

Teaching Boethius with Josh Gibbs

Introduction to
Boethius and *The
Consolation of
Philosophy*

Outline

Why is *The Consolation of Philosophy* perfect for high schoolers?

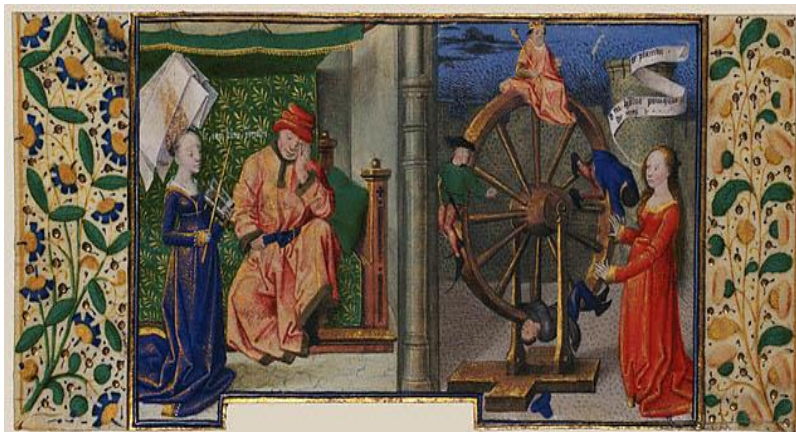
- Requires no laborious introduction of Boethius before reading.
- Claims in *The Consolation* will be familiar since many everyday adages actually originated in this text (e.g. “count your blessings”).
- Spurs thinking about how one offers and accepts consolation.

The Consolation is divided into FIVE sections:

- First three books concern evil as it exists in our own hearts.
- Fourth book concerns evil in the hearts of others.
- Fifth book concerns the very existence of evil.

Useful advance knowledge or discussion

- Knowledge of Aristotelian metaphysics is helpful.
- Knowledge of fortune (*fortuna*) is helpful.
- Penguin Classics edition with illustration of *fortune's wheel*.
 - 4 quadrants of *fortune's wheel*:
 - I rule.
 - I have ruled.
 - I have no kingdom.
 - I will rule again.
 - These are the 4 material states of life on earth.



The Wheel of Fortune as portrayed in the Coëtivy Master c. 1460/70

- The wheel is the earth itself. Fortune is the power that governs the earth.
- Fortune is the inclining “virtue” of the earth.
- Fortune is constantly upending man’s confidence in stability of the times.
- Lady Fortune is “luck”.
 - Luck (fortune) is a randomizing force in the world that constantly shakes up the affairs of man to dislodge man’s confidence in earthly things in favor of confidence in Heavenly things.
 - Boethius posited the idea that God created fortune for the good of man.
 - Vestiges of these ideas in the modern world: Establishment of equity and fairness—taking “turns” refers to fortune’s wheel.

Chap 1, Book 1: “Song of Boethius”

- Boethius became a public servant in order to virtuously serve the people of Rome. We find him in a jail cell, in exile, keeping company with the Muses, because he was unjustly convicted of treason.
 - Important to remember that Boethius’ self-pity is sinful, blinding him to a proper assessment of his situation.
 - Sin = sickness/disease; Sin=willing ignorance (in Boethius’ view).
- Lady Philosophy (Sophia) insults and sends Muses away; challenges Boethius.



A Mediaeval representation Boethius, visited by Lady Philosophy.