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CHAPTER 7

The Old English Boethius

Nicole Guenther Discenza

Alfred the Great’s Old English Boethius must have challenged Anglo-Saxon audiences as it continues to challenge modern readers. More controversies surround the Boethius than this chapter can engage. The question of Alfred the Great’s involvement in the translation, and whether the same translator rendered both prose and meters, both face renewed debate. Problems of sources have been treated in great detail by many scholars and so will receive little discussion here. This creative adaptation of the sixth-century Latin De consolatione philosophiae (The Consolation of Philosophy) by Boethius takes different forms in the two surviving manuscripts.

This chapter will focus on the form and content of those versions, one prose (B) and the other prosimetrum (C). Virtually all the prose sections in C replicate large portions of B with relatively little variation. The C Meters of Boethius exhibit much greater freedom from B but still feature much of the same lexicon and overwhelmingly the same imagery and concepts. The two Old English texts share significant features. Both are dialogues, adding dramatic flair to sometimes abstract queries. Both enliven the allegorical exchange by providing multiple perspectives on the two interlocutors: the ic or first-person narrator sometimes seems an everyman for audience identification, but at other points he seems to be the historical Boethius. Wisdom appears primarily as a

1 Thanks to Paul E. Szarmach and Susan Irvine for their comments and suggestions on this chapter. Any remaining errors are solely mine.
2 See Janet M. Bately’s chapter, Chapter 4, on “Alfred as Author and Translator” in this volume; and the appendix on authorship, 397–415. See also the section on the Meters in The Old English Boethius: An Edition of the Old English Versions of Boethius’s De consolatione philosophiae, ed. Malcolm Godden and Susan Irvine with Mark Griffith and Rohini Jayatilaka, 2 vols. (Oxford: 2009), vol. 1, 146–151, which persuasively argues that the translator of the Meters was not the translator of the prose.
3 Godden and Irvine’s excellent Commentary to the Boethius incorporates much earlier scholarship on sources and adds extensive quotations from the largely unpublished early Latin commentaries surrounding the Consolation. Godden’s team is currently editing ninth-through eleventh-century commentaries; see “Boethius in Early Medieval Europe: Commentary on The Consolation of Philosophy from the 9th to the 11th Centuries,” http://www.english.ox.ac.uk/boethius/index.html. See also Rosalind Love’s chapter in this volume, Chapter 3, “Latin Commentaries on Boethius’s Consolation of Philosophy.”
masculine figure but sometimes as the feminine “Gesceadwisnes,” and the text ultimately connects this figure to the divine. After attending to the form and characterization of the dialogues, the chapter will turn to substance. The Boethius presents a powerful synthesis of classical, late antique, and Anglo-Saxon literary forms and techniques. It explores practical and theoretical philosophy, with particular interest in hierarchies, both earthly and divine. The Boethius ultimately establishes a combined model that ranks priorities and beings from lowest to highest. The chapter concludes with evidence for later readers’ engagements with the text into the Middle English era.

**Forms**

Manuscript B (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 180) dates to the late eleventh or early twelfth century and contains a complete prose rendering of the Consolation, though the Latin source text alternates prose passages with poems. The Boethius is the only text in this manuscript, aside from a scribe’s brief closing prayer. Manuscript C (London, BL, Cotton Otho A.vi) contains a tenth-century copy of a prosimetrical version. Here, most of the Latin meters appear in Old English alliterative verse (regardless of their Latin metrical forms, which varied). The Latin prose portions and a few meters (or parts thereof) appear as Old English prose. MS C burned in 1731 and was painstakingly pieced back together in the nineteenth century. Francis Junius transcribed the C Meters.

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4 Godden argues that the text’s “philosophy remains otherworldly,” “The Player King: Identification and Self-Representation in King Alfred’s Writings,” in Alfred the Great: Papers from the Eleventh-Centenary Conferences, ed. Timothy Reuter (Aldershot, UK: 2003), 137–150, at 145.

5 For MS B, see Godden and Irvine’s Boethius, Commentary, vol. 1, 9–18. For the prayer, see Godden and Irvine, Boethius, vol. 1, 9, and vol. 2, 496–497; and Bately, “The Alfredian Canon Revisited,” in Alfred the Great, ed. Timothy Reuter, 107–120, at 117–119.

6 MS C is a composite manuscript with a late twelfth-century copy of Aelred of Rievaulx’s Latin vita of Edward the Confessor and a mid-thirteenth-century copy of a text about a pilgrimage to Edward’s shrine; see Godden and Irvine, Boethius, vol. 1, 18–24. When the later texts were added remains uncertain.

and many differences between the B and C prose texts before the fire, and his transcript (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 12) remains a valuable witness to MS C.8 Finally, A.S. Napier published the transcript of a subsequently lost fragment of the Boethius in 1886.9 The existence of two distinct forms of one text has perplexed a series of editors, who generally either edited the prose text and relegated the Meters of Boethius to the back of the book, or edited only the Meters. Most editors use the C prose and sometimes C verse to emend MS B, which has frequent scribal errors.10 The new edition of The Old English Boethius by Malcolm Godden and Susan Irvine presents MS B and MS C separately.

The B text’s prose-only form appears to be the earlier version. Not only does the prose preface to the Boethius claim the prose rendering came first, but Mark Griffith and others have also found evidence that the Meters of Boethius rely heavily on the prose versions of the Meters and very little on other sources.11 B contains 42 chapters; the logic of the divisions is unclear. Chapters vary in length from seven to 371 lines in the edition and contain as little as part of one or as many as six Latin prose sections.12 Four times, a new chapter begins in Old English where a section continues in Latin. Moreover,
The changes in chapter structure as the text progresses suggest that the chapter divisions are scribal, though they must date back to a copy prior to B. See Godden and Irvine, *Boethius*, vol. 1, 233–235; and Bately, “Book Divisions and Chapter Headings in the Translations of the Alfredian Period,” in *Early Medieval English Texts and Interpretations: Studies Presented to Donald G. Scragg*, ed. Elaine Treharne and Susan Rosser, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 252 (Tempe, AZ: 2002), 151–166, esp. 157–161 and 165–166.

Szarmach notes in “Thirty-One Meters” that these 31 *oe* meters represent only 30 of the 39 Latin meters, the first *oe* meter giving “back story” (415) from the *vitae* that preface many Latin manuscripts of the *De consolatione*. Three meters appear in the prose but not in the Meters; the other six are not rendered in either version (see Szarmach, “Thirty-One Meters,” 411–412 and 420–423). There are also 39 Latin prose sections; some have been combined in the Old English (see next note).

The exceptions are CP 5, which combines II.pr.1, II.pr.2 (omitting II.m.1), a prose version of II.m.2, and II.pr.3; CM 23 and CP 23, which break III.m.12 into a short verse and then a prose retelling of the Orpheus meter; and CP 30, which combines IV.pr.7 with a prose version of IV.m.7. *Anicci Manlii Severini Boethii Philosophiae Consolatio*, ed. Ludwig Bieler, CCSL 94 (Turnholt: 1957). For the omissions of Latin meters, see Szarmach, “Thirty-One Meters.”

Early authors often called these mixtures “satura.” Jan Ziolkowski’s “Prosimetrum in Classical Tradition,” *Prosimetrum: Crosscultural Perspectives on Narrative in Prose and Verse*, ed. J. Harris and K. Reichl (Suffolk: 1997), 45–65, informed much of this paragraph. See also Peter Dronke, *Verse with Prose From Petronius to Dante: The Art and Scope of the Mixed Form* (Cambridge, MA: 1994).
Capella’s *Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, a medieval school text; and the *De consolatione philosophiae*. Late antique and early medieval Latin introduced a new genre: the *opus geminatum* or “twinned work.”¹⁷ Aldhelm used it for his *De virginitate*, Bede for his lives of St. Cuthbert, and Alcuin for his lives of Willibord.¹⁸ The vernacular did not have as strong a tradition of prosimetra or *opera geminata* as Latin had. Some mixing or doubling of genres can be found, but mostly later than the *Boethius*. *Solomon and Saturn* in CCCC 422 moves from poetry to prose and back to poetry, but authorship and dates are uncertain.¹⁹ The primarily prose *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* incorporates several poems, but in entries after Alfred’s time.²⁰

In rendering the *Consolation* into Old English, then, Alfred and his helpers did not create a new form but translated a Latin one into the vernacular. C presents the most consistent alternation of prose and verse in early English vernacular. Much like its Latin source, the prosimetrical *Boethius* uses poetry to repeat, develop, and ornament the argument of the prose text.²¹ Philosophical points are typically made in prose first, then illustrated in poetry. B renders the entire text in prose, but it has the same imagery from the Latin Meters that C renders as verse.

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¹⁸ Mechthild Gretsch notes in *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, CSASE 34 (Cambridge: 2005), that Bede’s prose account of Æthelthryth and hymn to her constitute “an *opus geminatum* en miniature” (213) whose form Ælfric does not adopt. See also Paul E. Szarmach on Bede’s account of Ætheldreda as “a ‘poor man’s’ *opus geminatum*” (139) and how the OE translator compensates for the loss of poetry in “Æðeldreda in the Old English Bede,” *Poetry, Place, and Gender: Studies in Medieval Culture in Honor of Helen Damico*, ed. Catherine Karkov (Kalamazoo: 2009), 132–150.

¹⁹ See Daniel Anlezark, ed. and trans., *The Old English Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn* (Cambridge, UK: 2009), particularly the section on “Date and Authorship,” 49–57. Anlezark suggests authorship by Dunstan or his circle and a rough date of c. 920–930.


²¹ See Gerard O’Daly’s *Poetry of Boethius* (Chapel Hill: 1991) for a full-length treatment of the Latin Meters, and John Marenbon, *Boethius*, *Great Medieval Thinkers* (Oxford: 2003), especially Chapter 8, for the workings of the meters in the *Consolation* as a whole.
Both B and C texts retain the dialogue structure of the Latin text. Again, the form is not new; philosophical dialogues date back to the Book of Job and the works of Plato. The dialogue form in the Old English Boethius, as in Latin, adds dramatic tension to what might otherwise be dry philosophical discourse. The issues are never simply abstract or hypothetical; the narrator’s questions and complaints bear directly on a real imprisonment that readers know will end with the death of Boethius. The Latin text establishes the emotional situation at the outset with a Meter wherein the narrator bewails his misfortune. Philosophy then seeks to move Boethius beyond emotional confusion into an intellectual understanding and a spiritual engagement that transcend the material world. She appears unmoved by his laments (I.pr.v.1), even saying that she cannot bear his complaints (II.pr.iv.11). Philosophy succeeds, and Boethius makes his last emotional objections in Book 5, Prose 3 and Meter 3, where he worries that God’s foreknowledge deprives human beings of free will and makes reward and punishment a sham. After answering the narrator’s concerns in Book 5, Prose 4, Philosophy speaks for the remainder of the book; through the remaining two meters and two prose sections later, she leads Boethius through a purely philosophical discourse and closes the work with a prayer.

Despite the direct relevance of the philosophical issues to the prisoner’s life, the Latin frequently makes its arguments in third person or impersonal terms. The Old English often uses first and second person expressions to make the dialogue more personal and dramatic. For example, Alfred adds “þonne ic secge” (“then I say,” B24.52/CP 12.51) to an impersonal passage in the source text (III.pr.2.9). In other places, second person addresses replace the language of logic and a third person subjunctive. Finally, at the end of the Consolation,
Philosophy speaks 266 lines of Latin prose (in Bieler’s edition) and 55 lines of Latin verse after the last response by Boethius except for the single word “Minime” (“not at all,” V.pr.vi.19). In the Old English, however, the narrator is still querying Wisdom less than 40 lines before the end of the text. He asks his last question at B 42.23 (CP 33.24); the text ends at B 42.55 (CP 33.55). The Latin transcends the dialogue frame, but the Old English maintains it.28

The Old English also adds action and description to enliven the dialogue. A few times, the translator adds “smearcian” (“smile”) or “wundrian” (“wonder”) to a speech tag.29 Wisdom pauses to think more often than Philosophy does. Philosophy falls silent at II.pr.1.1: “Post haec paulisper obticuit atque ubi attentionem meam modesta taciturnitate collegit sic exorsa est.”30 The Old English uses the silence a little differently: “Þa geswigode se wisdom ane lytle hwile oððæt he ongeat þæs modes ingeþances. Pa he hi þa ongiten hæfde, þa cwæð he.”31 Another time, both texts have a silence for Philosophy/Wisdom to gather her or his own thoughts.32 The Old English texts, however, add other moments of silence at B 39.15 (CP 28.1), 39.79–80 (CP 29.1–2), and 41.10–11 (CP 32.1–2), where the Latin indicates no pause. On all three of these occasions, it is not Wisdom but the narrator who breaks the silence.

Wisdom also shows more emotional range than his Latin counterpart. He sometimes speaks more harshly to the narrator than Philosophy does to her interlocutor, yet he offers a sense of camaraderie not found in the Latin text.33 Philosophy seems to know everything, but Wisdom occasionally suggests that he too must work towards full understanding. At one point in the Latin,

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\text{The overall number of turns each speaker takes varies little; see my \textit{King's English}, 22. However, the placement of speaking turns has changed slightly due to the abridgement of the final sections in OE and the addition of responses from the narrator. I thus modify my statement in \textit{The King's English} that the narrator remains "as active as in the Latin, but no more so overall" (22): the changes at the end keep the narrator an active participant in OE where he has ceased to be one in Latin.}
\]

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\text{See B 34.253/CP 21.47, 34.342/CP 21.136 (the latter lost and based on B), B 35.111/CP 22.81, and B 40.26/CP 31.27. The "smearcian" at B 39.84/CP 29.6 translates the Latin "arridens" (IV.pr.6.2); the Latin has its own touches of characterization. For "wundrian" where no such verb appears in Latin, see B 35.109/CP 22.78 (from B), B 38.212/CP 27.162, and B 40.13/CP 30.13.}
\]

\[
\text{"After these [verses] she fell silent for a little while and thus drew my attention by her modest quiet, then began." Translations are my own unless otherwise specified.}
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\text{B 7.1–2/CP 5.1–2: "Then Wisdom fell silent for a little while until he understood the mind's innermost thoughts. When he had understood them, then he said."}
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\text{III.pr.2.1 in the Latin, B 24.1–3/CP 12.1–3.}
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\text{For Wisdom's harshness, see my \textit{King's English}, 72–73.}
\]
Philosophy says, “Quo fit ut, tametsi uobis hunc ordinem minime considerare ualentibus confusa omnia perturbataque uideantur, nihilò minus tamen suus modus ad bonum dirigens cuncta disponat.”34 The Old English changes the second person to first person plural, which it uses four times in this passage: “Ac se godcunda foreþonc hit understent eall swiðe ryhte, þeah us ðince for urum dysige þæt hit [on] woh fare; forþam we ne cunnon þæt riht understan- dan. He demð þeah eall swiðe ryhte, þeah us hwilum swa ne þince.”35 The first person pronoun aligns Wisdom in solidarity with the narrator on his quest for truth.36

Drama and characterization help maintain reader interest through difficult philosophical arguments and demonstrate the relevance of philosophy to a real, individual life.37 As Peter Dronke notes, the work does not merely discuss its topics: “What arouses our curiosity as readers or listeners is the manner in which they act...”38 The Boethius complicates the characterization by identifying both major figures in multiple ways. The name “Boeties” (“Boethius”) appears in the first chapter, which offers background before the dialogue proper begins, but the translator also uses it in the body of the text ten times. (not counting references to Boethius as author at book breaks)39 This name gives the character historical specificity: Anglo-Saxons knew him as both author and Christian martyr. The character is not called Boethius after

34 IV.pr.vi.21: “As it happens, even if all things seem to you, who are not at all strong enough to consider this order, confused and chaotic, nevertheless, for each thing, its own way disposeth it towards the good.”
35 Emphasis added, B 39.211–14 (CP 29.133–36): “But the divine foreknowledge comprehends it all very rightly, though it seems to us in our foolishness that it goes badly; for we cannot understand the right. He, however, judges all very rightly, though sometimes it does not seem so to us.”
36 Godden and Irvine read the attribution of apparent ignorance to Wisdom as a mistake, vol. 2, 468.
37 Godden writes that the translator also uses dialogue as "a way of capturing an imagined debate between different perspectives and world-pictures" and to show readers "that this is challenging material that ought to provoke and puzzle," “The Alfredian Project and its Aftermath: Rethinking the Literary History of the Ninth and Tenth Centuries,” Sir Israel Gollancz Memorial Lecture, 15 January 2009, Proceedings of the British Academy 162 (2009): 93–122, at 110.
38 Dronke, Verse with Prose, 38, referring to Martianus Capella’s De nuptiis, but Dronke adds immediately thereafter, “This is true in a more far-reaching way of Boethius’ Consolation,” 38.
Chapter 27 (CP 14), which is less than halfway through the text. The character is also identified as “Mod” (“Mind”) nearly thirty times between Chapters 3 and 24 (CP 2–12). The name Mod presents an allegorical figure, making the dialogue internal. Mod offers more possibility for reader identification: where Boethius names a specific, now-dead historical figure, we each have our own mod.

The most pervasive identification of the protagonist, however, simply uses the first-person pronoun, “ic,” starting in Chapter 22 (CP 11). Not counting the character referring to himself in dialogue, the Boethius calls the protagonist “ic” or “me” almost 150 times, usually in dialogue tags such as “Pa cwæð ic” (“Then I said,” B 26.42/CP 13.41–42). Occasionally tags position the protagonist as the recipient of speech: “Đa andsworode he me and cwæð.” The use of first-person pronoun for the protagonist begins while the translator still uses Mod and Boethius, but a few chapters after the first-person pronoun has been introduced as an identifier, the translator drops the other two names. The text shifts away from identifying the main character as a historical or an allegorical figure into a more universal mode of reference, inviting readers to put themselves in the place of Wisdom’s interlocutor.

The Boethius names Wisdom more consistently, but that figure too displays different facets. The Latin text rarely names Philosophia; instead, it uses feminine pronouns and third-person verbs for her, while Boethius receives masculine pronouns and first-person verbs. The Old English, however, often employs verbs with identical first and third person forms, and it sometimes refers to the Boethius-figure in third person. Thus the OE needs to name Philosophy to distinguish the dialogue’s participants. “Wisdom” was perhaps the closest English equivalent in the late ninth century, and Alfred uses that term as a name throughout the text. Another seven times he substitutes “Gesceadwisnes” (“reason” or “discernment”), and six times he uses both names: “se wisdom and seo gesceadwisnes.” In the Consolation, Boethius describes Philosophy as a woman. The noun “wisdom” is masculine in Old English, but, as Susan Irvine notes, Wisdom is characterized as a mother where Philosophy was figured as a

40 There are 42 chapters, but some of the later chapters are quite long. For the characterization of Mod/Boethius/ic, see also Godden’s “Player King.”
41 B 35, 7–8/CP 22, 58: “Then he answered me and said.”
43 3.27, 5.2, 10.9–10, 11.1, 13.1, and 14.4–5, with minor variations in wording and spelling.
44 For more on the characterization of Philosophy in the Latin, see Dronke, Verse with Prose, 38–41.
nurse. Such variation invites readers to consider the character in a variety of frames. The word “wisdom” occurs more than 850 times in Old English, in poetry, prose, and glosses, ranging from the Riddles and Beowulf to saints’ lives, homilies, and even charters. “Gesceadwis” and “gesceadwisnes” are less common, appearing under 230 times and confined almost completely to religious prose. The sentiment “seo gesceadwisnes...is synderlic cræft þære saule” is added to the Latin prose; the C Meter praises this virtue even more highly: “Hio is þæt mæste mægen monnes saule / and se selesta sundorcrefta.” Wisdom is sometimes called “heofencund Wisdom”: “heavenly Wisdom” or “Wisdom from heaven.” Near the end, Wisdom says, “se wise is God” (“this wisdom is God,” B 41.113/CP 32.105). Thus Wisdom appears as interlocutor, then as a capacity of the human soul, and finally as God himself. Wisdom and reason are also figured as both masculine and feminine. The Boethius encourages audiences to make a variety of identifications and connections with wisdom and reason, even identifying with God himself.

It also eases a difficult discourse by incorporating some material from Latin commentaries, not just the main text, as Rosalind Love showed in her chapter earlier in this volume. Such changes range from brief explanations and identifications of people and places to higher-level matters of interpretation where the Boethius agrees with Latin commentaries in “distinctive interpretation.”

The metricist seems to have used commentaries very little, however, and the main translator made very selective use. Much material from the commentaries never appears in the Boethius, and Alfred keeps a fairly tight focus despite many opportunities for digressions in the text.
Practical and Theoretical Philosophy

Though Anglo-Saxon England had little native tradition of philosophical texts, the Old English *Boethius*, following its Latin source text, does not hesitate to raise difficult issues: the nature of good and evil, the true end of all things, and the problem of free will. The *Boethius* relies more on authority and less on formal logic than its Latin source. In the closing sections, the Old English text treats kinds of knowledge and ways of knowing in far less depth than the *Consolation*. The *Boethius* moreover displays an interest in worldly goods and hierarchies of being that surpasses Latin source text’s. A brief outline of the Latin and Old English texts follows.\(^{51}\)

The *Consolation* has five books. In the first, Boethius meets Philosophy, who questions him in order to diagnose his illness. She determines that Boethius has forgotten his identity, true homeland, and the goal towards which all things tend. Book Two shows Fortune to be whimsical, arrogant, and the true owner of almost everything one thinks one possesses. Hardship is salutary, for it demonstrates that these goods are neither permanent nor ours, leading one to seek what endures and what one can truly possess. Philosophy then shows in Book Three that worldly goods are partial, and that one cannot be deprived of true goods. The ultimate, true good is God, who has unity and self-sufficiency.

Book Four relies on the Latin *beatus*, which means both “blessed” and “happy.”\(^{52}\) True happiness is not a transitory state of mind but an objective reality. Philosophy defines power by its ultimate outcome: the ability to do good is true power. Evil and the ability to do it are nothing. The closer to God and his Providence one comes, the less one feels the ups and downs of daily life. Books Four and Five explore why people suffer different fates that may seem unrelated to their merits. Some become examples of the success of good or the failure of evil; some are tested to their capacity but not beyond. When Boethius questions whether God’s foreknowledge allows free will, Philosophy establishes a hierarchy of perception and knowledge. Animals and human beings have senses, but humans also enjoy the superior faculties of imagination and reason. Pure intelligence belongs to God and allows him to see all time at once, so his foreknowledge is not truly knowledge *before* we act, but knowledge

\(^{51}\) This outline is necessarily brief and glosses over difficulties and contradictions within the text; for more detailed examinations, see Marenbon, *Boethius*, and O’Daly, *The Poetry of Boethius*, and their bibliographies.

outside of time; it does not determine our actions any more than observing that a person is sitting at a given moment causes her to sit. Philosophy ends the work with an exhortation to prayer and virtue, which remove one from the sphere of Fortune and bring one closer to God.

The Old English text follows most of the main lines of argument, although with different emphases. As in the Consolation, Wisdom visits a protagonist mourning lost earthly goods (B Chapters 1–3; CM 1–CP 3). Wisdom says the prisoner never really possessed these goods, though they can possess him if he is not careful (B 3–7/CP 3–5.141). Wisdom then reveals the weaknesses of the worldly goods (B 8–20/CP 5.142–CP 10) and how God controls everything (B 21/CM 11). Earthly goods are too partial and fallible to be true goods, and events that reveal their true nature are good (through B 32/CM 19). True good is God, who has unity, lacks nothing, and controls everything; one must seek the true good by seeking God inwardly (B 33–35/CP 19–CM 23). The evil have no true power or happiness (B 36–38/CP 24–27). God controls the heavens and wyrd ("fate," roughly equivalent to Fortune), and Wisdom explains various kinds of fate, as in the Latin text. Wisdom briefly treats the differing capacities of animals, human beings, angels, and God, and he asserts free will from a simile rather than from logic: as a powerful king has free subjects and not merely slaves, so God has free subjects too (B 39–41/CM 27–31). Wisdom concludes that we must pursue God through virtue and prayer (B 42/CP 33).

The Consolation inscribes an ascent from practical to theoretical philosophy early in the text with the description of Philosophy’s clothes: “Harum [vestitum] in extremo margine Π Graecum, in supremo uero Θ legebatur intextum atque inter utrasque litteras in scalarum modum gradus quidam insigniti


uidebantur, quibus ab inferiore ad superius elementum esset ascensus.”

This ascent from practical to theoretical is the movement of the work as a whole. B Chapter 3 amd CP 2 translate 1pr.1 but omit any description of Wisdom’s clothes. Thus the *Boethius* never declares an explicit ascent from one realm to the other nor divides practical from theoretical philosophy, yet it raises ideas of ascent and hierarchy at many points throughout the text.

The *Consolation* shows little interest in earthly goods, which Philosophy derides as “useless” or “empty” (II.pr.4.3 and II.pr.5.14). None of the goods that nature produces belong to us, and of them “nullum est proprium nobis” (“nothing is proper to you,” II.pr.5.24); to value them too much is to devalue oneself, for one resembles God and not these “ulissima rerum” (“basest of things,” II.pr.5.24–28, at 28). Book Three backtracks a little, for Philosophy says that people do indeed seek the true good, though in the wrong way. These earthly forms of the good are not truly bad, but because they are partial and easily lost, they are not the ultimate good (III.pr.2). Then Philosophy abandons worldly goods altogether, exhorting the protagonist to forsake useless desires and devote himself to the highest good. Late in Book 3, Philosophy reverses yet again to declare that partial goods cannot truly be good because they are partial (III.pr.9.16).

The *Boethius* displays the ambivalence towards earthly goods of its source text without partaking in the ultimate rejection of worldly things. Sometimes the *Boethius* denounces earthly goods as empty and false, much as the *Consolation* does. At other times, the *Boethius* ascribes real value to a variety of things in this world, constructing a hierarchy in which the Latin text has no interest. Instead of declaring that a partial good is nothing, the *Boethius* criticizes the seeker who looks in the wrong place (B 33.65–67/CP 19.64–66). In the course of her arguments, the Latin Philosophy casts Fortune as both giver and depriver of worldly things. Philosophy even engages in ventriloquism, speaking as if she were Fortune for much of II.pr.2. The Old English text, however, never shows Fortune as an independent character but simply has Wisdom speak as the giver (B 7.64–68/CP 5.63–67). Godden and Irvine note that the change makes the Old English text more consistent than the Latin, for “this picture of an autonomous Fortuna dispensing human goods is simply unfashionable in the 14th century.”

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55 I.pr.1.4: “At the lowest edge of these [clothes] could be read a Greek Π, and at the highest a Θ, and woven between the two were marked rungs on a ladder, by which there was an ascent from the lowest to the highest element.”

fortunes...is before long to be silently abandoned” by the Latin text. Making Wisdom the one who endows people with worldly goods here seems to ascribe a value to those goods that the Latin text does not. The *Boethius* also avoids the apparent conflict between Fortune and Providence as giver of earthly goods by putting all things under God’s control from the start (B 5.6–9/CP 4.6–8). Wisdom adds, “Ælc soþ wela and soð weorðscipe sindan mine agne þeowas. ...Eala hu yfele me doð manege woruldmenn mid þam þæt ic ne mot wealdan minra agenra [þeawa].” But what are the true goods? In the *Consolation*, true good is God: unity, self-sufficiency, completeness. In some passages, the *Boethius* declares that earthly goods are flawed or even useless, reflecting the ambivalence found early in the *Consolation*. In others, it attaches real value to worldly things, though it subordinates them to those that transcend this world.

Among the goods rejected by the Latin text are emotions. Boethius writes,

> gaudia pelle,  
pelle timorem  
spemque fugato  
nec dolor adsit.

While most people from a variety of beliefs would agree that fear and sadness are bad things, the Latin text’s rejection of joy and hope (“gaudia...spemque”) might shock Christian readers: hope is a theological virtue, not just a worldly pleasure. The Old English was probably more acceptable to Anglo-Saxon readers:

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57 Godden and Irvine, *Boethius*, vol. 2, 279.<br>
58 B 7.77–78, 82–83/CP 5.76–77. 80–81: “All true goods and true honors are my servants. ... Alas, how badly I am treated by many worldly people, so that I am not allowed to determine my own customs.” Godden and Irvine’s Commentary (vol. 2, 281) and Textual Notes (vol. 2, 203) express uncertainty here about whether Wisdom speaks of *þeowas* (servants) or *þeawas* (customs): MS B has *þeowasa*, but C has *þeawas* with the following letters missing from the fire. Godden and Irvine render the latter sentence “Alas, how badly I am treated by many worldly people, so that I am not allowed to determine my own customs,” vol. 2, 11. Whichever reading one adopts, Wisdom grants these things, and they never depart from him, though people can use them perversely. Godden and Irvine also note that the text departs greatly from the Latin here, momentarily presenting Wisdom as something created, one of the “gesceafta” (7.95).

59 I.m.7.25–28: “banish joy, banish fear, and rout hope, nor let sadness remain.”<br>
Ac gif āw wilnige on rihtum geleafan þæt soðe leoth oncnawan, afyr fram þe ða yfelan sælþa and þa unnettan, and eac ða unnettan ungesælþa and ðone yflan ege þisse worulde; þæt is þæt þu ne anhebbe on ofermetto on þinre gesundfulnesse and on ðinre orsorgnesse, ne eft þe ne geotrywe nanes godes on nanre wiðerweardnesse, forðam þæt mod siemle bið gebunden mid gedrefednesse þær þissa twega yfel audder ricsað.61

The Boethius rejects specifically those felicities that are evil and useless, not all emotions. The corresponding C Meter expands the passage to over twenty lines of verse (5.24–46) and addresses “idle ofersælþa, unnytnge gefean.”62 The hapax legomenon “oversælþa,” by its very formation with the prefix “ofeer-,” implies that these felicities are excessive ones.

The Boethius at times locates positive value in worldly goods, but in almost the same breath it cautions against valuing them too much. Wisdom asks and answers his own question about wealth: “Sege me nu hwæt his þe deorast þince, hwæber þe gold þe hwæt? Ic wat þeah gold. Ac þeah hit nu [god] seo and deore, þeah bið hliseadigra and leofwendra se þe hit selð þonne se þe hit gaderæd and on oðrum reafað.”63 Wisdom allows that gold has worth, though he warns that its value depends on how people acquire and dispose of it.64

Power and kingship receive particular scrutiny in the Boethius. The Consolation specifically specifically considers and rejects power as a good; Philosophy illustrates the futility of earthly power with examples of bad kings. The Boethius keeps most of those illustrations and adds more, particularly

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61 B 6.11–18: “But if you wish in right belief to know that true light, dispel from yourself the evil felicities and the useless, and also the vain infelicities and the evil fear of this world; that is, do not raise yourself in pride in your health and in your prosperity, nor again despair of any good in any misfortune, because the mind is always bound with cares where either of these two evils reigns.”

62 CM 5.27: “vain excessive felicities, useless joys.”

63 B 13.13–16/CP 7.12–16: "Tell me now which seems to you most precious, gold or something else? I think gold. But though it is now good and precious, he who gives it is more renowned and esteemed than he who gathers and steals it from others." B actually reads "gold" again instead of "god" (see brackets in quotation), but that reading makes the clause tautological. Junius recorded "god" here from the damaged ms C, whence Godden and Irvine emend.

64 Similarly, Godden and Irvine comment here, “wealth is precious in its own terms and by its own nature. ...This is consonant with [the translator’s] omission of the point in the previous sentence about the worthlessness of wealth," vol. 2, 299.
references to Theoderic. Yet the *Boethius* also portrays Cicero, Brutus, and Cato positively and dubs them *heretogas* ("rulers"), though not *cyningas* ("kings"). Where the *Consolation* says that virtue should lead to "reuerentia" ("respect," III.pr.4.6), Wisdom in the *Boethius* suggests that it should lead to power (B 27.38–44/CP 14.37–43). The most famous addition to the *Boethius* begins with Mod’s plaint that he never sought power for himself but what he needed “to þam weorce þe me beboden was to wyrccanne.” Each man must practice his *craeft*, which means both “virtue” and “skill,” and one needs the appropriate material and tools for one’s *craeft*, as Mod explains at length. Power is dangerous, but such positive language and the attention of a full chapter would hardly be lavished on the king’s exercise of his *craeft* if that exercise had nothing of true good in it. Wisdom responds, “Eala mod eala” ("Alas, Mind, alas," B 18.2/CP 9.29). He warns against “wilnung *leases* gilpes and *unryhtes anwealdes* and *ungemetlices hlisan*”—not all power or fame, but that which is excessive or for which one is unworthy.

Fame and honor are already invoked in this caution against seeking too much power. As he treats power, so Wisdom treats fame and honor, valuing them but warning of their dangers (B Chapter 18 and CP 9) and noting that even long-lasting fame is nothing when weighed against time without end. Yet he declares that writers have a duty to record the good practices and deeds of great people, castigating slothful writers who do not (B 76–85 and CP 9.102–10).

Power, honor, fame, and wealth emerge in the *Boethius* as ambivalent goods, things of worth that have their proper place in the world but must not be

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65 See B 1.6–25/CM 1.28–72, 16.9/CP 8.9, 27.36–38/CP 14.36–38 (but supplied from B); all references to Theoderic are additions. Nero appears in Bo B Chapter 16 (CP 8 and CM 9), B 28/CM 15, and B 29/CP15, as in De cons II.m.6, III.m.4, and III.pr.5. For more about kings, see my *King’s English*, 80–86. For Nero, see O’Daly, *The Poetry of Boethius*, 82–94; and Szarmach, "Alfred’s Nero."

66 See also B 16.30–31/CP 8.31–32.

67 B 17.5–6/CP 9.5–6: “for that work that I was commanded to do.”

68 For *craeft*, see my “Power, Skill and Virtue.” Godden and Irvine argue that the narrator here “is meant...to be articulating a faulty view,” Commentary, *Boethius*, vol. 2, 316. See also Godden, "Player King," 142–145. I do not believe that the narrator’s view is entirely undermined but corrected in that he has sometimes sought too much or the wrong kinds of reputation and power.


overvalued. Pleasure, the fifth of the *Consolation*’s quintet of earthly goods, receives briefer but more negative treatment in the Old English text and seems to lack positive aspects; apparently, the lack of lasting value in physical pleasure seems so obvious that writers need not devote much space to it in Latin or Old English.

The Latin text leaves earthly goods behind, refusing to allow the narrator to subordinate himself to Fortune as “dominam” ("ruler," II.pr.1.16–19). The Old English *Boethius* cautions Mod against becoming worldly goods’ “þegn,” (“retainer,” B 7.51) or “heora þegn and hiora hie" (“their retainer and their hireling,” CP 5.49–50). To prize worldly goods too highly overturns proper hierarchy. Wisdom says on behalf of the worldly goods: “Þu setst us on þæt setl þines sceoppendes þa þu wilnesto us þæs godes þe þu him sceoldest.”

Earthly things should be at the bottom and God enthroned on top. Wisdom reminds the narrator as early as Chapter 5 that God controls everything. A little later, he declares that God “se hrof is eallra gesælða.”

Earthly goods occupy the lowest rung on the ladder of goods. In a key passage, Wisdom expresses dismay at the misvaluing of worldly goods by human beings. He even uses the first person plural to align himself with humanity as he pronounces that the good of things does not belong to people and is insignificant compared to the good of a human being (B 13.48–50/CP 7.47–49). This passage then expands one in the source text (II.pr.5.8–10) that declares that earthly goods such as gems are God’s creation and have a share of beauty. The *Boethius* follows the Latin in noting that God created jewels, but the *Boethius* goes further as it repeatedly attributes god, goodness, to these creations. Instead of devaluing gems, Alfred uses their widely-acknowledged worth to emphasize the even greater value of human goodness, which outshines the sparkle of jewels. If one fails to recognize one’s own goodness, one seeks it in external creations as dumb animals do (B 14.68–76/CP 7.117–24). Thus one obscures the image of the creator in oneself, present in the three-fold capacity of the human soul: understanding, mind, and rational will (B 14.76–80/CP 7.125–29).
The Old English Boethius

The Latin text moves away from earthly concerns, disregarding the foot of the ladder in its philosophical ascent. The Old English text never forgets that the rise to heaven begins here on earth. The Consolation briefly grants a few goods a certain liminal space, rooted in earth but partaking of the higher good, particularly true friendship. The Boethius expands the twenty-two words of Latin to over 110 words in Old English, saying near the end of the passage “God...hi gecyndelice gesceop to gemagum.” The Boethius does not deny that these are worldly goods. Indeed, they are “þæt [deorwyrðeste] þyng eallra þissa woruldgesælþa.” Susan Irvine also notes that just before this passage, the Boethius mentions a wife as a sought-after good: “Unlike Boethius, however, he separates out the desire for a wife from the desire for children.” While Alfred does not explicitly number wives among true friends, listing them here, right before the extended passage on true friends, allows for their inclusion. Higher still come skills and virtues, united in the word *cræft*. Not all *creftas* are virtues, but those that are receive special attention: Wisdom specifically lists prudence, temperance, fortitude, and righteousness as key *creftas* (B 27.48–49 and CP 14.47–48). The greatest good is God, ultimate source of all the other goods.

The physical universe has its own hierarchy. Again, the ranking originates in the Latin Consolation, but the Old English Boethius offers more details. In the twenty-eight lines of III.m.9, the Consolation describes the order of the universe, seen and unseen, in twenty-one dactylic hexameters: God created the cosmos by joining the four elements and the ternary world-soul, and he governs it continually. The last seven lines of the Latin poem ask God for light and
understanding. They for this meter, B offers a 110-line prose expansion (B 33.142–251); C presents 281 lines of alliterative verse (Meter 20). Both Old English passages contrast the unmoving and unchanging God with his always subordinate, movable, changing creation. B begins by praising God’s greatness before it works through a series of oppositions and comparisons. The possibilities of anything greater than, or anything as good as, or any good separate from, God are considered and dismissed with a series of negatives. In a passage of 136 words (B 33.148–58), “nan” (“none”) occurs ten times, forms of “ne” (“not”) eleven (including contractions such as “nis”), “nauht” (“nothing”) and “na” (“never”) once each, and “ac” (“but”) three times. Nothing is mightier than God nor like him, nor did any need compel God to create, but he did so through his own will and power. His nature is wonderful, for he and his good are unified, whereas our good comes from outside us, from God. Nothing is greater or before God, and nothing exists except what he wrought.

Meter 20 in C conveys this initial section differently. It lacks the density of negatives that the prose translation has but relies on a similar series of oppositions: creator versus created, unmoved mover versus mutable being, indivisible good versus creature reliant on external goods. Expressions of wonder and praise appear in both B and C, but C calls further attention to them by making them the alliterating words in some lines:

\[ E]ala, min drihten, þæt þu eart ælmihtig, micel, modilic, mærþum gefræge and wundorlic witena gehwylcum.\]

Most of the alliteration in these three lines falls on words that emphasize the greatness of God: ælmihtig (“almighty”), micel (“great”), modilic (“high-minded”), mærþum (“in glories”), and wundorlic (“wonderful”).

After the initial section of praise and opposition, both texts move to the hierarchy of creation. This ordering runs heaviest to lightest: earth, water, air, fire. Water presents difficulties by occupying two different spaces. On the one hand, it sits on the earth but below the air or atmosphere. \(^{85}\) Yet Alfred also

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82 The Latin Meter has attracted much modern commentary as well as medieval; see, for instance, O’Daly, The Poetry of Boethius, 163–165, and O’Daly’s notes.
84 cM 20.1–3: “Oh, my Lord, you are almighty, great, noble-minded, renowned in glory, and wonderful to all wise people.”
85 See B 33.178–82; compare cM 20.90–98. As Godden and Irvine note, Boethius, vol. 2, 381, this is Bede’s hierarchy from De natura rerum.
writes that water belongs “on eorþan and eac on lyfte and eft bufan þam rodore.”86 The appearance of two apparently contradictory locations for water shows the translator’s commitment to precision and accuracy here: nothing is simplified or left out in this section, and indeed he elaborates far beyond the Latin. Though elsewhere the Boethius makes many omissions, this cosmology forms the heart of the work and does not suffer abridgement or deletion. The passage names the elements and then details their qualities (hot or cold, wet or dry) and the places that God has ordained for them.87 If the elements left their places, ruin would result: water and earth would be too cold for life without fire, but fire would burn everything without water and earth to temper it. All creation consists in the four elements. Though we cannot see them, they all reside in everything, even a stone.88

Unusually, the C Meter makes a substantive addition at this point in the text, introducing the image of the cosmos as egg:

\[
\text{þæm anlicost þe on æge bid} \\
giolæca on middan, glideð hwæðre \\
æg ymbutan. Swa stent eall weoruld \\
stille on tille, streams ymbutan, \\
lagufoda gelac, lyfte and tungla, \\
and sio scire scell scrided ymbutan \\
dogora gehwilce, dyde lange swa.89
\]

The versifier emphasizes the earth’s privileged position: like God, it stands still while everything else moves. God occupies the spiritual center of the universe; the earth, the physical center. Unlike God, however, the earth was created: God established its place and keeps it there. The C Meters thus display even more concern for the physical construction of the universe than the B prose text here.

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86 B 33.191–92: “on earth and also on air and again above the firmament”; compare CM 20.122–24. Godden and Irvine note of this sentence that Bede’s De natura rerum also speaks of waters around the earth, Boethius, vol. 2, 382.
87 B 33.166–214 and CM 20.59–175.
88 This pervasiveness also helps explain the location of water in more than one place.
89 CM 20.169–75: “most like to that is the yolk in the middle of an egg, though the egg turns about it. So stands all this world still in place, the waters around it, the motion of the streams, the atmosphere, and the stars, and the shining shell turns around every day, and has done so for a long time.” On this passage, see Godden and Irvine, Boethius, vol. 2, 511–512; for older traditions of the cosmic egg, see Dronke, Verse and Prose, 38.
The *Boethius* then treats the three-fold soul, but Alfred either rejects or fails to understand the Platonic notion of the world-soul. Instead, he treats human souls, explaining the triplex nature unspecified in the Latin text as the three faculties identified by Alcuin (following Augustine): the concupiscible, the irascible, and the rational. As the heavens rotate, so too the soul turns like a wheel ("hweol," B 33.227/CM 20.217). The image of the turning wheel has been previously invoked in the *Boethius* to illustrate the impermanence of worldly goods (B 7.61–62/CP 5.60–61) and the natural movement of all creation towards God (B 25.31–34/CM 13.73–80). The wheel appears again at B 39.155–93/CP 29.77–115 to illustrate how motion decreases as one moves closer to the axis, or God. The renderings of III.m.9 ("O qui perpetua") occur just past the halfway points of the Old English texts, making them the axis upon which the *Boethius* turns.

Throughout the translation of the Latin Meter, the *Boethius* celebrates God's work of creating, establishing, mingling, and binding through repetitions of words such as gesceaf ("creation" or "creature"), gesceppan ("to create"), and (ge)wyrcan (to make); gesettan ("to establish") and wealdan ("to rule"); gemengan ("to mingle"); and gebindan ("to bind"). All these ideas derive from the Latin, but where the concise Latin meter avoids duplication, both Old English versions delight in repetition and variation on these themes. The passage concludes with a prayer, though the proportions have changed. The Latin prayer takes the last quarter of the Meter; the Old English prayer takes only the last tenth of the prose and the verse renderings. The *Boethius* literally centers on a cosmology that maps out physical and spiritual relationships and hierarchies in detail.

The translations of III.m.9 elaborate the ideas in greatest depth, but later portions of the texts add one more element to the hierarchy. The Latin text mentions angels and demons once in passing, but the Old English texts insist on their place in creation: like human beings and unlike animals, they have

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90 Godden and Irvine note heavy glossing in Latin manuscripts here, *Boethius* vol. 2, 384. Paul Szarmach argues that Alfred may be "quietly seeking to avoid the doctrinal difficulties" of the world-soul, possibly using glosses: see "Alfred, Alcuin, and the Soul," at 131.

91 See Godden and Irvine's *Boethius*, vol. 2, 385, for Alcuin as the translator's source here; but see also Szarmach, "Alfred, Alcuin, and the Soul," 133–139, for the possible role of the commentary tradition.

92 In Godden and Irvine's edition, the midpoint of B comes around page 313; the rendering of III.m.9 begins at 315. C's midpoint is 462, and Meter 20 starts on 463. (In Bieler's edition, the midpoint is 53: III.m.9 begins on 51.) For the Latin Meter, see O'Daly, *The Poetry of Boethius*, 163, see Szarmach's "Meter 20" and "The Timaeus in Old English."

93 These words all appear in both the B prose and the C Meter.
free will and reason, so they can obey God or turn against him. In III.m.2, Philosophy sings about how creations return to their true natures: lions in captivity attack; caged birds will seek the freedom of the woods. Wisdom states outright, “ælc gesceaft bið heald [onloten] wið hire gecynde...buton monnum and sumum englum þa weorðad hwilum of hiora gecynde.” He then specifies that only men and “þa wiðerwierdan englas” defy their creator’s will.

The only time the Consolation mentions angels and demons, it names them among God’s instruments for enacting his providence: “Siue igitur famulantibus quibusdam prouidentiae diuinis spiritibus fatum exercetur seu anima seu tota inseruiente natura seu caelestibus siderum motibus seu angelica uirtute seu daemonum uaria sollertia seu aliquibus horum seu omnibus fatalis series textitur...” The Old English revises the list: “Ða wyrd he þonne wyrcð oððe þurh þa godan englas oððe þurh monna sawla oððe þurh oðerra gesceafta lif oððe þurh heofenes tungl oððe þurh þara scuccena mislice lotwrencas, hwilum þurh an þara, [hwilum] þurh eall þa.”

Godden and Irvine note that the translator takes the Latin spiritibus as angels, as do some of the Latin glosses, though the Consolation sets them apart from the angelica uirtute. Alfred also takes anima (“the world-soul”) as monna sawla (“the souls of men”), though none of the glosses give that interpretation. The Boethius groups men and good angels together, as it has done before, and distances the angels from the demons. It suggests that the angels are more active participants than they are...
in the Latin list, where “power” and “tricks” are the actual agents of providence and “angelica” merely describes the kind of power. In the English, the *englas* ("angels") themselves feature as the headword in the list, along with souls (of men), life (of other creatures), and tricks (of demons); only *tungl* ("stars") are also directly named as instruments of God instead of mere modifiers. Angels are not important in the *Consolation*. They receive far more attention in the *Boethius*.

After this passage, the *Boethius* returns to the topic of angels in every remaining chapter of *B* and the corresponding *C* passages. Where the *Consolation* demonstrates the free will and rationality of human beings, the *Boethius* insists that both faculties belong to angels as well.\(^\text{101}\) The next chapter asserts that angels have free will, rationality, or both three times.\(^\text{102}\) The *Consolation* attributes only sense to creatures unable to move themselves, imagination to creatures who can move themselves, reason to humanity, and pure intelligence to the divine.\(^\text{103}\) The *Boethius* renders the Latin text, with some elaboration, then it diverges: "Englas þonne habbað gewiss andgit. Forþam sint ðas sceafa þus gesceapene þæt ða unstyriendan hi ne ahebben ofer ða styriendan ne him wið ne winnan, ne ða styriendan ofer ða men, ne ða men ofer ða englas, ne ða englas wið God."\(^\text{104}\) Alfred has precedent for taking “intellegentia...diuini” as angels: two manuscripts gloss the phrase “angelici spiritus” ("angelic spirits").\(^\text{105}\) No precedent exists, however, for using epistemology to create a ranking of creatures who do not contend against those above them; indeed, the *Boethius* earlier touched on animals killing humans and angels and men revolting against God, so it contradicts itself here (where the Latin source does not).\(^\text{106}\)

The *Boethius* then goes even further, claiming that “gewis andget” ("perfect understanding") belongs both to “englas...and wise men” ("angels...and wise men," B 41.145–46/CP 32.137–38). Here again the translator may draw on a gloss; where two manuscripts take the “diuini” ("divine") to whom intelligence belongs as “angelici spiritus” ("angelic spirits"), a different gloss to “diuini”...
reads “quia illi sunt diuini generis qui deo digni adherent.” The Old English text then seems to retreat from the radical position that wise men may possess pure intelligence, for the subsequent concessive clause “gif we nu hæfdon ænigne dæl untwiogendes andgites swa swa englas habbað” implies that we do not, as do the following lines, which contrast human doubt with angelic certainty. The connection between angels and men is not abandoned, however: angels and men’s souls are the two kinds of beings that have a beginning but no end. The Boethius promotes a cosmology that includes a surprising suggestion that human capacity may approach the divine.

Philosophy’s goal throughout the Consolation is to redirect the narrator’s mind from the lower to the higher. She is not concerned about lower creations except to make him understand that they are lower. While the Boethius also redirects the mind to the divine, the Old English texts demonstrate clear and sustained interest in ranking things. From partial goods to the one good, from the heavier elements to the lighter, from the purely sensual to pure intelligence, the Boethius maps out the cosmos, seen and unseen, in an orderly fashion. The text focuses on the higher and the eternal but never loses sight of the lower and the ephemeral. The Boethius keeps a broad perspective that encompasses life in this world even as it looks to the next.

**Conclusions: The Afterlife of the Boethius**

Perhaps the combined interest in life in this world and the next helped keep the Boethius alive. Though it is a difficult philosophical text, the Boethius survives in two copies made as much as two hundred years apart, and an additional fragment was lost little more than a century ago. It influenced several works by authors into the thirteenth century. Clearly, later readers valued it.

The Boethius was used by Old English homilists, most notably Ælfric. Godden and Irvine have recently traced key borrowings from the Boethius for Ælfric’s Lives of the Saints and De auguriis in their edition. Ælfric also very

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107 “because those are of divine nature who are worthy to cleave to God,” Godden and Irvine, Boethius, vol. 2, 493.
108 B 41.148–49/CP 32.139–40: “if we now had any part of the certain understanding which the angels have”; the contrast follows in B 41.150–55/CP 32.141–46. (C is damaged here and supplied from B).
109 B 42.16–18/CP 33.17–19.
110 For the manuscripts and fragment, see above, 201–202.
111 Godden and Irvine, Boethius, Introduction, vol. 1, 207–209; and “Ælfric Passages,” vol. 1, 545–547. See also Szarmach, “Boethius’s Influence in Anglo-Saxon England: The Vernacular and the
likely used the *Boethius* as a source for his *De creatore et creatura*.Ælfric’s idea of God’s eternity seems to derive from the end of the *Boethius*. Three passages in *De creatore* borrow from the last chapter of the *Boethius*. Two are less dramatic: *De creatore* 20–25 and 29–32, both drawing on B 42.13–19. The final passage is closest:

Ne ondræt he nenne forþān de nan oðer nis mihtigre þonne he, ne furþān him gelic. 
Efre he bið gifende his gifa þam de he wile, 
ac [he h]is þin[g] ne wanið, ne he nanes ne behoðað. 
Efre he bið ælmihtig and efre he wyle wel. (*De creatore* 41–45)

The *Boethius* is a direct source for words and ideas in these passages, although, as Godden and Irvine note, Ælfric never names it explicitly. Godden suggests that Ælfric did not know the attribution of the *Boethius* to Alfred, and that he avoided naming it because it takes heterodox positions.
Ælfric’s *Interrogationes Sigewulfi* also includes this exchange: “Hu fela / gesceadwise gesceafhta gesceop God? Twa, Englas & menn.” 117 Alcuin’s *In Genesim* is a likely source: “Inter. 2. Quot creaturas rationales condidit Deus?—Resp. Duas. Angelos et homines: et coelum angelis, et terram hominibus habitationem.” 118 Yet Ælfric’s wording echoes the *Boethius*: “he gesceop twa gescedwisian gesceafhta frio, englas and men.” 119 Anglo-Saxon glossators are nearly as likely to use *(ge)settan or *(ge)wyrcan to translate *condo* as they are to use *(ge)sceapan, and Ælfric uses all three of those verbs in contexts of creation, suggesting influence from the *Boethius* as well as from Alcuin directly. 120

Godden and Irvine have also shown borrowings from the *Boethius* by the Old English *Distichs of Cato*. 121 Moreover, Nicholas Trevet used the *Boethius* when he wrote a Latin commentary on the *Consolation* around 1300. 122 Manuscript B was annotated in the fourteenth or fifteenth century; the *Boethius* still found an audience through the Middle English period. 123 Despite its evident...

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119 B 41.25–26/CP 32.16–17: “He created two free, rational creatures: angels and men.” The *Boethius* here draws on the same passage from Alcuin that Ælfric uses. Godden and Irvine do not cite Alcuin for this line in the *Boethius*; their Commentary for the passage in Chapter 41 (*Boethius*, vol. 2, 488) refers back to their note on 40.111–113 (vol. 2, 485–486) where they quote a commentary on the Latin *De consolatione*: “sciendum itaque quod soli angeli et homines rationalis a deo creati sunt, quibus etiam liberum arbitrium etsi concessum siue ad bonum siue ad malum,” (“and thus it is known that only angels and men were created rational by God, and to them free will was also granted, whether for good or for evil,” my translation). Alcuin picks up the matter of free will a little later in his text (*PL* 100, 523B), arguing that it is not fitting for a supreme being to be served by unfree men. The glosses may derive from Alcuin, and either or both may inform Alfred’s translation.

120 See the *oec*.

121 Godden and Irvine, *Boethius*, vol. 1, 209–212. For other *OE* texts that may draw on the *De consolatione* or the *Boethius*, see Szarmach, “Boethius’s Influence,” 243–253.


difficulty in language and in philosophy, readers considered the Old English text worthwhile for centuries after it was written.

Scholars in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries rediscovered its value. The *Boethius* enjoyed only one transcript and one edition before 1829, but the nineteenth century saw three full editions, plus three of the Meters only.\textsuperscript{124} Four more editions of the Meters were published in the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{125} Beginning in the 1960s, scholarship on the *Boethius* grew tremendously.\textsuperscript{126} The twenty-first century so far has seen great interest in the text, not least in the important new edition by Godden and Irvine.\textsuperscript{127} The *Boethius* now invites scholars to consider its two texts in multiple contexts: in light of each other, in view of both Latin and vernacular genres and traditions, and in terms of manuscript history. Creative and speculative thought shine through this free translation, provoking us to reconsider its place in literary and intellectual history. While it shares many themes with its main Latin source text, it takes a broader view of human life, ultimately ranking of priorities and beings in both earthly and divine spheres. The *Boethius* proved a vital text not only for the later Old English period but also into the Middle English era. It excites inquiry and wonder in readers more than a millennium after its writing, and it will continue to do so for quite some time.

\textsuperscript{124} Godden and Irvine, *Boethius*, vol. 1, 215–222.
\textsuperscript{125} Godden and Irvine, *Boethius*, vol. 1, 223–224.
\textsuperscript{127} At least 46 items on the *Boethius* appeared in *oen* bibliographies for 2001–9 (and more since 2009).