

The Circular Activity of Prayer in Boethius' *Consolation*

Martin Curran

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

In Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, Lady Philosophy appears to the unnamed Prisoner and, through a series of increasingly complex arguments and poems, restores his faith in philosophy and in the providence of God. Though there are prayers in the work, prayer is never a subject directly addressed for more than a few lines at a time. Nevertheless, Lady Philosophy ends the work by saying, "Nor are hopes and prayers put in God in vain, which, when they are right, are not able to be inefficient" (5, 6,46).¹ These final claims demand that all earlier references to prayer be re-read in a new light.

This paper will begin by examining the thematic link in a set of four inter-related poems; they represent a continuing discussion on natural action and on circular and spherical imagery. The first poem is I,V, in which the Prisoner sees none of the circular order of the heavens in the physical world. Natural action has a close relation to the circle imagery throughout the work and this has implications for man's reason. Here Boethius is evoking a tradition present throughout the history of philosophy. Reis summarizes Plato's views thus:

According to the Plato of the *Timaeus* (34 a 2f) and the *Laws* (897 d 8–898 a 6) the circle or rather the unceasing circular motion is the image ... of intellect (νοῦς) which through the regular circling of the heavenly bodies manifests itself as a principle of cosmic order. However, this reasoning presupposes the superiority of circular motion to all other kinds of motion which in the eyes of Plato is only a consequence of its self-sufficiency and sameness in several respects.²

1. *Nec frustra sunt in deo positae spes precesque, quae, cum rectae sunt, inefficaces esse non possunt.* The Latin text is from Boethius, *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, ed. Claudio Moreschini (Munich: Bibliotheca Teubneriana, 2005). English translations from Boethius are my own.

2. Burkhard Reis, "The Circle Simile in the Platonic Curriculum of Albinus," in *The Perennial Tradition of Neoplatonism*, Ancient and Medieval Philosophy: De Wulf Mansion Centre, Series I.XXIV, ed. John J. Cleary (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1997), 243.

Though Aristotle rejects the connection between circular motion and mental activity, he “clings to the excellence of circular motion in *Physics* VIII.”³ By using this image, Boethius is alluding to a tradition in which circular action is the best kind. This theme will also be explored with reference to the relation between prayer, circular action and Lady Philosophy. I will end with a fuller examination of the purpose of prayer and, with this knowledge, a second evaluation of some climactic poems.

At 1, V the Prisoner, lamenting his position and the state of the world, prays for God to control everything on earth with the same structure and order possessed by the rotating heavens. At 3, IX Lady Philosophy prays that God enlighten their minds and lift them up from human reason to the level of divine intellect. This paper is an attempt to trace the logic of prayer in the work, in order to discern the difference between the Prisoner’s prayer at 1, V and Lady Philosophy’s at 3, IX. Why is one prayer ‘right’ and the other one not? The key to answering this question comes from the circle imagery throughout the work, each book containing a different use. I will argue that all the circles are associated with natural action and movement toward the divine. The heavens are a prime example of natural activity and their circularity is proof of this. The Prisoner comes to realize that natural activities like thought and prayer connect him to his origin and help to bring him to his end. God is conceived as the centre pivot of providence; the closer man moves to this, the more godlike he is, but he cannot go the full way by himself. Where reason cannot reach, prayer is necessary, and even if grace does not arrive, a proper prayer will be effective by being natural activity and a connection to the divine.

THE ANAPESTIC DIMETER POEMS AND THEIR COMPANIONS

The only poems in the *Consolation* which are in anapestic dimeter are 1, V; 3, II; 4, VI; and 5, III.⁴ Taken together they contain a crucial discussion on natural activity and circles. The first poem is the prayer at 1, V following a long lament by the Prisoner. In it he sings, “O founder of the starry spheres, resting on your everlasting throne you turn heaven quickly in a circle and you drive the stars to be open to law” (1, V,1–4).⁵ God is conceived as the efficient cause of the heavens and also the direct agent of their spinning. While discussing the oceans, the Prisoner ends his prayer thus, comparing the effects of Fortune with the ocean: “Steersman, check the fierce waves and

3. *Ibid.*, 244. See Reis for an analysis from Plato through to the Neoplatonists.

4. Joachim Gruber, *Kommentar zu Boethius, De Consolatione Philosophiae*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006), 21.

5. *O stelliferi conditor orbis, / qui perpetuo nixus solio / rapido caelum turbine versas / legemque pati sidera cogis.*

as you guide boundless heaven, steady earth with that [same] firm covenant" (1, V,46–8).⁶ The Prisoner wants the order of the circular heavens to be present in, presumably, everything on earth. The problem is one of reconciling universal ideas with singular experience: "As is clear from the opening of the *Consolation*, the exile grasps both the concept of universal order and the concept of man as a rational animal: his difficulty originates in his inability to comprehend their relation (1. m.5, pr.6)."⁷ The circle or sphere is an appropriate image for order and stability, but it can also represent the finishing point of the Prisoner's development. As Reis argues, the circle is for Plato a symbol of the overcoming of perspective.⁸ The *Consolation* then can be seen as the account of the Prisoner's development towards a circular end, both in viewpoint and action. The Prisoner thinks this perfect position is wholly removed from his life and, generally, the physical world.

Though the logic is worked out before this, the hymn to Nature at 3, II is a direct response to the earlier complaint. Lady Philosophy begins by singing, "Nature has power to bend the great reins of things, and, with laws, prescient Nature keeps the great orb safe and, binding, draws tight each thing in an unloosened knot" (3, II,1–5).⁹ Philosophy presents a world in which everything is held in chains that cannot be broken. The world is not constant flux as the previous invocation suggests, but instead everything is directed by itself towards its proper end. For her final example, Philosophy sings, "Phoebus descends into western waves, but again on his secret flight, turns the car into the accustomed circle" (3, II,31–3).¹⁰ In this case the sun is shown as something that does not deviate from its proper nature and moves in a circle. God is no longer the direct cause of the *revolution* of the heavens, but the final cause. He does not turn the heavens the way Lady Fortune turns her wheel (2, I,1), but instead all things move for him. The Prisoner wishes in 1, V that God would control all things, but here he finds that all things operate according to their nature towards God.

Immediately after the example of Phoebus, Philosophy concludes the prayer: "Everything seeks again its return and rejoices in its return; a thing does not stay with the traditional order, except that which joins the origin

6. *Rapidos, rector, comprime fluctus / et quo caelum regis immensum / firma stabiles foedere terras.*

7. Elaine Scarry, "The External Referent: Cosmic Order; The Well-Rounded Sphere: Cognition and Metaphysical Structure in Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*," in *Resisting Representation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 146.

8. Reis, "The Circle Simile," 243–44.

9. *Quantas rerum flectat habenas / natura potens, quibus immensum / legibus orbem prouida seruet / stringatque ligans inresoluto / singula nexu.*

10. *Cadit Hesperias Phoebus in undas, / sed secreto tramite rursus / currum solitos vertit ad ortus.*

with the end and makes for itself a fixed circle” (3, II,34–8).¹¹ The proper nature of all things is represented as a circle in which the beginning and end are united. It is no coincidence that God is seen as the beginning and end of all things—he is the maker invoked in 1, V, but in 3, VI, similar language establishes God as that which one’s nature seeks. The poem begins: “The descent of all mankind surges up from the same beginning; that is to say there is one father of all things, one who rules all” (3,VI,1–2).¹² Nature moves all things back to their origin, which is God, and so embracing Nature is returning to the beginning. 3, II plays with this idea by having the final couplet end with *ortum* and *orbem*; the image of the circle is embraced because it unites the beginning and the end. As all things seek their origin and end in God, this is reflected in Boethius’ wordplay by creating a strong affinity between the circle and the origin. At 1, V the Prisoner wishes that everything were as ordered as the circles of the heavens. At 3, II Philosophy says that, symbolically, everything’s proper nature is as a circle. John Magee describes it so the “idea is that progress is circular.”¹³

In the final sections of book 4, Lady Philosophy uses the image of concentric circles to explain the relation between providence and fate. Providence, where all hope to arrive, is the pivot around which the trappings of fate rotate. The third poem of the anapestic dimeters, 4, VI, also uses circle imagery as a symbol of natural function, especially in reference to the heavenly spheres. The poem resolves the imagery of the earlier poems and points to the way in which man’s role is different from that of other things.

In the poem, Philosophy describes a love present in all things, found in the natural cycles from God. She sings:

Now if [God] recalling the departed things did not collect them a second time with the right curves into circles, into which he now holds them steadfast in order, separated they would fall apart from their fountain. This is the love common to all and everything seeks to be held by the end of the good; they cannot bear it otherwise except the causes which gave them existence flow back, they turn back with returning love (4, VI,40–8).¹⁴

11. *Repetunt proprios quaeque recursus / redituque suo singula gaudent / nec manet ulli traditus ordo / nisi quod fini iunxerit ortum / stabilemque sui fecerit orbem.*

12. *Omne hominum genus in terris simili surgit ab ortu: / unus enim rerum pater est, unus cuncta ministrat.*

13. John Magee, “Boethius’ Anapestic Dimeters (Acatalectic), with regard to the structure and argument of the *Consolatio*,” in *Boèce ou la chaîne des savoirs*, Proc. of Fondation Singer-Polignac Conf., 8–12 June 1999, Louvain-la-Neuve/Paris, ed. Alain Galonnier (Éditions de l’Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, Éditions Peeters, 2003), 162.

14. *nam nisi rectos revocans itus / flexos iterum cogat in orbes, / quae nunc stabilis continet ordo / dissaepa suo fonte fatiscant. / Hic est cunctis communis amor / repetuntque boni fine teneri, / quia non aliter durare queant / nisi converso rursus amore / refluant causae quae dedit esse.*

All things seek their end in circular action so that they might not be separated from their origin, which is God, their first and final cause. The constant change of nature and the seasons are both recast as cycles; Magee writes that Boethius' imagery here reinterprets the Wheel of Fortune in a new light: "Fortune's constancy, like that of the seasons, *is change*. Boethius has accomplished an astonishing integration of ideas."¹⁵ Not only are circles seen as natural, proper action, but earlier negative images of circles are taken up into this new understanding. The Prisoner hates Fortune at the beginning, but this is because of his incorrect perspective. Fortune is only faultlessly engaged in her natural, circular action.

Though images and references to Phoebus permeate the poetry of this work, they are particularly symbolic in the discussions of the heavenly movements. Boethius ends 3, X by writing: "The brilliance, with which heaven is guided and thrives, escapes the shades and ruins of the mind; anyone able to notice this light will deny that the rays of Phoebus are bright" (3, X, 15–8).¹⁶ Whereas in 3, II, Boethius uses Phoebus as a prime example of something operating according to its natural laws (3, II, 31–3), here he points out that there is something beyond the natural. The passage in 3, X about Phoebus is mirrored strikingly in 3, XI. Lady Philosophy advises that to discover the highest end one should turn one's mind into a circle and, in doing so, one will discover a light brighter than Phoebus (3, XI, 1–8).¹⁷ This bright light, identified as deriving from the heavens, is now also found within man. It is found by means of circular action and thought directed inward. This Phoebus imagery is a crucial point for the interpretation of 4, VI.

The importance of astrological imagery at 4, VI is that it is meant to mirror the concentric circles around the pivot of providence, discussed just before at 4, 6. Man possesses a light brighter than the sun, and so, as the heavenly motions always rotate in the same way, there is a suggestion that man is able to move closer to the pivot. The planets and stars will always follow the same route; though man may not be able to reach the centre, he can move away from the outermost of the circles and the trappings of fate. Man's onus is that he should not simply engage in circular action, but try and create a circle with a rotation as small as possible around the pivot. God, as the pivot, is the necessary centre point that is both origin and end for all circles.

15. Magee, "Boethius' Anapestic Dimeters," 159.

16. *Splendor quo regitur vigetque caelum / vitat obscuras animae ruinas; / hanc quisquis poterit notare lucem / candidos Phoebi radios negabit.*

17. *Quisquis profunda mente vestigat verum / cupitque nullis ille deviis falli / in se revolvat intimi lucem visus / longosque in orbem cogat inflectens motus / animumque doceat quicquid extra molitur / suis retrusum possidere thesauris; / dudum quod atra texit erroris nubes / lucebit ipso perspicacius Phoebus.*

4, VI builds upon the arguments of 1, V and 3, II by reminding the Prisoner that he is not like the unerring planets or fixed concentric circles. Magee writes: "In their final sections [these three poems] differ, but in such a way as to contribute to the logical progression of thought: I m5 ends pessimistically, with Fortune and earthly tyrants; III m2 concludes with the *regressus* theme; and IV m6 both corrects the pessimistic conclusion of I m5 and incorporates the *regressus* theme of III m2."¹⁸ The imagery of the heavens and Fortune that inspires the Prisoner's complaint is not rejected by Philosophy, but deepened. Though Phoebus is turning constantly in a fixed course, man is able to expand and contract his circle. God both inspires the turning of the natural circles and draws those of man closer to Himself.

5, III seems an unsatisfying conclusion to the quartet as it asks more questions than it answers. It begins as a reflection on the conflict of free will and divine foreknowledge, but quickly becomes an examination of man's capacity to know. The Prisoner no longer doubts the providence of God, but now points out that he simply does not yet understand its workings. Thomas Curley draws a connection between 1, V and 1, VI on the one hand, and 5, III and 5, IV on the other. He writes that 1, V is the Prisoner laying out a problem, while 1, VI contains the solution, though he cannot yet recognize it. Curley believes that 5, III and 5, IV mirror this progression, signalled by the fact that their metres are the same as the other two poems.¹⁹ The Prisoner has progressed to a point where, though he cannot yet understand the workings of God's providence, he now approaches it with reason and inquiry instead of complaint and anger.

The circle imagery is present only in the first and last of the four poems Curley connects. In 5, IV Lady Philosophy saves the circles by moving them from abstract principles and forces into the human mind. Thus they are now crucial to human knowledge and proper self-relation. In 1, V the Prisoner thinks that God acts as an efficient cause of the turning of the heavens and wishes that He would act the same way towards men. In 5, IV the theme is resolved when the human mind explicitly is called an efficient cause at lines 26–27. Lady Philosophy then describes human thought as something as natural as the turning of the heavens; she praises the activity the Prisoner has just engaged in and reassures him that he will understand her imminent explanation. As efficient cause, the mind is now responsible for its own rewards and punishments. The circle imagery shows that this kind of thought is a process entirely natural to it.

18. Magee, "Boethius' Anapestic Dimeters," 164.

19. Thomas Curley, "How to Read the *Consolation of Philosophy*," *Interpretation* 14 (1986): 260.

As a whole the anapestic dimeter poems and the two which Curley connects arrive at the conclusion that the rewards and punishments that the Prisoner wants all things to receive are inseparable from the things themselves. Lerer writes that 5, IV "completes the development of a set of images basic to the work's movement: from external hopes, wealth, fame, and extrinsic arguments, there has been a move to inner reliance, self-sufficient arguments, and rejection of transitory reward."²⁰ I would add that the circle imagery is crucial to this development. The natural and right action of a thing brings about its happiness. This action is compared to that of the circular motions of the heavens or a firm and unbreakable cycle like that of the passing seasons. The Prisoner begins by wanting God to control each thing, but learns that each thing brings about its own rewards and punishments. This natural action is circular because it leads to its end, which is also its origin. In 5, IV, Philosophy demonstrates that the action of thought is as circular as the astrological examples, and therefore a natural and right thing for man to do. Man brings forth his own rewards and punishments, symbolized by the fact that man can expand and contract his circular action, unlike the astrological examples. The tighter the circle, the more man performs natural actions that return him to his origin.

THE ACTIVITY OF PRAYER

At 5, 3 the Prisoner makes a direct connection between prayer and natural, circular motion and describes prayer as man's only means of communication with God. This comment is made when he describes a world where God's foreknowledge eliminates any possibility of human free will:

Thus the one correspondence between men and God will be removed, that is, hope and prayer. If we deserve the inestimable exchange, [then there is] divine love for the price of just humility. This way is the only one in which men seem to be able to communicate with God and join that inaccessible light, before they even seek it, in the manner of prayer. The necessity of future things regained, if these things are believed to have no strength, how will we be able to attach ourselves and connect the highest principle of things? It would be necessary that humankind, as you sang a little earlier, separated and disunited would fall away from its fountain (5, 3,34–36).²¹

20. Seth Lerer, *Boethius and Dialogue: Literary Method in The Consolation of Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 267.

21. *Auferetur igitur unicum illud inter homines deumque commercium, sperandi scilicet ac deprecandi, si quidem iustae humilitatis pretio inaeestimabilem vicem divinae gratiae promeremur; qui solus modus est quo cum deo colloqui homines posse videantur illique inaccessae luci, prius quoque quam impetrent, ipsa supplicandi ratione coniungi. Quae si, recepta futurorum necessitate, nihil virium habere credantur, quid erit quo summo illi rerum principi connecti atque adhaerere possimus? Quare necesse erit humanum genus, uti paulo ante cantabas, dissaeptum atque disiunctum suo fonte fatiscere.*

The final words of this echo 4, VI,43, and immediately following this the Prisoner begins 5, III. At 4, VI,43 the natural principles of things move in circles to return to their origin. At 5, 3 the Prisoner says that prayer is the way in which one does not fall from his origin. This statement is not said by Lady Philosophy, but it is not incorrect. When Philosophy answers this complaint in later sections she saves human free will—and so prayer—from being useless activity. She does not disagree with his assertion here. The final words of 5, 3 connect the natural circular movements of the heavens with prayer. Thus, two different activities of the mind are compared to the natural circular movement of the heavens.

Just before beginning the prayer of 3, IX, Philosophy says that according to Plato in the *Timaeus*, divine aid ought to be invoked in even the smallest of things (3, 9,32).²² She claims that God should be invoked before all things, while 5, 3 suggests that by doing so, one is connected to one's origin. Prayer should not only be understood to be circular, but also regarded as the highest natural function of man, being his only connection to the divine.

A crucial moment to examine in the work is 3, IX; it, more than anywhere else, demonstrates the relation between reason, Lady Philosophy and prayer. She ends the hymn by calling God “beginning, conveyance, leader, path and end the same” (3, IX,28).²³ These names explicitly bring out the circle imagery of the other poems in the work, showing God to be a beginning and end to all things. Lines 22–27 discuss God as the *terminus* of all things and here even Lady Philosophy's powers begin to be limited. Before the prayer she says that God ought to be called upon even in the least of things and so therefore she relies on God in all things. This theme is picked up at the end of the invocation when Lady Philosophy asks God to bring her to his seat and the fountain of good (3, IX,22–24).²⁴ This implies that she is not able to do this by herself. She cannot see Him, or even properly see, without divine help. If all is better with divine beginnings for Lady Philosophy, whose head sometimes pierces the heavens (1, 1,2), then divine aid should be invoked in all things for mortals.

Whether Lady Philosophy is above *ratio* or not, she is divine without being God. She echoes the final line of 3, IX when she speaks about herself later, saying that she will return the Prisoner to his homeland by being his leader, path and conveyance (4, 1,9).²⁵ Stephen Blackwood writes: “Her ambiguous

22. *Sed cum, uti in Timaeo Platoni . . . nostro placet, in minimis quoque rebus divinum praesidium debeat implorari, quid nunc faciendum censes, ut illius summi boni sedem reperire mereamur?*

23. *Principium, vector, dux, semita, terminus idem.*

24. *Da, pater, augustam menti conscendere sedem, / da fontem lustrare boni, da luce reperta / in te conspicuos animi defigere visus.*

25. *Pennas etiam tuae menti quibus se in altum tollere possit adfigam, ut perturbatione depulsa sospes in patriam meo ductu, mea semita, meis etiam vehiculis revertaris.*

stature confirms that she is what is prayed for [at 3, IX]: the vision of God as leader, pathway and end."²⁶ I do not agree that Lady Philosophy is an end. She relies on God in all things and when she sings about the *terminus*, she asks God to lift her up. Nevertheless, through practising philosophy one moves closer to the pivot and, in that sense, Philosophy can compare herself to the divine *vector*, *dux* and *semita*. She does not describe herself as the *principium* or *terminus*. She is not the cause of the world nor is she the final end, for which *even she* strives through prayer.

Taken together, the final entreaty at 3, IX,22–24 and the reference to the *Timaeus* at 3, 9,32 summarize the argument. They show that God should be invoked at the beginning of an endeavour and at the immortal *terminus*. This is another allusion to man's relation to the divine through circles. It also shows how the final line of the invocation folds this progression from beginning to end back in on itself by calling to mind the earlier stages and names. The five names of God at 3, IX,28 are not separate moments in Him. Just as God is called upon at the beginning and at the end, He must be called upon at all intermediary steps. In a pivot there are no separate parts and so God should be implored in all things and at all times. The closer a circle moves to the pivot, the more it resembles it; the circular, natural action of all things, especially man, makes them more godlike.

THE LINK TO THE DIVINE

Blackwood writes: "Reason's recognition of its own inability to reach its end is what makes prayer necessary and possible."²⁷ Both reason and prayer are natural functions of man and so both lead man back to his origin. As reason is lower than intellect, it must realize that human knowledge cannot know all things; where it cannot reach, one prays. There is an inherent humility in this recognition of reason's inferiority by situating the subject. Prayer enables all human reasoning to recognize its lesser position.

Magee claims that Boethius' solution to the problem of human free will and divine foreknowledge puts him in the tradition of Neoplatonic thinkers who "allow ... for the corrective power of prayer, which is a form of contact with the divine."²⁸ Boethius, though, specifically says that it is man's *only* contact with the divine: it is a greater way back to the origin and the end than reason. One ought to pray before beginning something and when one reaches the extent of reason's reach. Magee writes that in the *Consolation*,

26. Stephen Blackwood, "Philosophia's Dress: Prayer in Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*," *Dionysius* 20 (2002): 151.

27. *Ibid.*, 145.

28. John Magee, *Boethius on Signification and Mind*, *Philosophia Antiqua: A Series of Studies on Ancient Philosophy* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989), 148, n.13.

“the references to prayer implicitly secure once and for all the possibility of some form of contact between human *ratio* and divine *intellegentia*, even if they leave it unexplained.”²⁹ Wayne Hankey elaborates: “Unless the human, defined by *ratio* which divides the One when knowing, can reach beyond itself by the prayer which also fulfills it, there would be no consolation. It is by this reaching, which must be at once within and beyond the human, that the human can be carried to the *intellectus* which understands the simple Good.”³⁰ If prayer is man’s contact with the divine, it would be able to connect these two forms of knowing. Without this contact, all prayer is useless and man has no connection to the divine. Magee also writes that *intellegentia* “is for Boethius ... something augustly remote, but nevertheless attainable by means of petition in prayer, and by the intervention of grace.”³¹ Prayer turns man’s mind into circle to discover the true source of his light that is his origin and end. Though grace cannot be summoned on command, the more contact with the divine, the more godlike man is, and the closer he is to the pivot. Prayer is a natural activity that extends beyond the reach of man’s natural capacities. By recognizing his own insufficiency, the Prisoner should pray for his reason to be enlightened.

The Prisoner learns at the end of the work that correct prayer cannot be inefficacious. Marenbon writes that this means, “insofar as hopes and prayers are right (that is to say, in accord with providence), they will be answered—just volitions will be efficacious, when they are the right thing to will.”³² This is only a partial picture: correct prayer comes at the right time and is a contact with the divine. Prayer is used before an endeavour and when reason cannot go any further. At 1, V the Prisoner has not tried to answer his questions yet, and his prayer is not preceding any attempt by him. The Prisoner’s prayer at 1, V is not correct because his reason is so deficient that he does not understand God or his relation to the world. He does not understand that the circular motion of the heavens is present in all things and thus also are the rewards and punishments. The answers he seeks from God are within himself, and through reason he comes to realize this. He does not yet understand the divinity with which prayer should give him contact. If prayer can bridge the gap between reason and intellect, then the Prisoner cannot be understood to have a sufficient reason yet for this to take place; his reason has not yet advanced to the gap.

29. *Ibid.*, 149.

30. Wayne Hankey, “*Secundum rei vim vel secundum cognoscentium facultatem*: Knower and the Known in *The Consolation of Philosophy* of Boethius and the *Proslogion* of Anselm,” in *Medieval Philosophy and the Classical Tradition in Islam, Judaism, and Christianity*, ed. John Inglis (London: Curzon Press, 2002), 132.

31. Magee, *Boethius on Signification and Mind*, 149.

32. John Marenbon, *Boethius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 127.

In this light, the poem at 5, III gains a new significance, and the Prisoner's questions there a greater depth. Magee writes: "If there is a complaint at V m3, it is one that Boethius turns inward, for he is now prepared for the idea that the measure of knowledge is not in the known object but in the knowing *subject*."³³ After this poem Lady Philosophy says that things are known according to the mode of the knower, suggesting that his lament here is as far as reason can travel. Magee continues that in 5, III:

the idea is that the *summa* is a dimly recollected universal truth, while the *singula* are particular data which are unintelligible on their own. What we seek, in other words, is a way of making phenomenal particulars universal and intelligible, of coordinating them with the pattern, and *that* is a precise fit for Boethius' earlier failure to coordinate Fortune and tyranny (I m5,25–41) with the universal divine governance (I m5,1–24). Thus V m3 is a reprise, at a higher level of comprehension, of the worries driving I m5, and its precise function is to trigger the final phase of argumentation. Can our often violent and erratic freely chosen actions, in effect, all that Boethius previously blamed on Fortune and tyranny, be reconciled with the unchanging eternity of divine providence? They can be reconciled, of course, and prayer will emerge as the *commercium* between them.³⁴

At 5, III, the Prisoner has restored his *ratio*, but is now ready for *intellegentia*. He cannot understand the universal in a way that explains the singular, or vice versa. He knows that reason can go no farther and hopes for grace to explain his problems. Though 5, III is not a prayer, it does follow the Prisoner's lament for the possible loss of prayer in 5, 3. Shortly before the final poem and prose section of the work, Philosophy says, "Let us lift ourselves up, if we are able, to the highest point of that highest intelligence" (5, 5,12).³⁵ This could signify the final poem to be a kind of prayer, or it at least implies pious hope in the interlocutors. There is an implied prayer in these final sections then: the Prisoner has progressed as far as he can on his own and now awaits the knowledge from grace, beyond man's reasoning.

Though there is no systematic account of prayer and its types in the *Consolation*, Lady Philosophy herself prays for divine aid, and her hymn at 3, IX follows the rules set out: she prays in order to begin an endeavour and requests to be lifted where she cannot reach. Blackwood writes: "The prayer at 3, IX is reason's recognition that it must be raised to the unity it seeks by that unity itself."³⁶ The proper prayer is one that reminds the subject of his place in the order and makes him prepared to receive grace. Whether or not the prayer is answered, if done correctly, it will still be a recognition of

33. Magee, "Boethius' Anapestic Dimeters," 167.

34. *Ibid.*, 167–68.

35. *Quare in illius summae intellegentiae cacumen, si possumus, erigamur.*

36. Blackwood, "Philosophia's Dress," 145.

circular, natural action and the desire to return to one's origin. It tightens the circle around the pivot, even if one does not receive the knowledge of *intellegentia*. Reason can only contract the circle so far by itself and then (as indeed at all stages) prayer is necessary to contact the divine.

CONCLUSION

5, III and IV each represent different kinds of climax in the logic of the *Consolation*. 5, IV resolves the themes so prevalent throughout the anapestic dimeter poems. In 5, IV, circles are brought from the heavens where they appear in 1, V into the natural processes of the human mind. The divine is no longer conceived as something that controls the heavens and is unconnected to the physical world. The divine laws, symbolized by circles, are understood to be present in all things, and each thing creates its own rewards and punishments. These circular activities connect man to his end and origin, and so make man more godlike. Man has a privileged position in the cosmos, because more than anything else, he can choose the size of his circle around the pivot, especially through reason.

5, III is a climax because it represents reason at its farthest point, ready to receive the knowledge from beyond man's processes. This is the gap that Lady Philosophy repeatedly tries to close through prayer. Even she implores God to lift her up, showing that she is not a *terminus* for man, though she can aid him in getting there. Proper prayer is also a circular, natural activity which Philosophy says should be carried out before any endeavour. It is man's only link to the divine, and his highest function, and so is necessary to overcome the deficiencies of human reason. A true prayer like 3, IX is effective because it situates the petitioner cosmically, and connects man to the divine.