

The right kind of  
hope: lady philosophy  
and her importance to  
beothius



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

In *The Consolation of Philosophy*, the main character and author of the work, Boethius, faces the hardest time in his life when he is imprisoned and sentenced to death. Boethius is mourning the loss of his privileges, influence, and freedom, and seeks consolation from Lady Philosophy, whom he envisions he is having a philosophical discussion with. Lady Philosophy attempts to help Boethius remember his higher purpose in life by encouraging him to lead with reason and logic rather than his passions. Throughout the novel Boethius utilizes Lady Philosophy's presence as an opportunity to ask existential and moral questions to help him grasp the role of higher powers such as Fortune, Providence, and God in human life. By the end of his conversation with Lady Philosophy, Boethius recognizes that leading with his passions rather than with reason is the root to his personal suffering and is what has prevented him from understanding why Divine foreknowledge and human freedom's coexistence is needed in human life.

At the beginning of the text, Boethius thinks that Divine foreknowledge and free will are contradictory and he does not think both can exist at the same time. In Book V, Boethius explains his confusion about these two concepts to Lady Philosophy, "...either future events be seen by God or that things foreseen happen as foreseen, and this alone is enough to remove freedom of the will" (120-21). Boethius suggests that all events that occur on Earth happen because they occur in God's mind. From a human's perspective, his reasoning initially makes sense, because if all things originate in God's mind, then humans have no way of changing this and thus must not have free will. However, what Boethius struggles to understand and does not account for in his reasoning is that God does not experience time in the (linear) way

humans do. Boethius assumes humans can view the past, present and the future the way God does. What Lady Philosophy explains to Boethius is that for God, the past, present and future have already happened; God has seen our entire lives and the lives after ours and those before ours, all at once. Lady Philosophy brings this to Boethius' attention, proving his initial ideas faulty, because Boethius' perspective is clouded by his emotions- or his "passions." Embittered by his imprisonment, Boethius shapes his idea of human's lack of free will based on his bitterness. Lady Philosophy reminds him that passion is preventing him from clearly and logically evaluating human freedom in relation to Divine foreknowledge.

One of Boethius' thoughts about God's relationship to human freedom is that things only happen because it is necessary that they happen. However, his thinking that God sees only one possibility to be the "future" is proven false by Lady Philosophy, when she explains, "God sees those future events which happen of free will as present events" (135-36). Although God does not experience time at the same rate or moment that we do, he recognizes that the present moment is, for humans, the present because this is how he allows humans to have and use their free will. God is able to see all possibilities of the future; people are allowed to change their minds and decisions, which can lead them to various destinations in life, but doing so does not mean they have escaped divine foreknowledge because God accepts the present moment that humans have chosen. God's foreseeing of humans using their free will does not constrain the freedoms humans have nor does it devalue or discredit humans in the moments that they are using their free will. Lady Philosophy says that this is because God's relationship to

the event and the event by itself are separate entities, and though they are intertwined because of God's foreseeing of it, when looked at separately, the way in which one uses his/her free will is his/her decision alone and has no direct influence from God. With help from Lady Philosophy, Boethius comes to understand that free will and fortune are in God's power and are not used to aid the evil, but are for the good.

Lady Philosophy believes that though Fortune is random, whatever fortune people get plays a purposeful role in their lives based on whether they themselves are good or evil. This is because of Fortune's very fickle, unpredictable and unreliable nature. If a person is going to embrace Fortune, they need to be grateful for the good and the bad fortune that they are given. If they grieve the good that leaves them and the bad that comes to them, they are enslaved to Fortune. Lady Philosophy says that this speaks to the person's character, not to their circumstances, "When [the wicked] suffer, no one is surprised, because everyone considers they deserve ill...and when they prosper, it is a powerful argument to good men about the kind of judgement they should make of such happiness as they often see wait upon the wicked" (108). Lady Philosophy tells Boethius this to reveal to him that evil people receiving good fortune is not God merely letting them get away with evil. Lady Philosophy assures Boethius that evil people's souls will be held accountable for their actions when they die. Without evil bringing "destruction on the good", the wicked would not be able to punish themselves by going through the cycle of constantly chasing the desire/happiness that they will never attain. Free will is needed in order for people to be held accountable for their sins. Only through goodness can people find true

happiness, which is why evil people will never reach this true happiness.

Boethius struggles to come to this realization, and says that philosophically he understands what Lady Philosophy is trying to teach him, but through a human's perspective, it is easier said than done. Boethius, the author, gives Lady Philosophy the final words of the account.

Throughout Boethius's writing, Lady Philosophy guides Boethius to discover the answers to his own questions rather than her telling him directly, so her words ending their conversation seems contradictory. However, Lady Philosophy's closing words are, once again, advice to Boethius to " lift up your mind to the right kind of hope" (137). She encourages him to connect with God, and take this time of despair and hopelessness to turn toward the highest power of good in the universe and handle himself logically and reasonably to find consolation. Ending the novel with Lady Philosophy's words tells the reader that this message is not something humans can ponder: it just is.