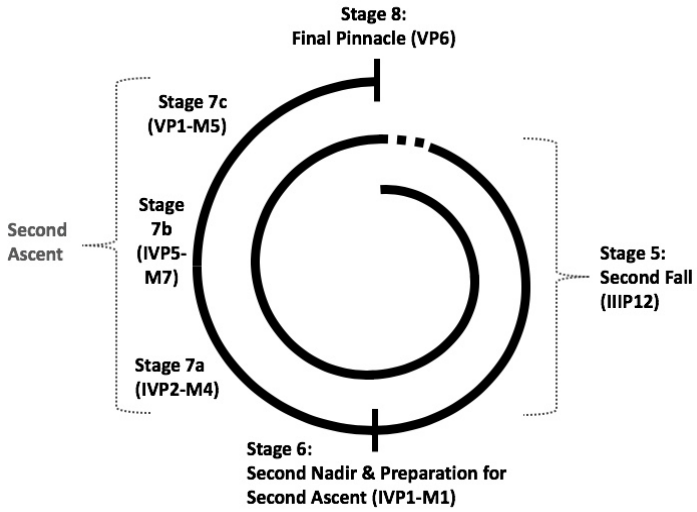

Figure 3: The Circle of the Different in the *Consolatio* Narrative

As Book IV of the *Consolatio* opens, we are confronted with an all-too-familiar sight (Stage 6, IVP1-M1): the dejected Prisoner in his dungeon cell, once more aware of his "deeply seated grief."[51] Have we then returned to our exact starting place? Is the Prisoner's journey, as hinted in IIIM12, only an endless circling in which

51 *Ego, nondum penitus insiti maeroris oblitus*...(IVP1.1). The Latin text here is ambiguous; *penitus* may either, as Tester takes it, modify *oblitus* ("not yet having **completely forgotten**...") or *insiti* ("...my **deeply seated** grief"). I believe the latter reading is more convincing, both because, far from merely "not completely" having forgotten his grief, he has at this particular moment been vividly reminded of it, and also because the wording closely recalls the Prisoner's objection in IIP3 that the hurt of his wrongs lies deeper than Rhetoric and Music, once they have ceased to be heard, can assuage (*sed miseris malorum altior sensus est. Itaque cum haec auribus insonare desierint, **insitus** animum maeror praegravat*, IIP3.2). The implication is that the Prisoner fears that the vision of divine unity and goodness will prove in the end no more effective for his pain than rhetoric and music: an implication suggested by, in IIIM12.14-17, the inability of the *flebilibus modis* to soothe Orpheus' overly great grief.

the terminus is the same as the beginning, repeated ascents are followed by falls, and no true progress is made? No; the Prisoner of IVP1 is a very different person than the Prisoner of IM1. Far from being *elinguem prorsus mutumque*, he is eager to speak and even interrupts Philosophy.[52] Although his remembered suffering is personal, his objection is not, as before, subjective and egocentric, but generalized: how is the very existence of evil compatible with God's good governance? Having temporarily lost the ecstatic vision of the first pinnacle, he nonetheless still holds his regained capacity for critical thought and is eager to apply it to the difficult ethical and logical questions raised by IIIP12. In preparation for the second ascent, Philosophy summarizes what she will demonstrate – the good are always powerful, the bad are weak, virtue rewarded and vice punished – and promises to show the Prisoner the way "back home" (*domum*), affixing "wings" (*pennas*) to his mind by which it may "raise itself aloft" (*se in altum tollere possit*).[53] The subsequent poem (IVM1) excites rather than, as in IM6/7, calms the Prisoner's emotions; depicting a soaring journey through the cosmos on the promised "wings," it culminates in the triumphant exclamation: "This...is my native land; here I was born, here I will halt my step!"[54] Here the one ascending is not forbidden but positively encouraged to look back[55] and see earthly tyrants to be mere exiles, their apparent power exercised entirely under God's control and governance, the true *arbiter* (22) and *regum dominus* (19).

Several characteristics of the second ascent (IVP2-VM5) exemplify the Circle of the Different in the same way that the first ascent did the Circle of the Same. Firstly, where the first ascent was planned and executed by Philosophy, the second ascent is a cooperative effort. Though Philosophy is still the *magistra* and

52 *Intentionem dicere adhuc aliquid parantis abrupi* (IVP1.1).

53 Translations from Tester.

54 *"Haec," dices, "memini, patria est mihi,/hinc ortus, hic sistam gradum"* (IVM1.25-6); translation from Tester.

55 *Noctem relictam visere*, 28.

does most of the talking, the Prisoner is far more equal partner than passive listener; at times he anticipates her arguments,[56] and he repeatedly takes the initiative in proposing new topics. Secondly, where the first ascent was concerned with establishing the nature of the *divine* (the first matter concerning which the Prisoner was ignorant in IP6), a deep interest in the *human* (the second matter) is reflected throughout the second ascent. Repeated references to the "talk of common people" (*vulgi sermonibus*) and the "practice of humanity" (*humanitatis usu*, IVP7.7) indicate that it will no longer be sufficient to prove abstract truths in a purely theoretical manner; the conclusions reached must also be tenable from a subjective human viewpoint and make sense of the Prisoner's own lived experience. This is reflected in the second ascent's prominent use of human mythical exemplars: Odysseus, Agamemnon, and Heracles (IVM3 and IVM7).

More generally, while the method of the first ascent consisted of tracing a diversity of apparent goods (riches, honor, power, etc.) back to a single unified source of happiness – the *summum bonum*, God – the second ascent is concerned with establishing how a multiplicity of subjects (various ethical issues, the relationship between fate and providence, and the nature of chance and of free will) interrelate and are logically compatible. This requires a systematizing approach amenable to human *ratio*, culminating in the two great theoretical models of the *Consolatio:* Fate and Providence as concentric spheres (IVP6) and the four levels of knowing (VP4-6). It is important to note that the second ascent does not operate via a simple *opposition* to the first, which would only produce paradox. Rather, just as the Circle of the Different rotates with two motions – that of the Circle of the Same, as well as its own proper oblique motion – the second ascent operates under a double necessity: it must at once retain the divine unity glimpsed through the first ascent *and* show how it is logically compatible with a diversity of created beings which have real individual existence (e.g. free will).

56 E.g. *recte...praecurris* (IVP2.25).

Like the first ascent, the second is divided into three main stages. Stage 7a (IVP2-M4) takes up the ethical problem raised in IVP1: how could a good governor let evil people exercise power over good ones? In answer, Philosophy leads the Prisoner through a series of arguments derived from Plato's *Gorgias*, which demonstrate that good is inherently powerful, while evil, being the absence or contrary of good, is devoid of all power. Goodness is also its own reward since it raises people above the merely human to the divine level (IIIP10), while evil thrusts them down to the animal level: a perpetual satisfying of pure appetite, devoid of *ratio*. Thus we learn that the human as such is unstable, for "he who having left goodness aside has ceased to be a man, since he cannot pass over into the divine state, turns into a beast":[57] a possibility vividly illustrated by IIIM12, which depicts Circe's transformation of Ulysses' sailors into animals. To the Prisoner in IVP4, such arguments, though logically sound, seem difficult to accept from the common human standpoint, which generally seeks *external* compulsions and punishments to restrain the wicked. This is, Philosophy explains, because the common person looks not to the "order of things" (*rerum ordinem*) but rather to their own, unreliable and unstable, desires (IVP4.27). This *systematizes* and thus dissolves the apparent conflict between the subjective/human and objective/divine perspectives; since they are relative to different frames of reference, they can coexist without logical contradiction. Stage 7a ends with the conclusion that vice is a "disease of the mind" much more oppressive than any bodily illness (38-42); evil people thus deserve pity and healing, not hatred. This cannot help but recall the Prisoner in Book I of the *Consolatio*, utterly oppressed by a similar "disease of the mind," his cure possible only through Philosophy's divine grace. Drawing together the subjective and objective sides of the Prisoner's

57 *Qui probitate deserta homo esse desierit, cum in divinam condicionem transire non possit, vertatur in beluam* (IVP3.21); translation from Tester. This instability of the human is first hinted at in IIP5.29, and is explored in detail by Hankey, "Placing the Human," 594-600.

experience, it decisively answers his ethical objections: if the Prisoner himself was and is deserving of pity, he must justly in turn pity and not hate even those very men responsible for his suffering.

In Stage 7b (IVP5-M7), the Prisoner raises a new objection. Even though good and evil contain their own inherent recompense, surely it is only fitting, when distributing external rewards and punishments, to give the former to good people and the latter to evil ones. Why does God as governor appear to do otherwise? Indeed, how is his "topsy-turvy" governance distinguishable from pure chance? Philosophy's initial reply – that when a thing's causes are unknown, it is naturally thought random and confused – fails to entirely satisfy the Prisoner, who entreats her to explain what she can of these hidden causes (*latentium rerum causas*, IVP6.1). Obliging, she warns the Prisoner of the complexity of this question, for "when one doubt is cut away, innumerable others grow in its place, like the heads of the Hydra."[58] We are reminded of the *pravitas* of human *ratio*, which insists on dividing that which is a unified whole into incomplete parts (IIIP9.16).[59] Just so, unaided human reason cannot hope to fully explicate the workings of the divine governance, including "the singleness of providence, the course of fate, the suddenness of chance, the knowledge and predestination of God, and the freedom of the will"; nor, Philosophy states, would there be any end to the bifurcating doubts raised by the cutting motion of *ratio*, "if one did not repress them with the most lively fire of one's mind."[60] Thus, just as prayer was needed in IIIM9 for Philosophy and the Prisoner to rise above dividing *ratio* to the unified vision of the highest good, so *ratio* will only be able to resolve the issues now raised with the help of the higher level of *intellegentia*, bestowed not through unaided human effort but through divine grace

58 *Una dubitatione succisa innumerabiles aliae velut hydrae capita succrescant* (IVP6.3); translation from Tester.

59 See also Hankey, "Placing the Human," 595.

60 Translations from Tester.

sought in prayer. Similarly, just as Heracles was unable to slay the Hydra without Iolaus' help to cauterize the necks, this new search cannot be undertaken by a single person alone but will require *both* Philosophy and the Prisoner's full participation and effort.

Philosophy begins by systematizing the relationship between Fate and Providence. When the forms and causes of things are seen from above, as "contemplated in the utter purity of the divine intelligence," they are called Providence; when seen from below, they are called Fate. Providence is the motionless and unified pattern conceived by God, Fate the sequence of moving steps by which it is carried out. This is visualized as a set of concentric spheres: the one nearest the center, which is the simplicity of divine Providence, is largely free from motion, while that furthest away is ceaselessly whirled around by the motion of Fate. Applying this distinction to the apparent confusion between people's merits and their deserts, she explains that the divine mind alone, like a skilled doctor, can see the "inner temperament" (*intimam temperiem*, IVP6.26) of human minds and knows what medicines will best help them. Thus only divine Providence can properly ordain whether a given person should receive good or evil at a particular moment: that is, their Fate. God's providential order furthermore embraces all that happens, including our actions, both good and evil; *all* fortune is useful and thus good, for it either rewards or exercises good people or punishes or corrects the bad. To the Prisoner, this conclusion seems once again to wander too far from the "common talk of men" (*hominum sermo communis*, IVP7.6), and Philosophy accordingly consents to analyze the situation from the subjective perspective as well. Looking from a purely human standpoint at each of the possible combinations of virtue and vice paired with reward and punishment, she concludes that to those who possess or seek virtue, all fortune is good, while to those who persevere in badness, all fortune is bad. The individual human is not a mere passive plaything of Fortune, as the Prisoner lamented in IM1, nor of Divine Providence, as was ominously hinted in IIIM12. Rather "it is placed in your own hands, what kind of fortune you prefer to

shape for yourselves";[61] whether Fortune is good or bad depends not upon what that particular fortune *is*, but rather upon how it is *received*. The poem that follows (IVM7) summarizes the ethical conclusions of Book IV, depicting the virtuous self-control of three mythical exemplars: Agamemnon, Odysseus, and Heracles, all of whom in some way transcend the usual limitations of the human.[62] Its intense focus on *humanity* is indicated both by its many references to parts of the human body[63] and in the way all three *exempla* show a conflict with some inward human tendency (selfishness, grief, fear) worked out in physical action. The message is that the struggles of this life, however painful, lead us and others towards the good by training and exhibiting our virtue. The poem ends with an exhortation to the Prisoner to put off his former passivity (*cur inertes/terga nudatis?*, 33-4). Indeed, we have come a long way from the Prisoner of IIM2, staring downward at the dust with chained neck (*pressus gravibus colla catenis*, 25); now, like Heracles who held up the heaven "with unbended neck" (*inreflexo...collo*, 29-30), he is called upon to follow the exalted path of virtue, for "earth overcome grants you the stars" (34-35).

The final stage of the second ascent (7c) turns from ethical to logical questions, a move initiated once more by the Prisoner, who questions Philosophy concerning the nature of chance. This preliminary question is fairly easily dealt with using Aristotelian principles: *nothing* happens by chance from the perspective of divine Providence, but for human beings, who do not see

61 *In vestra enim situm manu qualem vobis fortunam formare malitis* (IVP7.22); translation from Tester.

62 Agamemnon, sternly "puts off the father" (translation from Tester) and sacrifices his beloved daughter so that the Greek fleet can sail to Troy; Odysseus, mourning his lost companions, nonetheless craftily blinds the Cyclops to regain his freedom; Heracles exhibits great courage as he faces twelve dangerous labors, and is rewarded by being made divine (31).

63 *Iugulum*, 7; *alvo*, 10; *ore*, 11; *laevam*, 18; *fronte*, 23; *ora*, 24; *umeros*, 28; *collo*, 30; *terga*, 34. (To forestall the possible objection that some of these terms (e.g. *alvo* in 10, *fronte* in 23) refer in VIM7 to body parts of non-human mythical creatures, I will point out that a) these creatures are largely human in form, and b) no body parts are mentioned which are characteristically *non*-human.)

all causes, some occurrences appear fortuitous. However, the related question that it provokes – if divine Providence foresees all that will happen, does free will even exist? – proves far more difficult to solve, triggering a second "clash" and crisis accompanied by an *intensification* of seeking, questioning, and praying, culminating in VM5 and corresponding to the climactic adonic ostinato (lines 25-27) in the paradigmatic form of IIIM9. The Prisoner is unsatisfied with Philosophy's initial answer (human beings do and must have freedom of the will, since it is inescapably associated with *rationality*). His perplexity breaks forth into a lengthy monologue (VP3), in which he explores at length the ways in which free will and Divine Providence might be logically reconciled, finding none of them satisfactory. If all is determined from the beginning by Divine Providence, events, including human choices, could not possibly fall out otherwise than ordained: a devastating conclusion which, recalling the "nightmare" vision of IIIM12, renders prayer ineffective, destroying all hope of return to God and hence of true happiness.

A poem (VM3) follows, the last of Curran's anapestic dimeter series and a response to the Prisoner's previous anapestic dimeter poem (IM5). There, the Prisoner lamented that God's governance did not extend to the human realm, while here he struggles with the exact inverse: God's governance appears to leave no room at all for human freedom. What God, the Prisoner asks, has set such enmity between two truths – Divine Providence and human freedom – such that they stand apart singly but do not cohere? Again we are reminded of the "clash of arguments" and the *X* where the Circle of the Same and the Circle of the Different obliquely meet and appear, on a two-dimensional plane, to collide. Yet, to one who, perceiving three dimensions, can see that the latter circle actually lies *inside* the former, it becomes clear that not only do they not obstruct one another's motion, but together produce a harmoniously spiraling pattern of movement. Just so, the Prisoner quickly recognizes that in actual fact there can be no such discord between truths. Truth

is one, but the "suppressed light's fire" (*oppressi luminis igne*, 9)[64] of the embodied human mind cannot grasp the whole, and thus human *ratio* insists on dividing what is unified into pieces (*carptim*, 4); it does not yet possess the intellectual fire needed to defeat the many-headed Hydra. However, the Prisoner is able to advance the tentative beginnings of a solution based upon the Platonic doctrine of anamnesis (20-31): like the soul before birth, he perceived the complete and unified whole from the "height" (*alte visa,* 29) of IIIP10-12. His task is thus to add the "forgotten parts" – i.e. the particulars of human experience, including free will – to his retained memory of the universal, in such a manner that they cohere.

Philosophy begins her lengthy reply with a visual metaphor: just as when we watch but do not determine the actions of charioteers in a race, God foresees our future actions without thereby necessitating them (VP4.15-6). Though a compelling image, this cannot in itself fully satisfy the Prisoner's doubts; once more systematization is required. Accordingly, Philosophy now presents the second great model of the *Consolatio,* based upon the principle that "everything which is known is grasped not according to its own power but rather according to the capability of those who know it."[65] Certain lower animals can know things only through sensory perception (*sensus*); higher (though non-human) animals have the capacity for imagination (*imaginatio*) as well; humans possess the foregoing along with reason (*ratio*); and the divine knowledge of *intellegentia* is higher still, for "passing beyond the process of going round the one whole, it looks with the pure sight of the mind at the simple Form itself"[66] in "that single stroke of the mind" (*illo uno ictu mentis*, 33). Thus, she concludes, God's foreknowledge does not stem from any certainty inherent in the thing known, but is rather a consequence of his own ability to perceive things *with*

64 Translation from Tester.

65 *Omne enim quod cognoscitur non secundum sui vim, sed secundum cognoscentium potius comprehenditur facultatem* (VP4.25); translation from Tester.

66 Translation from Tester.

certainty; no thing is certain or uncertain in itself. Furthermore, since the higher contains the lower (but not *vice versa*), the latter must give way to the former if their judgments appear to conflict. Hence we, who possess reason, imagination, and sense, must recognize that the divine intelligence (*divinam intellegentiam*, 8) located above them can perceive things, including future events, in a manner that seems self-contradictory to these lower faculties. Therefore, Philosophy concludes, "let us be raised up, if we can, to the height of that highest intelligence, for there reason will see that which she cannot look at in herself."[67] The verb *erigamur* deserves further comment, as it is ambiguous between passive ("let us be raised up") and middle voice ("let us raise ourselves up"). The implication is that, just as the mind is neither wholly active nor wholly passive, so the activity of being "raised up" requires *both* our own effort and divine grace sought through prayer. We cannot hope to lift ourselves up by our own bootstraps, as it were, but neither will we be lifted up if we simply wait for it passively.

This exhortation to the Prisoner forms the basis for the final poem of the *Consolatio*, VM5, which completes the second ascent. The poem is in stichic Greater Archilochian, a rather unusual meter[68] consisting of dactylic tetrameter immediately followed by *ithyphallic* meter, from ἰθύς ("straight, upright") + φαλλός, referring to the large mock phalluses waved in the Bacchic ritual processions from which this meter comes.[69] The dactylic tetrameter is solid, regular, and balanced, evoking the physicality of the embodied human as well as the methodical, step-by-step workings

67 *Quare in illius summae intellegentiae cacumen, si possumus, erigamur: illic enim ratio videbit quod in se non potest intueri* (VP5.11-12); translation from Tester.

68 Horace uses the Greater Archilochian meter in alternation with iambic trimeter catalectic in his *Odes*, I.4: Allen and Greenough, *New Latin Grammar* (New Rochelle: Aristide D. Caratzas, 1991), Section 622, 626.11. The Greater Archilochian is a (slightly altered) Latin derivative of the archilochean meter featured in Greek drama, including stichically in Aristophanes' *Wasps*. L.P.E. Parker, *The Songs of Aristophanes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), xvii, 258-61.

69 J.M. van Ophuijsen, *Hephaestion on Metre: A Translation and Commentary: Supplements to Mnemosyne, 100* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987), 73.

of *ratio*. In contrast, the double syncopation of the ithyphallic meter propels it forward with an elastic energy, bounding upward in a manner akin to the instantaneous mental "flash" of *intellegentia* and theurgically propelling the reader's mind upward as well. The Greater Archilochian meter also features the longest line lengths of any poem in the *Consolatio* and, as Blackwood points out, represents a "metric anthology" of the *Consolatio*'s poetry as a whole, as "every line contains at least one substantial metric segment of every line of every other poem in the *Consolatio*";[70] it is thus a poetic retrospective, a chance for the Prisoner to look back and consider how far he has come in his journey. All animals except humankind, the poem states, have faces turned down to the ground, weighing down and dulling their senses; human beings alone "lift high their lofty heads and lightly stand with upright bodies,/looking down so upon the earth." The poem ends with an admonition to the Prisoner: "You who with upright face do seek the sky, and thrust your forehead out,/You should also bear your mind aloft, lest weighted down/The mind sink lower than the body raised above."[71] The "upright" ithyphallic meter thus mirrors the human posture: standing on two feet, face lifted up to the sky, recalling Philosophy's redefinition of the human in VP4.35 as "a bipedal, rational animal" (*homo est animal bipes rationale*). The rectilinear "straightness" of human physicality, including even the "phallic" connotations of the meter, is not abandoned in favor of circular movement, but only *redirected*, "lifted up" toward the sky as *ratio* is to be "lifted up" to the level of *intellegentia*. Thus in VM5 we at last see represented the correct definition of the human: a mortal animal, yet one with an immortal mind; the only animal endowed with rationality, as well as the potential to attain, through prayer, the divine level of *intellegentia*.

70 Blackwood, *The* Consolation *of Boethius*, 219.

71 *Unica gens hominum celsum levat altius cacumen/atque levis recto stat corpore despicitque terras* (VM5.10-11); *qui recto caelum vultu petis exserisque frontem,/in sublime feras animum quoque, ne gravata pessum/inferior sidat mens corpore celsius levato* (13-15). Translations from Tester.

The Prisoner has reached the final pinnacle (Stage 8, VP6); head and thoughts lifted up, he is ready to understand, insofar as is possible for a human, the manner in which Divine Providence knows contingent future outcomes. God stands altogether outside of the flow of time and thus sees all in a single eternal flash (*ictu*); it is incorrect to speak of God's "foreknowledge" (*praevidentia*), for there is no *prae* ("before") where God is concerned. Rather, just as a person might look forth from the "highest peak of the world" (*excelso rerum cacumine*, 17), God's "providence" (*providentia*), set above all times, simultaneously sees them all. To understand this image requires *all* of the Prisoner's faculties; his sensory experience of vision and height, his imagination which visualizes the scene, and his rational understanding of time, are combined and lifted up into *intellegentia*'s understanding of God's all-seeing gaze. "Just as you see certain things in this your temporal present," Philosophy concludes, "so he perceives all things in his eternal [present]."[72] No matter how many times a human changes their mind regarding what they will do, the ever-present eye of God's providence inevitably "runs ahead" to perceive it, without changing the freely chosen nature of the action itself.

Thus, the Prisoner's fears in VP3 and the "nightmare" vision of IIIM12 have been finally and decisively annulled. Freedom of the will remains inviolate; God as divine Judge views all things in His eternal present and dispenses rewards and punishments accordingly; neither are our prayers vain, which "when they are right cannot be ineffectual."[73] Philosophy concludes with a solemn exhortation to the Prisoner and, through him, the reader, to continue in the path of virtue that she has prescribed: "Turn away then from vices, cultivate virtues, lift up your mind to righteous hopes, offer up humble prayers to heaven."[74]

72 *Uti vos vestro hoc temporario praesenti quaedam videtis, ita ille omnia suo cernit aeterno* (VP6.20).

73 *Quae cum recta sunt, inefficaces esse non possunt* (VP6.46). This and the following two translations are from Tester.

74 *Aversamini igitur vitia, colite virtutes, ad rectas spes animum sublevate, humiles*

There is a great necessity laid upon us as humans to do good, for we "act before the eyes of a judge who sees all things."[75]

Conclusion

Let us cast a final look back over the Prisoner's journey and summarize what has been gained. The "two truths" of human free will and all-seeing divine Providence, which to the Prisoner initially appeared to clash like the Timaean *X*, have been shown to form, like the Circles of the Same and the Different, a harmoniously interwoven pattern. This new understanding allows the Prisoner to comprehend the mode in which God governs the world: an *amor* that draws all things toward itself through their own desire to return to their source as end, the *summum bonum* and true happiness; an all-seeing divine Providence that observes, but does not coerce, the outcome of human choices, working through the manifold changes of Fate to bring about the ultimate good of every individual human being. Furthermore, the Prisoner finally understands his own nature: a bipedal, rational animal with an immortal mind (IIP4.28), capable, through grace obtained by prayer, of rising to the divine level of *intellegentia*. In doing so, the Prisoner has not left behind the physical world of embodied life, the rectilinear movements of human locomotion and *ratio*, his emotional capacity, or his animal faculties of sense and imagination. Rather, these have all been transformed, redirected upward, and raised aloft to share in the divine vision: a *participatory* mode of return to and union with God which preserves and perfects distinction rather than abolishing it, tracing, not a pure circle in which the end is indistinguishable from the beginning, but the spiral motion of the helix.

preces in excelsa porrigite (VP6.47).

75 *Cum ante oculos agitis iudicis cuncta cernentis* (VP6.48).