



Teaching Boethius

with Josh Gibbs

Lesson 6: Is God Good?

Outline:

Book 5 - addresses Epicurus' questions (asked in Book 1) concerning the goodness of God.

Departs from the practical into more abstract ideas about God and metaphysics

- May require substantial introduction of metaphysics

Happiness is achieved via union of all the virtues (as God is one, so there are no separation of virtues); this union is only achieved in God, and so one must pursue God if he wishes to pursue happiness.

Idea of the “otherness” of God and man - whatever man is that makes him not God.

- The many differences between God and man.
- Chasm between God and man is constantly bridged by God's blessings on man as an autonomous “other.”
- Privacy of Being: man's thoughts are his own, his will is his own.
 - “If the will won't will, nothing can make it” - Beatrice, *Paradiso*, *The Divine Comedy*.
 - God rewards good and allows man to choose evil, but also brings good from it.
- Revisiting Epicurus (list question on board at beginning and end of study):
 - Is God willing to stop evil but not able? Then he is not omnipotent.
 - Is God able to stop evil but not willing? Then he is not omnibenevolent.
 - Is God willing and able to stop evil? Then why is there evil?
 - Is God neither willing nor able to stop evil? Then why do we call him God?
 - Ask whether to being a response? (#3 is the answer because of its correct premises).
 - Ask students to describe theodicies (explanations for evil) they have encountered.
 - Boethius' theodicy relies upon the freedom of the will; God is capable of viewing us as a spectator would.
 - Types of language used to describe God:
 - Cataphatic - depicts God as a subject of time and place, like man; used most often in Scripture
 - Apophatic - speaks of God as he understands himself; reveals limitations of man's understanding



- Apophatically, there is no “foreknowledge” because God experiences all things at once, outside of time. All things take place in God’s eternal present.
 - Analogy of the chariot wheel
- Conclusion
 - Necessity of man to pursue virtue because man’s free pursuits of virtue is rewarded and punished by a just God, as well as being their own reward and punishment.
 - Similar morality to the conclusion of Ecclesiastes.
 - “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).