

St. Augustine, Semi-Pelagianism and the *Consolation* of Boethius

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The *De consolazione philosophiae* of Boethius, the final great spiritual testament of Classical and Christian antiquity, is multifaceted both in its literary forms and in the substance of its argument. To begin with, it is the personal lament and *apologia* of a man who sees himself as the innocent victim of a fickle, cruel and unjust fortune, helplessly and hopelessly tossed about upon the stormy sea of life, blind with grief, looking only for death to end his misery. Consolation appears, unlooked for, in the form of Lady Philosophy, and the work immediately becomes a philosophical dialogue, mixing the sweet persuasions of rhetoric and poetry with the stronger medicines of logic and rational demonstrations, gently leading the sick man towards a vision of the good which is the true homeland of his spirit. Thus, the work has the aspect of a *protrepticus*, an exhortation to *contemptus mundi* and the philosophic life of contemplation, in which all the basic themes of late antique spirituality, pagan and Christian, are represented. But finally, and most profoundly, the *Consolation* is a work of theology, in which Boethius addresses not only the crisis of his own life, but also the universal, underlying questions about divine justice and human wickedness, the vicissitudes of fortune, the omnipotent causality of divine providence, and human freedom and initiative.

Lady Philosophy is called upon “to reveal the causes of hidden things, and to explicate reasons veiled in mist” (IV, pr. 6, 2–3, p. 356),¹ to consider the most difficult of all questions: the Hydra-headed question “of the simplicity of providence, the course of fate, the unexpectedness of chance, divine knowledge and predestination, and the free choice of will” (*ibid.* 11–13). The

1. All references to the *Consolation* and the *Tractates* (section, line and page) are to the 1977 “Loeb Classical Library” edition: H.F. Stewart, E.K. Rand, S.J. Tester, *Boethius. The Theological Tractates. The Consolation of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA/London, 1977). I have also consulted the “Teubner” edition, by C. Moreschini, *Boethius. De consolazione philosophiae. Opuscula theologica* (Munich/Leipzig: K.G. Saur, 2000). My translations usually follow those of Tester. (Earlier versions of this paper were presented to the Patristic, Medieval and Renaissance Conference at Villanova University, and to the Boston Medieval Colloquium at Boston College. I am grateful to all those who offered useful comments on those occasions.)

essential dilemma lies in the apparent contradiction between the certainty of divine providence, that “most certain fount of all things” (V, pr. 3, 78–79, p. 398), foreseeing and constraining all things to one outcome, and the liberty of human intentions. If the certainty of providence be accepted, how great must be the fall of human concerns: if all things are driven by divine necessity, and nothing lies in the power of the human will, there will be no sense in moral effort, no distinction between virtue and vice, no grounds for praise or blame. All the disciplines of moral life and religious aspiration will be empty of significance, and “it will follow of necessity,” says Boethius, “that the human race, uprooted and disjoined from its Fount, must fall away into nothingness” (*ibid.* 110–12, p. 402).

Lady Philosophy reminds her patient that this is no new dilemma, but an ancient one, seriously considered by Cicero, for instance, in his treatise, *De divinatione*; nor, indeed, is it a new question for Boethius himself, but one which he has studied profoundly for a long time. Still, she says, it is a matter which has so far not been worked out “by any of you with sufficient thoroughness and firmness” (V, pr. 4, 4–6, p. 404). Her reference to his long concern with the issue may be an allusion to his treatment some ten years previously in his two commentaries on Aristotle, *De interpretatione* (especially the second), where, with reference to the question of “future contingents,” he considers whether the certainty of divine knowledge implies a universal determinism. In those commentaries, and now, again, in *De consolazione*, he responds to that question in a manner which is, as Luca Obertello observes, “markedly neoplatonic.”²

In recent decades, close attention has been devoted to identifying the sources of Boethius in the philosophical tradition, particularly in the late neoplatonic schools of Athens and Alexandria. Many *similia* have been suggested, but in some respects the results have been less than satisfactory. Boethius, in *De consolazione*, never mentions a neoplatonic author, and various attempts to establish his precise dependence upon one or another by the method of setting out parallel texts have proved to be, as Christina Mohrmann argues, rather unconvincing.³ It is clear, however, that certain important elements

2. For an excellent analysis of Boethius’ treatment of the question in *De interpretatione* II, cf. L. Obertello, “Proclus, Ammonius and Boethius on Divine Knowledge,” *Dionysius* 5 (1981): 127–64; a fuller version in *Boezio e dintorni* (Florence, 1989) 67–124; quotation, 99.

3. C. Mohrmann, “Introduzione,” in *A.M. Severino Boethius. La consolazione della filosofia*, trans. Ovidio Dallera (Milan, 1977) 11–31, esp. 24–26. On the present state of the question, see L. Obertello, *Boezio e dintorni* (*op. cit.*) 110–12. As S. Gersh remarks, “we must consider the emphasis which many modern scholars have placed upon the influence of the later Neoplatonist Proclus over [Boethius] to be somewhat excessive”: *Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism. The Latin Tradition*, Vol. II (Notre Dame, 1986) 701; but see also L. Torraca, “Providenza e fato secondo Proclo e A.M. Severino Boezio,” in F. Conca, I Gualandri, G. Lozza, eds., *Politica, Culture e Religione nell’impero romano (secoli iv–vi) tra Oriente e Occidente* (Naples, 1993) 304–13.

in his argument—with regard to the distinctions between providence and fate, between eternity and perpetual duration, between the nature of divine and human knowledge—are very much at home in that late neoplatonic tradition. Whether he draws directly upon Ammonius of Alexandria (his contemporary), or Proclus, or Iamblichus, or Syrianus, or any of them, it is perhaps impossible to establish definitively. It is perhaps enough to say, with Luca Obertello, that Boethius was “a thinker in full solidarity with the culture of his time,”⁴ both Greek and Latin, and that, as he himself indicates in his second commentary on *De interpretatione*, he drew inspiration from Porphyry and “other authors.”⁵

Much less persistently explored has been the question of Boethius’ Christian (biblical and patristic) sources. A careful study by Agostino Trapè has done much towards clarifying the Augustinian inspiration of the *Theological Tractates*, *De Trinitate* (where St. Augustine is mentioned, as providing “semina rationum”) and *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium*,⁶ but in regard to *De consolazione*, although there have been many suggestions as to its Christian character, and although E.K. Rand long ago observed that “there is nothing in [the *Consolation*] for which a good case might not have been made by any contemporary Christian theologian, who knew his Augustine,”⁷ little has been done by way of showing precise connections, and the context of *De consolazione* in the history of early Christian thought in general, and in the Augustinian tradition in particular.⁸

For those who would argue for the Christian character of *De consolazione*, a considerable problem lies in the fact that just as Boethius, in that work, never quotes a neoplatonic text and never mentions a neoplatonic author, so, too, he never quotes a biblical or patristic text, and never mentions a

4. L. Obertello, *Boezio e dintorni* (*op. cit.*) 112.

5. *Ibid.* 110, with reference to Boethius, *De interpretatione* II, ed. Meiser (Leipzig, 1880) 7, ll. 5–7.

6. A. Trapè, “Boezio teologo e s. Agostino,” in L. Obertello, ed., *Atti. Congresso internazionale di studi boeziani* (Rome, 1981) 15–25; cf. 16: “... a proposito delle fonti boeziane mi pare che si è insistito più su quelle filosofiche e scientifiche che su quelle patristiche.” One must bear in mind, however, that the philosophic and scientific sources may also be patristic, especially Augustinian. Cf. M. Lluch-Baixauli, *Boezio. La ragione teologica* (Milan, 1997); L. Obertello, “I trattati teologici di Boezio,” *Filosofia* (1991): 439–46.

7. E.K. Rand, *Founders of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA, 1928) 178.

8. Some interpreters insist upon the definitively pagan character of the *Consolation*, e.g., F. Gastaldelli, *Boezio* (Rome, 1974) 54–55; J. Gruber, *Kommentar zu Boethius De Consolatione Philosophiae* (Berlin/New York, 1978) 15. A. Croce, “La concezione sapienziale della filosofia in Boezio,” *Sapienza* 34 (1981): 385–35, on the contrary, remarks upon “lo *hiatus* profondo esistente tra la filosofia boeziana e le sue fonti platonice e neoplatoniche” (390). See also C. Starnes, “Boethius and Christian Humanism,” in L. Obertello, ed. *Atti. (op. cit.)*; L. Obertello, “Boezio e il Neoplatonismo cristiano,” *Cultura e Scuola* 87 (1983): 95–103; R. Crouse, “*Semina Rationum*: St. Augustine and Boethius,” *Dionysius* 4 (1980): 75–86.

book of Scripture or the name of a Church Father. The usual explanation of that circumstance has been that he makes a proto-scholastic distinction between the realms of philosophy and theology, and in *De consolazione* he writes philosophy.⁹ But apart from the obviously anachronistic character of such an explanation,¹⁰ it stands in clear contradiction to both his theory and his practice of theology. For him, “theology” is one of the three parts of speculative science, distinguished (in Aristotelian fashion) from physics and mathematics in terms of its object (“sine motu abstracta atque separabilis”),¹¹ and its method (“in divinis intellectualiter versari oportebit”),¹² and in his practice of theology (including the “theological tractates”) he never quotes a text of Scripture, nor cites the authority of a Church Father: the single reference to St. Augustine (“ex beati Augustini scriptis”) occurs in the letter to Symmachus, introducing *De trinitate*.¹³ Even in *De fide catholica*, which is a history of salvation, from creation to *parousia*, in the course of which the authority of the Scriptures, “or of universal tradition,” and “of the universal tradition of the Fathers” is asserted,¹⁴ the Scriptures and the Fathers are not actually quoted, although there are certainly allusions to biblical texts, which will be clear, as Boethius says, “to minds learned in the divine Scriptures.”¹⁵

St. Thomas Aquinas, in his preface to his commentary on the tractate, *De trinitate*, offers a more credible explanation, when he remarks that while some of the Fathers, as St. Augustine, used both reason and authority, others, as St. Hilary and St. Ambrose, used authority alone, and Boethius used only

9. E.g., M. Grabmann, *Die Geschichte der scholastischen Methode*, I (Freiburg, 1909) 176; E.K. Rand, *Founders of the Middle Ages* (*op. cit.*) 154ff; P. Courcelle, *Late Latin Writers and their Greek Sources*, trans., H. Wedeck (Cambridge, MA, 1969) 320–22.

10. H. Chadwick, *Boethius. The Consolations of Music, Logic, Theology and Philosophy* (Oxford, 1981) 248, protests that there is no “anachronism” in attributing to Boethius a disjunction between faith and reason, inasmuch as “Boethius’ master Proclus operates with much the same distinction . . .” But the point is that neither in Proclus nor in Boethius is that disjunction expressed in terms of different sciences of philosophy and theology. In neither of them is there a conception of philosophy as the preserve of “natural reason.” On this matter in Proclus, see J. Trouillard, *La mystagogie de Proclus* (Paris, 1982) esp. 249. While the later scholastic division of the sciences of philosophy and theology undoubtedly owes something to Boethius and Procline (and Augustinian) distinctions between faith and reason (as is evident, e.g., in St. Thomas’ *Expos. in Boeth. de trin.*), the direct application to Boethius of the scholastic paradigm seriously distorts the history of that development.

11. Boethius, *De trin.* II, ll. 14–15, p. 8.

12. *Ibid.* II, ll. 17–18, p. 8; cf. *In Isogogen Porphyrii commenta ed. prima*, I, 3 (ed. G. Schepss, S. Brandt, CSEL 48) 8–9.

13. *De trin., prol.* ll. 31–32, p. 4.

14. *De fide cath.* ll. 260–63, p. 70.

15. *Ibid.* ll. 136–37, p. 62; cf. R. Crouse, “HAEC IPSA VERBA DELECTANT. Boethius and the Liber Sapientiae,” in A. Campodonico, ed., *Verità nel tempo. Platonismo, Cristianesimo e contemporaneità*, Studi in onore di Luca Obertello (Genoa: Il Malangelo, 2004) 54–61.

reason, “presupposing what others had established by authorities.”¹⁶ Boethius does not draw a distinction between a theology which derives its principles from the *auctoritates* of divine revelation and another theology which is a part of speculative science, or philosophy: for him, theology is a matter of the logical development, *sola ratione*, of doctrines about God, whether they are held on the basis of Scripture, or of “universal tradition,” or of the Church’s “own and particular teaching,” or of the “universal tradition of the Fathers.” Thus theology concerns itself, *intellectualiter*, with the logical explication of questions concerning the divine being and divine knowledge, whether those questions arise from peculiarly Christian teaching (as in the three tractates directed against specific Christian heresies), or from “universal” (including Christian) tradition, as in the cases of the tractate, *Quomodo substantiae*, and the theological arguments of *De consolatione philosophiae*.¹⁷

For Boethius, as for the theological tradition, both pagan and Christian, which lies behind him, there is no distinction between philosophy and theology: theology is simply a part (and the highest part) of philosophy. There is, indeed, a distinction between *fides* and *intellectus*, but it is essentially the Augustinian distinction: philosophy gives the substance of religious doctrine, which stands firmly on its own basis of faith,¹⁸ its true intellectual form, so far as the *intuitus* of human reason can scale the height of divinity.¹⁹ It is in that sense that there is, in theology, a conjunction of faith and reason.²⁰ Religious doctrine rightly rests upon authority; theology, as a form of speculative science, does not. And therefore theology proceeds, not by way of authorities, or arguments “sought outside itself,”²¹ but by way of its own proper logic and language: the logic and language of Platonic (and Aristotelian) theology. In those terms, the theological arguments of *De consolatione* are no less properly “theological” than those of the tractates, and it is entirely in accord with the methods of theology that Boethius does not cite *auctoritates* from the Scriptures or the Fathers.

But *De consolatione*, although it contains sections (as, for instance, Lady Philosophy’s speeches in Book V) which could well have stood alone as

16. Thomas Aquinas, *Exposito super librum Boethii de trinitate*, ed. B. Dekker (Leiden, 1965) 47.

17. Thus, as L. Obertello remarks, “Nel *De hebdomadibus*, nel *De consolatione* e nel *De trinitate* troviamo, con accenti diversi e sotto diversi punti de vista, una sostanziale univocità di contenuti”: *Boezio e dintorni* (*op. cit.*) 60.

18. *De trin.* VI, l. 31, p. 30: “fundamentis fidei.”

19. *Ibid.*, *prol.* ll. 23–24, p. 4; cf. *Consol.* V, pr. 5, ll. 50–52, p. 418. On the similar relation of faith and *intellectus* in St. Augustine, cf. R. Crouse, “St. Augustine’s *de trinitate*: Philosophical Method,” in E.A. Livingstone, ed., *Studia Patristica*, vol. XVI (Berlin, 1985) 501–10.

20. *Utrum Pater* l. 71, p. 36: “fidem si poterit rationemque coniunge.”

21. *Consol.* III, pr. 12, ll. 97–99, p. 304; cf. ll. 108–12, p. 306; V, pr. 4, ll. 38–41, p. 406.

“theological tractates,” is not simply a work of speculative theology, and is not confined by the canons of that discipline; rather, the sharp medicine of theology is mingled with the milder persuasions of rhetoric and poetry, in a work which has practical, ethical and religious dimensions. Certainly, many names are mentioned. Lady Philosophy refers to works by her students, Plato and Aristotle, quotes the ancient poets, and draws *exempla* from ancient history and mythology. But all her authors are ancient: no neoplatonist, pagan or Christian, is ever mentioned, and, in fact, her most modern author is Cicero. That circumstance may be simply a reflection of the general neoplatonic penchant for ancient tradition, but it may also mean something more. The *De consolatione* addresses an issue which belongs to the theological tradition universally (whether Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic, Epicurean, or Neoplatonic, whether pagan or Christian): that of providence (or predestination) and human freedom; and the authors and *exempla* she draws upon belong to the ancient and universal inheritance of wisdom, and stand apart from “modern” controversy.

Plato is obviously her favourite author. His words are her own: she has put them into his mouth.²² That estimate of Plato, as inspired by divine wisdom, certainly coincides with the judgement of Proclus;²³ but it is also a notion long familiar in Christian tradition,²⁴ and Christian authors had long since made Platonic myths their own.²⁵ All Lady Philosophy’s great *exempla* (e.g., Orpheus, Ulysses, Hercules, etc.) are certainly pagan; and yet, they are not simply pagan. Allegorically interpreted, they had long occupied an important place in Christian literature and iconography, in a tradition which found a certain culmination in the works of Boethius’ contemporary, Fulgentius the Mythographer.²⁶

Boethius, clearly, shares a taste for hidden meanings, whether it be a matter of obscure philosophical language, or the allegorical sense of Scripture;

22. *Consol.* pr. 4, l. 19, p. 146: “atqui tu hanc sententiam Platonis ore sanxisti,” cf. III, pr. 9, l. 99, p. 270; I, pr. 3, l. 18, p. 140.

23. Cf. Proclus, *Theol. plat.* I, 1, ed. H.D. Saffrey and L.G. Westerink, Vol. I (Paris, 1968) 5–6.

24. Cf. E. von Ivanka, *Plato christianus. Übernahme und Umgestaltung des Platonismus durch die Väter* (Einsiedeln, 1964).

25. Cf. J. Daniélou, “Le symbole de la caverne chez Grégoire de Nysse,” in *Mullus. Festschrift Theodor Klauser, Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, Ergänzungsband 1 (Munster, 1964) 43–51.

26. The traditional identification of Fulgentius the Mythographer with Bishop Fulgentius remains a possibility, but is doubtful; cf. M. Laistner, *The Intellectual Heritage of the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: 1957) 202–15; M. Simonetti, *La produzione letteraria latina fra Romani e Barbari*, sec. V–VII (Rome, 1986) 30. An impressive seventh-century witness to that mythological tradition are the books of *Mythographi Vaticani*, I and II, ed. P. Kulcsár, CCSL, XC1c (Turnbolt, 1987), which draw upon Fulgentius, Isidore and other authors, both pagan and Christian.

meanings evident only to those capable of understanding.²⁷ He stands apart from the public controversies of those who through their superficiality and political manoeuvring bring discredit upon the study of divinity, while they themselves understand neither the point at issue nor the meaning of their own statements.²⁸ Thus, in *De consolatione*, Lady Philosophy does not enter into debate about the interpretation of conflicting authorities or the specific contentions of one party or another. Addressing a theological issue which is common to pagan and Christian, she brings to bear upon it an ancient tradition of wisdom, literary and philosophical, which is common to both. And just as Plato had cast the profound truths of theology in poetic images and myth, accessible to belief, so Boethius, the Christian, does likewise. The hidden meanings and allusions, and the contemporary relevance of the argument will be evident to those who have eyes to see them.

These, and other ambiguities, which have so troubled modern interpretation of the *Consolation*, in regard to its method, its sources, and, indeed, the substance of its argument, are initially suggested in the figure of Lady Philosophy (or Lady “Sapientia,” as she is once called)²⁹ at the outset of the work. Is she philosophy or theology? Is she pagan or Christian, ancient or modern? Is she human wisdom or divine revelation? In reality, she is all of these at once: the essential point of her ambiguity (“statura discretionis ambiguae”)³⁰ is that she stands for a unitary wisdom, which unites and transcends all such dichotomies. She sees all from the perspective of an all-embracing *intelligentia*.

As to the sources of the image, they have been zealously sought in the whole history of Greek and Latin literature, from Homer and Plato down to Cicero and Seneca, in various accounts of appearances of goddesses, and various personifications of virtues.³¹ The one precedent which seems to me most convincing in detail, and most significant of all, has been totally neglected: that is the representation of Lady Wisdom in the *Liber Sapientiae*, the Wisdom of Solomon. It was a stroke of clear insight which led the miniaturist of a still-surviving Carolingian manuscript of Alcuin’s Bible to adorn the initial letter of that book, the “D” of “Diligite,” with the figure of Boethius’ Lady Philosophy.³² The modern oversight is the more remark-

27. Cf. *Quomodo* l. 13, p. 38; *De trin. prol.* ll. 16–18, p. 4; *De fide cath.* ll. 90–95, p. 58; ll. 135–37, p. 62.

28. *Contra Ent. prol.* ll. 38–45, pp. 74–76.

29. *Consol.* I, pr. 3, l. 17, p. 140.

30. *Consol.* I, pr. 1, l. 8, p. 132.

31. Cf. J. Gruber, “Die Erscheinung der Philosophie in der Consolatio philosophiae des Boethius,” *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 112 (1969): 166–86; P. Courcelle, “Le personnage de Philosophie dans la littérature latine” *Journal des Savants* (1970): 209–52.

32. British Museum Add. MS. 10546, fol. 262b. The miniaturist is reproduced as frontispiece in A. Bonnardière, *Biblia Augustinianna. Le livre de la sagesse* (Paris, 1970).

able in view of the fact that the one generally undoubted biblical allusion in the *Consolation* (i.e., that Wisdom orders all things “fortiter et suaviter”) derives from that book.³³

That is not to say, of course, that the image is simply Christian *rather* than pagan; modern studies of the Wisdom Literature have shown how syncretistic that tradition really is, and Salvatore Lilla, among others, has demonstrated how closely the biblical description of Wisdom corresponds to descriptions in Stoic and Neoplatonic sources.³⁴ Still, no sixth-century Latin Christian author or reader could be unmindful of the Christian—indeed the Christological—dimension of the concept of *sapientia*, which had been underlined especially by St. Augustine.³⁵ Perhaps rather startling in this connection, but nonetheless profoundly appropriate, is the iconography of the Emperor Henry II’s millennial gift to Charlemagne’s court chapel at Aachen, the “Pala d’Oro,” made with the gold recovered from Charlemagne’s tomb in the year 1000. The central figure is Christ enthroned as *Sapientia*, with sceptre in his right hand and open book in his left: he is the power of God and the wisdom of God, who orders all things “fortiter et suaviter.”

The ambiguities embraced in the figure of Lady Philosophy—pagan and Christian, divine and human—underlie the whole argument of the *Consolation*. Above all, she is divine grace, who comes unmerited and unanticipated, as divine *medicus*, to save Boethius from despair. The essential question she must address is that of providence and freedom, to restore the possibility of hope and the viability of prayer. It is a universal question—as old as the poetry of Homer—and Boethius treats it universally; but for the theologically informed readers among his contemporaries it would seem full of allusions to the conflicts and dilemmas which beset the tradition of Augustinian theology in the fifth and sixth centuries.

In the history of Christian doctrine, the problem of divine predestination and human freedom is especially the problem of Pelagianism, with its aftermath in the “Semi-Pelagian” controversy in the fifth and sixth centuries: it was, in fact, the major theological debate in Latin Christendom throughout the lifetime of Boethius, brought to a rather uneasy conclusion

33. *Consol.* III, pr. 12, l. 64, p. 302. Lady Philosophy alludes to Wisdom 8:1, and Boethius is delighted, not only with the argument, “verum multo magis haec ipsa quibus verba delectant” (ll. 66–67).

34. Cf. S. Lilla, “La Sapienza di Salomone tra stoicismo e neoplatonismo,” in *Letture cristiane dei Libri Sapienziali* (Rome, 1992) 505–22.

35. Cf. e.g., *De trin.* III, 3, 5: “When Scripture mentions wisdom either itself speaking, or when something is said concerning it, the Son is especially meant.” Cf. E. Zocca, “Sapientia e Libri sapienziali in sant’ Agostino prima del 396, in *Letture cristiane dei Libri Sapienziale (op. cit.)* 97–114. On Boethius’ conception of divine wisdom, see *In Isagogen Porphyrii ed. prima* I, 3 (*CESL*, 48, p. 7, ll. 12–23); and on the subject in general, A. Solignac, “Sagesse IV: Sagesse antique et sagesse chrétienne,” *Dict. de Spirit.* XIV (Paris, 1990) cc. 96–114.

by the decisions of the Second Council of Orange, in 529, a few years after his death. The essential question was whether the Augustinian doctrine of divine prescience, predestination and grace involved a negation of human freedom, initiative and responsibility; and the continual complaint of the Semi-Pelagians was that the Augustinian account of the operation of divine providence implied a “fatal necessity” in human affairs, encouraging believers “to cast aside all diligence and give up the effort for virtue,” for, they said, “exertion becomes superfluous if neither diligence can save a reprobate nor negligence ruin an elect. Whichever way they behave, nothing can happen to them except what God has decreed”³⁶

From the last years of St. Augustine himself until the Second Council of Orange, the chief centres of opposition to the Augustinian doctrine were the monastic communities of southern Gaul, especially the great houses of St. Vincent at Marseilles (founded by John Cassian about 415) and St. Honoratus, at Lérins (where Faustus, subsequently Bishop of Riez, was abbot from 433), with their rigorous emphasis upon the disciplines of *contemptus mundi* and the life of contemplation: an enterprise in which they owed not a little to the inspiration of St. Augustine, but the salvific value of which seemed to them vitiated by his doctrine of predestination and grace. It was, in fact, their complaints, reported to St. Augustine in letters from two laymen, Prosper and Hilary, which elicited his final intervention in the controversy, in the form of two treatises (originally one), *De praedestinatione sanctorum* and *De dono perseverantiae*.³⁷ But the issue was by no means settled, and throughout the early decades of the sixth century, inspired especially by the works of Faustus of Riez, the controversy continued unabated. In his treatise, *De gratia libri duo*, Faustus defines the issue sharply from a Semi-Pelagian standpoint: if the destinies of men, to life or to death, are predestined or foreordained in the divine knowledge, what use is there in hope or prayer? “Sub pietatis fronte gentilitatis malum et intra gratiae vocabulum absconditum erit fatale decretum.” Faustus, in defense of human freedom and responsibility, and the goodness of the divine will, would argue that the divine prescience must depend in some way upon the character of human acts: “vim quamdam patitur divina sententia.”³⁸

36. These are the complaints of the “Semi-Pelagian” monks of Gaul, as reported by Prosper in his letter to Augustine (among the letters of Augustine, no. 225), as translated by P. DeLetter, *Prosper of Aquitaine: Defense of St. Augustine*, ACW 32 (New York, 1963) 40–44. On the controversy in general, see C. Tibiletti, “Rassegna di studi e testi sui semipelagiani,” *Augustinianum* 25 (1985): 507–22; J.P. Weiss, “Le ‘semi-pelagianisme.’ Se réduit il à une réaction contra Augustin et l’Augustinisme de la première génération?” in *Congresso Internazionale su s. Agostino nel XVI Centenario della Conversione, Atti*, I (Rome, 1986) 465–81.

37. For a thorough introduction and analysis of these works, see *Sant’ Agostino. Grazia e libertà*, ed. A. Trapè, in the Città nuova edition of Augustine, Vol. XX (Rome, 1987).

38. *De gratia libri duo, Fausti Reinsis opera* (ed. A. Engelbrecht, *CESL*, XXI, 1891), I, 3, p. 17;

Two bishops, Fulgentius of Ruspe, “Augustinus abbreviatus” (d. 532), and Caesarius of Arles (d. 543), both contemporaries of Boethius, were the great sixth-century champions of the Augustinian doctrine. They insisted upon the universal salvific will of God, denied that evil and death belong to the divine predestination (although known to the divine prescience), and declared that the judgements of God, though often hidden, are always just. God, who is good and just, knows that man will sin (for nothing is hidden from the divine knowledge), yet he compels no man to sin; his predestination, which is “the everlasting, merciful and just disposition of his works,” must not be understood as imposing any necessity upon the human will. Chiefly through the work of Caesarius, the major architect of its decisions, the Second Council of Orange determined, in general, in favour of the Augustinian cause, denying predestination to evil, and insisting upon the double truth of infallible divine prescience and human freedom of choice, without in any way resolving the apparent contradiction in the doctrine.³⁹

The centre of greatest controversy was always the church of southern Gaul, but the church of Rome was involved in the issue from the beginning (especially through the efforts of Prosper of Aquitaine), and two popes, within the lifetime of Boethius—Gelasius I and Hormisdas—found it necessary to intervene in favour of the Augustinian position. Hormisdas (pope, 514–523), addressing a question raised by the Scythian monks in regard to the doctrine of Faustus of Riez, speaks of the severe tempest stirred up by this issue, and insists that the Roman Church holds to the doctrine of free choice and divine grace, as expounded in various writings of St. Augustine, “et maxime ad Hilarium et Prosperum . . .”⁴⁰ It would be surprising indeed if Boethius were not closely familiar with this controversy, which had its storm-centre actually within Theodoric’s domain; and, given his manifest interest in Christian orthodoxy, it seems impossible to suppose that he would not have been concerned about it. Yet, as Agostino Trapè remarks in his essay on the theology of Boethius in relation to St. Augustine, “Si sa che Boezio non ha parlato di proposito dell’ argomento.”⁴¹

In *De fide catholica* Boethius refers to six heresies: Arianism, Sabellianism, Manichaeism, Eutychianism, Nestorianism and Pelagianism. The first two are clearly dealt with in the first two tractates (*De trinitate* and *Utrum Pater*), and the Christological heresies are considered in the tractate *Contra Eutychen*

II, 2, p. 63. Cf. C. Tibiletti, “Libero arbitrio e grazia in Fausto de Riez,” *Augustinianum* 19 (1979): 259–85.

39. For the proceedings of the Second Council of Orange (Consilium Arausicanum, 529), see C. de Clercq, ed., *Concilia Galliae* A 5–695, *CCSL* 148A (Turnholt, 1963) 53–76; cf. Tibiletti, “Rassegna” (*op. cit.*) 522.

40. *Hormisdas papae Epistola LXX* (PL 63, 490C–493A; col. 493A).

41. A. Trapè, “Boezio teologo” (*op. cit.*) 24.

et Nestorium. While those Trinitarian and Christological heresies are specifically Christian in their genesis and nature, Manichaeism has a rather different character, as a religious manifestation of a crucial problem in Platonic theology generally: the problem as to the unity or opposition of principles in the constitution of the finite order, and the attendant question as to how what is other than divine can be considered as in any sense good. That universal theological question is addressed in *Quomodo substantiae*. Similarly, the heresy of Pelagianism raises in Christian terms a dilemma which is not exclusively Christian, but universal in the theological tradition: the question as to how the contingency of the finite, and especially the free choice of the human will, can be reconciled with the immutable, determinate and determining simplicity of the divine knowing and willing. The same issue is raised, for instance, by a certain Theodorus, eliciting Proclus' treatise, *De providentia*.⁴²

In several remarks in the "tractates", Boethius clearly indicates his opposition to Pelagianism,⁴³ but the basic theological issue, of long concern to himself, as Lady Philosophy remarks, and so far not sufficiently resolved "by any of you" (V, pr. 4:5–6, p. 404), is addressed only in *De consolazione philosophiae*. Thus, one may perhaps see in Lady Philosophy's comment not only a reference to the problem as it pertains to the doctrine of the pagan neoplatonic schools, but also to the same issue in its Christian (Pelagian and Augustinian) form, as remaining insufficiently resolved and urgently troubling the Church in Boethius' own times. It is, in fact, inconceivable that any theologically informed Christian author in Latin Christendom in the early decades of the sixth century could employ such terms as "praedestinatio" (IV, pr. 6:11–12, p. 356), "arbitrii libertas" (V, pr. 3:5–6, p. 394), "divina gratia" (V, pr. 3:104, p. 400), or such a phrase as "suis quaeque meritis praedestinata" (V, pr. 2:28–29, p. 392), without having in mind, and reminding his readers of that major controversy in the tradition of Augustinian theology.

The complaints raised by Boethius (especially in V, pr. 8) against divine predestination ("divina mens sine falsitatis errore cuncta prospiciens ad unum alligat et constringit eventum") are precisely those raised by the Semi-Pelagians: the injustice of rewards or punishments for actions which are not truly voluntary, but driven by divine necessity; the indistinguishable confusion of virtues and vices, and the attribution of our vices to the author of all good; the uselessness of hoping or praying for God's grace ("si quidem iustae humilitatis pretio inestimabilem vicem divinae gratiae

42. Proclo *Diadochi. Tre opuscula (De providentia, libertate, malo)*, ed. H. Boese (Berlin, 1960) I, 622 (167–68).

43. Cf. *Contra Eut.* II, ll. 26–28, p. 82; VIII, ll. 48–58, pp. 124–26; *De fide cath.* ll. 126–27, p. 60; ll. 234–43, p. 68. Typically Augustinian is the remark (241–43): gratia vero, quae nullis meritis attributa est, quia nec gratia diceretur se meritis tribueretur, totum quod est salutis afferret. Cf. Augustine, *De grat. et lib. arb.* 21, 43.

promeremur”), and the uselessness of any human aspiration towards that “inaccessible light.”⁴⁴ And the argument by which some (“quidam”: it is, in fact a characteristically Semi-Pelagian argument) seek to untie the knot of this question will not serve: they would make the character of our actions the cause of God’s foreknowledge, which is “praeposterum,” “de Deo credere nefas,” and ineffectual.⁴⁵

But neither are the typically Augustinian positions (“illam solventium rationum”: V, pr. 4; 12, p. 404) entirely satisfactory. They represent, rather, the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, the absolutely good, omniscient and omnipotent providence of God governs all things according to his will. In the mystery of his predestination, he saves some from among sinful mankind, by virtue of no merits of their own, but only by his grace. Even the *initium fidei* must be divine gift. The initiative is God’s, and is therefore necessarily effectual. On the other hand, free will (*liberum arbitrium*) remains, even in fallen man, and man must, in some sense, work out his own salvation, in ascetic disciplines, cultivating virtues, shunning vice, and cleaving to God with hopes and prayers. On the one hand, all depends upon the foreordained divine initiative in prevenient and effectual grace; on the other hand, it seems that all depends upon human effort. This is truly an *aporia*, a war between two truths: divine providence and human freedom. Each of them, regarded separately, is certain; but yoked together, they resist reconciliation (V, m. 3:1–6, p. 402). That is the dilemma “haud quaquam ab ullo vestrum hactenus satis diligenter ac firmiter expedita” (V, pr. 4; 5–6, p. 404).

In the works of St. Augustine himself, both sides of the dilemma are uncompromisingly upheld. In *De civitate Dei*, where he criticises Cicero for denying divine prescience in the interests of maintaining human freedom, he declares that “the man of faith requires both, professes both, and holds both firmly with devout faith.”⁴⁶ The problem of working out the reconciliation of those two certain truths occupied the mind of St. Augustine until the end of his life, and the phenomenon of Semi-Pelagianism arose from the judgement of some that the problem was not resolved, and was not, in fact, resolvable in Augustinian terms. The argument of *De consolatione philosophiae* addresses precisely that difficulty, and everywhere, throughout the treatise, in vocabulary and thought, there are echos of St. Augustine and the Semi-Pelagian debate, which could scarcely have been missed by sixth-century Christian readers.

44. *Consol.* V, 3, ll. 101–07, p. 400.

45. The argument is essentially that of Faustus of Riez, *De gratia libri duo* II, 2: “praescientia dei de materia humanorum actuum sumat exordium quid de nobis praescire ac praecoordinare debeat deus, quantum pertinet ad futurum, in profectu hominis defectuque consistit” (*ed. cit.*) 62.

46. Augustine, *De civ. Dei* V, 10.

When Lady Philosophy undertakes to explain the simplicity of providence, the course of fate, the suddenness of chance, the divine knowledge and predestination, and the freedom of the will (IV, pr. 6:11–12, p. 356), beginning “as if from a new principle,” she lays down the presupposition that “the generation of everything, and the entire development of mutable natures, and whatever moves in any way, are given their causes, order and forms from the stability of the divine mind” (IV, pr. 6:22–25, pp. 356–58). In an argument reminiscent of both St. Augustine and the Neoplatonic schools, she explains that what the ancients called “fate” is the simplicity of divine providence, explicated in the temporal order in an indissoluble connection of causes.⁴⁷ Whether or not “divine spirits” of one sort or another are servants of providence in that explication (IV, pr. 6: 51–56, p. 360), it is clear that fate is nothing other than the mobile and temporal ordering of what the divine simplicity has disposed.⁴⁸

The divine working may seem confused and unfair to human minds unable to contemplate the order, but one should think of God, “rector ac medicator mentium (IV, pr.6: 121, p. 364), as a good “medicus,”⁴⁹ who knows how to apply sweet or bitter remedies according to the inner temper of men’s minds, as he knows to be suitable to each. Even wickedness cannot fall outside God’s ordering, for the divine power even draws good from evil (IV, pr. 6:189–90, p. 370).⁵⁰ And although man is unable to comprehend or explicate all the divine “machinas,” yet he can perceive that God disposes all things towards the good, and banishes all evil from the “republic” of his universe (IV, pr. 6:203–04, p. 370).⁵¹ Thus the high Creator rules creation, binding all things by law, recalling them to right paths. That law of motion is the love in all things, whereby they seek their good, and flow back to the cause of their existence, converted by the returning fire of love (IV, m. 6: 44–48, p. 374).⁵² In the *exitus* and *reditus* of the creation, Providence sees and disposes all that is predestined to each according to his merits (V, pr. 2: 27–29, p. 392).

But to Boethius, the certainty of divine predestination seems to contradict any possibility of human freedom. There is a battle here between two truths, each certain in itself, but refusing to be yoked together (V, m. 3: 1–5, p. 402).⁵³ Lady Philosophy finds the source of the dilemma in a

47. On providence and fate in Proclus, see E.R. Dodds, *Proclus. The Elements of Theology* (Oxford, 1933) 263; in Augustine, *De civ. Dei* V, 9.

48. *Consol.* IV, pr. 6: 51–60, p. 360. Cf. Augustine, *De gen. ad litt.* IX, 14, 24; *De civ. Dei* VII, 30.

49. *Consol.* IV, pr. 6: 121, p. 364. Cf. Augustine, *De corrept. et grat.* 5, 7; 5, 8; 14, 43.

50. Cf. Augustine, *De grat. et lib. arb.* 22, 44; *De corrept. et grat.* 10, 27; *Enchir.* 8, 227.

51. Cf. Augustine, *De civ. Dei* XI, 22; *De trin.* III, 4, 10.

52. Cf. Augustine, *Conf.* XIII, 9, 10; *De gen. ad litt.* I, 4, 9.

53. Cf. Augustine, *De grat. et lib. arb.* 21, 42; Immo utrumque verum est, quia et sua voluntate

confusion between divine and human ways of knowing; and in the course of a thoroughly Neoplatonic argument (at once Augustinian and Procline) about eternity and time, the divine substance, and appropriate modes of knowledge she brings Boethius to the conclusion that future events have a necessary character when related to the divine knowledge (in which, of course, they are not future), while, considered in themselves, they are free from the bonds of necessity.

As discursive reasoning is held within the unitive grasp of *intelligentia* without losing its own character as discursive, and as the mobility of time is held within the stable “now” of eternity, just so human action is held within the unity of divine knowledge and will, without losing its own character as free. Thus, she affirms both sides of the Augustinian *aporia*. Thus, she saves the justice of reward and punishment, and the usefulness of hopes and prayers, “which when they are right cannot be ineffectual” (V, pr. 5: 171–72, p. 434). Therefore, she admonishes Boethius, the need for righteousness is great, for “you act before the eyes of an all-discerning Judge” (V, pr. 5: 175–76, p. 434).

The *Consolation*, in its explication—theological and poetic—of predestination, grace and liberty, clearly addresses a major problem in Augustinian doctrine, and provides a powerful resolution of the Semi-Pelagian dilemma. Yet, so far as we know, the contemporaries of Boethius paid it no heed. Certainly, there is no indication that Fulgentius or Caesarius knew anything of it; and the Second Council of Orange was content to insist upon both sides of the Augustinian *aporia* without attempting any resolution. It is not until the ninth century that we find an echo of the argument of the *Consolation*, in the very controversial treatise of John Scottus Eriugena, *De divina praedestinatione*,⁵⁴ which represents quite precisely the doctrine of the *Consolation*, and carefully relates every aspect of the argument to texts of St. Augustine. Goulven Madec, editor of the critical edition of Eriugena’s treatise, explains that Eriugena interprets the Augustinianism of predestination in terms of the Augustinianism of divine simplicity.⁵⁵ That is true and basic; but one must bear in mind that for Eriugena, Augustine’s view of divine simplicity includes the whole of creation, eternally thought and willed “semel et simul

venerunt, et tamen spiritum eorum Dominus suscitavit.

54. G. Madec, ed., *Iobannis Scotti: De divina praedestinatione liber*, CCCM, 50 (Turnholt, 1978); trans. M. Brennan, *John Scottus Eriugena. Treatise on Divine Predestination* (Notre Dame, 1998); a new critical edition, with Italian translation and commentary, has been edited by Ernesto Mainoldi, *Giovanni Scoto Eriugena, De praedestinatione liber* (Florence: Edizioni Galluzzo, 2003).

55. G. Madec, “L’augustinisme de Jean Scot dans le ‘De praedestinatione,’” in *Jean Scot Érigène et l’histoire de la philosophie* (Paris, 1977) 183–90.

et semper,” in the primordial causes.⁵⁶ Thus, all things live and move in the divine thinking and willing of them, and each thing according to the character of its finite nature. The multiplicity of creation is held in the unity of the divine mind, and all the discursiveness of time is held within the eternal “now” of the divine simplicity. Thus, all is divinely known and willed: not, properly speaking, *foreknown* or *predestined*, but eternally known and willed, including human freedom. Both sides of the *aporia* are true: both the perfection of the divine knowing and willing, and the reality of human freedom and responsibility. That is the heart of Eriugena’s argument, which he presents and carefully documents as an interpretation of St. Augustine.

But that is also the argument of Boethius, in Books IV and V of the *Consolation*. The precise relation of Eriugena’s treatise to Boethius has yet to be worked out,⁵⁷ but Eriugena, in that ninth-century revival of the Semi-Pelagian controversy, cannot have been unmindful of the *Consolation*, just as Boethius could not have been ignorant of St. Augustine’s works on predestination. A recognition of the character of the *Consolation* as an essay in Augustinian theology, in the context of the Semi-Pelagian controversy, should provide a starting-point for the Eriugena-Boethius comparison, as well as suggest a new perspective on the place of Boethius in the Augustinian tradition.

56. Cf. R. Crouse, “Primordiales causae in Eriugena’s Interpretation of Genesis: Sources and Significance,” in G. Van Riel, C. Steel, J. McEvoy, eds., *Iobannes Scottus Eriugena: The Bible and Hermeneutics* (Leuven, 1996) 209–20.

57. Cf. G. d’Onofrio, “Giovanni Scoto e Boezio: tracce degli ‘opuscula sacra’ e della ‘Consolatio’ nell’ opera eriugeniana,” *Studi Medievali* 21 (1980): 707–52; R. Crouse, “Predestination, Human Freedom and the Augustinian Theology of History in Eriugena’s *De divina praedestinatione* in J. McEvoy and M. Dunne, *History and Eschatology in John Scottus Eriugena and His Time* (Leuven: Leuven UP, 2002) 303–11; and E. Mainoldi’s account of the sources in the introduction to his edition (*op. cit.*) xlvi–lii.