

The Longest Transference:
Self-Consolation and Politics in Latin Philosophical Literature

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Department of
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This dissertation identifies Cicero's *Consolatio*, Seneca's *Ad Polybium de consolatione*, and Boethius' *De consolatione Philosophiae* as self-consolations, in which these Roman authors employ philosophical argument and literary art, in order to provide a therapy for their own crippling experiences of grief. This therapeutic discourse unfolds between two contradictory conditions, though, since the philosophers must possess the self-mastery and self-possession that qualifies the consoler to perform his task felicitously, and they must lack those very same qualifications, insofar as their experience of loss has exposed their dependence upon others and they thus require consolation. Foucault's theoretical treatment of ancient philosophical discourse is supplemented by Lacanian critical theory and the political philosophy of Giorgio Agamben to perform analyses of the consolatory texts and their political context. These analyses reveal that self-consolation overcomes the contradictory conditions that found this discourse through literary and rhetorical artifice. But this resolution then places the apparent completeness of the philosophical argument in doubt, as the consoled authors in each case finally call for a decisive action that would join philosophical reflection to the merely human world that philosophy would have these consolers leave behind. Each author's self-consolation therefore demonstrates a split allegiance to the Roman political community and to a Socratic philosophical heritage that advocates for withdrawal from politics.

To Carolyn

What good are words between those who share love?

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Introduction

“Mourning over the loss of something that we have loved or admired seems so natural to the layman that he regards it as self-evident. But to psychologists mourning is a great riddle, one of those phenomena which cannot themselves be explained but to which other obscurities can be traced back...why it is that this detachment of libido from its objects should be such a painful process is a mystery to us and we have not hitherto been able to frame any hypothesis to account for it. We only see that libido clings to its objects and will not renounce those that are lost even when a substitute lies ready to hand. Such then is mourning.”¹

“Grief seems to be among the opponents of life...”²

Among the curiosities that survive from antiquity is a collection of short epistles in which the unrecognizable authors assume the identities of those among the Socratic circle, and then compose correspondence as if they possess the long defunct voices of these legendary figures, addressing others among that group. Much of the letters’ substance is given over to discussing biographical details, Xenophon’s shrine to Artemis, the exchange of money or resources for one cause or another, or any other such ephemera as one may freely lift from the *Memorabilia* or the frames of Plato’s dialogues.³ These letters are known in the scholarship as the Socratic epistles.⁴ One in particular I highlight,

¹ Sigmund Freud, "On Transience," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. by James Strachey et al. (London: Hogarth, 1953-1974): 303.

² For the text from which this quotation comes, see fn. 5 below. For all Greek and Latin texts used in this dissertation, I have employed my own translations. For abbreviations, I have followed the standard Oxford Classical Dictionary Abbreviations.

³ See fn. 7 below.

⁴ On pseudepigraphic letters in general, see the bibliography at Benjamin Fiore, S.J., *The Function of Personal Example in the Socratic and Pastoral Epistles*, *Analecta biblica investigationes scientificae in res biblicas* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1986): 108 fn. 21. And further, see: Lewis R. Donelson, *Pseudepigraphy and Ethical Argument in the Pastoral Epistles* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck),

though, for its significance to my theme. Letter twenty-one in Köhler's edition reads as follows:⁵

[Aeschines] to Xanthippe, wife of Socrates

I gave Euphron of Megara six measures of barley, eight drachmas, and a new tunic to get you through the winter. So take these things and know that Eucleides and Terpsion are altogether fine and good men, and kindly disposed to you and to Socrates. When the children should wish to come along to us, do not stop them; for it's not far to go to Megara. But as for those many tears, O good lady, enough. There is nothing to be gained by this, and more likely it will do you harm. You must recall what Socrates said, and try to follow his habits and teachings, since by grieving at each turn you will wrong yourself and the children to a much greater extent. For, if these are Socrates' little chicks, whom it is necessary not only that we raise, but also it is necessary that we ourselves try to survive for their sake; if you or I or someone else, on whom the care of the

1986); C. D. N. Costa, *Greek Fictional Letters* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001): xi-xxi, with bibliography at xxii-xxiii; Patricia A. Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions: The letter in Greek literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). For the Socratic epistles in particular, see also Liselotte Köhler, "Die Briefe des Sokrates und der Sokratiker" (Der Universität Zürich, 1928); Johannes Sykutris, *Die Briefe des Sokrates und der Sokratiker* (Paderborn: Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, 1933); Abraham J. Malherbe, *The Cynic Epistles: A Study Edition*, vol. Number 12, Society of Biblical Literature, Sources for Biblical Study (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977); Donelson, *Pseudepigraphy and Ethical Argument in the Pastoral Epistles*: 33-42; Benjamin Fiore, S.J., "Chapter VI: Example in the Socratic Letters," in *The Function of Personal Example in the Socratic and Pastoral Epistles* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1986). There is also further bibliography at Fiore, *The Function of Personal Example in the Socratic and Pastoral Epistles*: 101, n. 1.

⁵ Köhler, "Die Briefe des Sokrates und der Sokratiker." Malherbe and Costa have alternative translations of this letter, with some commentary from Costa as well Malherbe, *The Cynic Epistles: A Study Edition*, Number 12: 270-71; Costa, *Greek Fictional Letters*: 82-83, 170-71. For this letter, cf. also Leon Allazzis, *Socratis, Antisthenis et aliorum Socraticorum epistolae* (Paris 1637); Johann Conrad Orelli, *Socratis et Socraticorum, Pythagorae et Pythagoreorum, quae feruntur epistolae* (Leipzig 1815); Sykutris, *Die Briefe des Sokrates und der Sokratiker*: 71-73; Fiore, *The Function of Personal Example in the Socratic and Pastoral Epistles*: 142. It may be significant that this letter stands at the head of the original manuscript of the letters, Codex Vaticanus Graecus 64, on which all other existing manuscripts are dependent. Malherbe discusses the manuscript history of the Socratic epistles in Malherbe, *The Cynic Epistles: A Study Edition*, Number 12: 27-29. He cites as authoritative the following articles: Johannes Sykutris, "Die handschriftliche Ueberlieferung der Sokratikerbriefe," *Philologische Wochenschrift* 48 (1928); Johannes Sykutris, "Sokratikerbriefe," *Pauly-Wissowa Realencyklopädie* Supp. 5 (1931).

deceased Socrates' children has fallen, should die, these children will be wronged, being devoid of anyone helping them or raising them fittingly; on account of this, try to live for them. This could not come to pass in any other way, unless you supply yourself with the necessities of life. Grief seems to be among the opponents of life, since by it the living are harmed. Apollodorus the so-called "madman" and Dion commend you, because you receive nothing from anyone, but you say you are rich. And you do well in saying this. To whatever extent I and the rest of our friends have the strength to assist you, you will want for nothing. Have courage, then, Xanthippe, and cast down none of Socrates' beauties, knowing how this man became something great among us; and concentrate upon him, in what manner he lived and in what way he died. For I think that his death also was great and noble, if indeed someone should see it in the way in which it must be seen.

Farewell.⁶

This little letter may seem trite by comparison with the powerful and dramatic artistry of Plato's *Phaedo*, the other Socratic text in which Xanthippe and Socrates' death are

⁶ Köhler, "Die Briefe des Sokrates und der Sokratiker," 36-37. Here is the Greek from which I have made this translation:

[Αισχίνης] Ξανθίππῃ τῇ Σωκράτους

Εὐφροني τῷ Μεγαρεὶ ἔδωκα ἀλφίτων χοίνικας ἕξ καὶ δρακμᾶς ὀκτώ καὶ ἐξωμίδα καινήν τὸ χεῖμά σοι διαγεγεῖν. Ταῦτα οὖν λάβε καὶ ἴσθι Εὐκλείδην καὶ Τερψίωνα πάνυ καλῶ τε καὶ ἀγαθῶ ἄνδρε καὶ σοὶ τε καὶ Σωκράτει εὖνω. Ἦνίκα δ' ἂν οἱ παῖδες ἐθέλοιεν παρ' ἡμᾶς ἰέναι, μὴ κώλυε· οὐ γὰρ πόρρω ἐστὶν ἰέναι εἰς Μέγαρα. Τῶν δὲ πολλῶν σοὶ δακρῶν, ὦ ἀγαθή, ἄλις. Ὀνήσει γὰρ οὐδέν, σχεδὸν δέ τι καὶ βλάψει. Ἀναμνησκου γὰρ ὦν ἔλεγε Σωκράτης καὶ τοῖς ἡθεσιν αὐτοῦ καὶ τοῖς λόγοις πειρῶ ἀκολουθεῖν, ἐπεὶ λυπούμενη παρ' ἕκαστα καὶ σεαυτὴν ἀδικήσεις ὅτι μάλιστα καὶ τοὺς παῖδας. Οὗτοι γὰρ οἰοῦναι νεοττοὶ εἰσι Σωκράτους, οὓς δεῖ οὐ μόνον τρέφειν ἡμᾶς, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡμᾶς αὐτοὺς αὐτοῖς πειρᾶσθαι παραμένειν· ὡς εἰ σὺ ἢ ἐγὼ ἢ ἄλλος τις, ὅτῳ μέλει τελευτήσαντος Σωκράτους τῶν παίδων, ἀποθάνοι, ἀδικήσονται οὗτοι, ἔρημοι γενόμενοι τοῦ βοηθήσαντος καὶ θρέψοντος ὁμολογουμένως· ὅθεν πειρῶ ζῆν αὐτοῖς. Τοῦτο δὲ οὐκ ἂν ἄλλως γένοιτο, εἰ μὴ τὰ πρὸς τὸ ζῆν αὐτῇ <αὐτῇ> παρέχοις. Λύπη δὲ δοκεῖ τῶν ἐναντίων ζωῆ εἶναι, ὅπου βλάπτονται ὑπ' αὐτῆς οἱ ζῶντες. Ἀπολλόδωρος ὁ μανικὸς ἐπικαλούμενος καὶ Δίων ἐπαινοῦσί σε, διότι παρ' οὐδενὸς οὐδὲν λαμβάνεις, φῆς δὲ πλοτεῖν. Καὶ εὖ ποιεῖς. Εἰς ὅσον γὰρ ἐγὼ τε καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι φίλοι ἰσχύομεν ἐπικουρεῖν σοι, δεήσει οὐδενός. Θάρρει οὖν, ὦ Ξανθίππη, καὶ μηδὲν καταβάλης τῶν Σωκράτους καλῶν εἰδυῖα, ὡς μέγα τι ἡμῖν ἐγένετο οὗτος ὁ ἄνθρωπος· καὶ ἐπινόει αὐτὸν ὅποια ἔζησε καὶ ὅποια ἐτελεύτησε. Ἐγὼ μὲν γὰρ οἶμαι καὶ τὸν θάνατον αὐτοῦ μέγα τε καὶ καλὸν γεγονέναι, εἰ δὴ τις καθ' ὃ χρῆ σκοπεῖν σκοποίῃ.

Ἔρρωσο.

brought together. Nevertheless, when read as a supplement to the Socratic dialogues, it does tease out, and in a way answer, certain questions that one is bound to ask upon working through the dialogues: what happens to Xanthippe after she leaves the prison? What happens to Socrates' children, to whom, as he requests in at least Plato's recollection of the *Apology of Socrates*, the city should tend, in exactly the same way that he always tended to the city (Pl. *Ap.* 41e)? Did the Athenians and Socrates' other friends meet this request, and goad the "young chicks" of Socrates toward virtue practiced according to the Socratic model? This letter presents a slice of life in which one may witness the "φίλοι" of Socrates, as they are identified, fulfilling just this task, looking out for one another and for their friend's children, seeing to it that these children should not fall into worthlessness and that they should preserve his way of life.

But more than this, the letter is a singular example of a certain mode of philosophical discourse commonly called the *λόγος παραμυθητικός*, or the *consolatio*.⁷ The letter becomes recognizably consolatory in the fourth sentence, where Aeschines writes, "Τῶν δὲ πολλῶν σοὶ δακρύων, ὦ ἀγαθή, ἄλις." "As for those many tears of yours, O good lady, enough." The expression here is quite compact: in eight syllables one encounters a woman's weeping, in four more a complimentary address and a feminine

⁷ Through the third sentence, this letter is not unlike those that appear elsewhere in the corpus of Socratic epistles: Terpsion and Eucleides, who appear in Plato's *Phaedo* at 59c as two of the foreigners present at Socrates' death and in the frame of the *Theaetetus* as the readers of a Socratic dialogue about Theaetetus (*Tht.* 142a-143c), have given Aeschines some resources; he has provided a certain Euphron with this letter and the resources, in order for him to bring them along to Xanthippe; Aeschines invites the children to visit whenever they like, demonstrating his care for Socrates' family. Such are the ephemeral details the author has borrowed from these major Socratic texts.

identity of the addressee, and, in two final short syllables, just what to do with those tears: leave off of them. The pauses separate the vocalizations with symmetrically divided punctuations in such a way that they naturally culminate in the sentence's closing silence. Aeschines' calm control of his voice contrasts with what one imagines as the broken strains of tears in his addressee. The effect of this delivery reinforces the gendered message of a wise man, now telling a woman carried away by her grief how to handle her aberrant emotions, how to acquire the strength to overcome them. Aeschines thus performs the *ethos* he would have Xanthippe adopt.

But the personal character of this exchange is evident at every turn, and Aeschines is not unreasonably violent with the mourning Xanthippe. The argument, for one, involves no metaphysical speculation on the beyond, but rather stays on the nearer side of life and death. The author of the letter presupposes for his counsel not that life is indifferent or evil, but rather that it is more likely “harmful” to allow oneself to mourn excessively, that grieving leads to disregard for one's own life and the lives of one's dependents (“λυπουμένη παρ' ἕκαστα καὶ σεαυτὴν ἀδικήσεις ὅτι μάλιστα καὶ τοὺς παίδας”). Aeschines introduces the example of Socrates' “habits and speeches” (“τοῖς ἤθεσιν αὐτοῦ καὶ τοῖς λόγοις”), in order to provide a model for a life that shunned grief, a life that is worthy of Xanthippe's imitation. That he points to her deceased husband complicates the imperative Aeschines advances, though, since the grief that Xanthippe feels—one does not read that her grief is for her loss of Socrates, but that is the obvious conclusion to reach—is precisely that of which Aeschines may avail himself

in order to establish Socrates' life as exemplary. That is, precisely the same frustrated attachment to the deceased Socrates that Xanthippe's grief presupposes is exploited here in order to encourage her to leave off her mourning of him, as Socrates would have had her do, for the sake of his children and his friends. In this way, a personal bond between two singular people is preserved even as it is transformed, so that grief for the loss of Socrates, which affect "seems to be among the enemies of life," must give way to boldness ("Θάρρει") and meditation upon "how he lived and how he died" ("ὅποια ἔζησε καὶ ὅποια ἐτελεύτησε"). Xanthippe may draw from the counsel of Aeschines the strength that he insists she requires.

To the consolatory argument of this letter, finally, is added also the consolatory force of the act of writing itself, which, like the garment and resources that prove Eucleides and Terpsion to be "altogether fine and good men, and kindly disposed to you and to Socrates" must be taken as a token of Aeschines' loyalty ("πάνυ καλῶ τε καὶ ἀγαθῶ ἄνδρε καὶ σοί τε καὶ Σωκράτει εὖνω"). His act of writing proves that "Εἰς ὅσον γὰρ ἐγὼ τε καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι φίλοι ἰσχύομεν ἐπικουρεῖν σοι, δεήσει οὐδενός," that is, "To whatever extent I and your other friends have the strength to assist you, you will want for nothing."

Strategies of Self-Consolation in Fronto's De nepote amisso

The letters shared between Fronto and Marcus Aurelius provide an important

point of comparison for understanding what is at stake in consolation. In the first of four letters grouped under the heading *De nepote amisso*, “On his deceased grandson,” Marcus Aurelius writes to his teacher, Marcus Cornelius Fronto, in order to express his concern for his master’s recent loss of a beloved grandson.⁸ It is remarkable that Marcus Aurelius presents Fronto’s vulnerability at this moment as a threat to his own sense of self-possession. In the second sentence, he writes, “Since I am so often tormented even at the individual aches and pains of your joints, my master, what do you think I have suffered, when you are pained in your soul?”⁹ The sentiment is echoed in the continuation, where Marcus Aurelius writes: “To me, upset as I am, nothing else comes to mind than to ask you that you protect my sweetest master for me, in whom I have more comforts for this life than those comforts for that sadness of yours which can come from any source.”¹⁰ Marcus Aurelius thus regards the ethical comportment of Fronto as a more successful and convincing source of consolation, at least in the case of his master, than the worn-out arguments of the consolatory tradition. The emperor will spare Fronto these commonplaces, with which Fronto was doubtless familiar, and say the only that Fronto

⁸ Marcus Cornelius Fronto, *M. Cornelii Frontonis epistulae schedis tam editis quam ineditis*, ed. Edmund Hauler and M. P. J. Van Den Hout, *Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana* (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1988): 235-40. See especially Pascale Fleury, “Consolation,” (2006). See also Antonio Ramírez de Verger, “La «Consolatio» en Frontón: en Torno al «De nepote amisso»,” *Faventia* 5, no. 1 (1983).

⁹ The letter begins as follows: “*Modo cognovi de casu. Cum autem in singulis articulorum tuorum doloribus torqueri soleam, mi magister, quid opinaris me pati, cum animum doles?*”

¹⁰ The Latin continues: “*nihil conturbato mihi aliud in mentem venit quam rogare te ut conserves mihi dulcissimum magistrum, in quo plura solacia vitae huius habeo <quam> quae tibi tristitiae istius possunt ab ullo contingere.*”

must take care of himself. Marcus Aurelius puts his own protection from the anxiety he feels on his master's behalf entirely in his master's hands, and he trusts that Fronto's greater competence in these matters will be up to the challenge of managing grief without the rehearsal of so many consolatory topics.

Fronto's reply is remarkable, since it acts as a letter of consolation only insofar as it shows the author of the letter in the process of wrestling with his own grief. If Marcus Aurelius expects Fronto to summon the resolve that will subdue the affect that assails both of them, then Fronto must show himself worthy of this confidence. He begins by listing the "many sorrows" with which "*Fortuna*" has "tested him through all [his] life" ("*multis huiusmodi maeroribus fortuna me per omnem vitam meam exercuit.*" 2.1). In addition to other unnamed misfortunes, he has lost five children already. Fronto emphasizes that each of these five was an only child, so that all five losses brought a singular grief in their wake, and the sense of joy at one child's birth was tempered by the misery at another's death. He then contrasts his victories over those episodes of grief that afflicted him alone with his resourcelessness in the case of his current despair, in which "mourning is multiplied with the grief of a daughter, with a kindred grief," insofar as it attacks Fronto as well as his daughter and his son-in-law, Victorinus, the father of the deceased grandson ("*...luctus mihi dolore filiae, dolore generi multiplicatur...*" 2.2). The grief that circulates among a circle of loved ones is far more difficult to bear than that which afflicts a philosopher alone, so that Fronto finally declares, "*Victorini mei lacrimis*

tabesco, conliquesco.” “At the tears of my Victorinus I go to waste, I melt away” (2.3).

The philosopher admits he even goes so far as to blame the gods and the fates, cursing them for this grief, which stands out as intolerable when compared with his earlier losses.

This admission opens the way to speculation in the third and fourth paragraphs on the arrangement of providence and the individual's experience of this immense design.

He cannot understand how a universe governed by providence would arrange that

Fronto's son-in-law, a man defined by “his dutiful respect for the gods, his mildness, his honesty, his faultlessness, and his humanity” should suffer the loss of a dearly beloved

child (“*Victorinum pietate, mansuetidine, veritate, innocentia, humanitate...*” 2.3). Fronto

poses an abundance of searching, metaphysical questions, finally concluding this line of thought with a classic conceit, in which the order of providence is compared to the

production of garments: no spinner would produce a poor quality work for a master even as she makes fine and artful garments for a slave; how then would the fates weave so

pitiful a thread for Fronto's son-in-law, so good and upright a man? He challenges this account of the classic problem of reconciling providence with the suffering of the

virtuous, suggesting that “what we desire so greatly as advantageous to us is actually

evil” (“*...rerum quae mala sunt quasi prospera concupiscimus,*” 2.4). “Death itself,” he

goes on to explain, “which seems sorrowful to all,” may rather arrive as “a rest from

labors, worries, and troubles” (“*...mors ip<sa>, quae omnibus luctuosa videtur, pausa*

laborum adfert et sollicitudinum et calamitatum...”). He refers to the Platonic metaphor

originally occurring in the *Phaedo* at 82d-e, in which death is conceived as a “release from the terrible chains of the body,” and raises the possibility of a life after death in which the soul comes to a pleasant location in which the souls of the good gather together (“...*miser/rimisque corporis vinculis liberatos...nos*” 2.4). From this perspective, Fronto's grandchild's death can be understood as a sign that the gods especially loved this child, that their providential design is a flawless one, and that death comes as a reward to the virtuous (2.5).

Accepting this account of providence not because it must be true, but because the absence of providence or an evil providence is simply unthinkable to Fronto,¹¹ he nevertheless concedes in paragraph five that the immortality of the soul and a joyous afterlife bring little consolation to the bereaved, sorrowing over the loss they feel. Fronto concedes,

quod tamen verum sit licet, parvi nostra refert, qui desideramus amissos, nec quicquam nos animarum immortalitas consolatur, qui carissimis nostris dum vivimus caremus. istum statum, vocem, formam, animam liberam quaerimus, <f>aciem defunctorum miserandam maeremus, os obseratum, oculos eversos, colorem undique deletum. si maxime esse animas immortalis constet, erit hoc philosophis disserendi argumentum, non parentibus desiderandi remedium.

Even allowing that all this is true, it brings little comfort to those of us who long for the deceased. Nor does the immortality of souls console us in the slightest, we who lack those dearest to us, as long as we live. We search for that way of standing, the voice, the figure, the free spirit, we feel sorrow at the pitiful face of the dead, the mouth sealed shut, the eyes turned up, their complexion depleted from every angle. If it will be most certainly established that souls are immortal, this will be a point of disputation for philosophers, not a remedy for parents'

¹¹ “*hoc ego ita esse facilius crediderim quam cuncta humana aut nulla aut iniqua providentia regi.*” 2.4.

longing.

This attitude towards death is surprisingly contemporary, when compared with most consolation literature: Fronto not only admits that the argument for providence is more rationalizing than strictly rational, but he also rejects the classic commonplaces of the consolatory tradition in the case of anyone who is not a philosopher, declaring that those commonplaces fail to speak to the most urgent cause of grief for the bereaved: the identification with the deceased who have parted.¹²

In paragraphs 6 through 9, then, Fronto must consider sentiments and counsels that address the grief of those who find philosophy unconvincing, whose pain is at once less intellectual than the philosopher's and yet all the more urgent. He turns from the universal problem of a virtuous man's search for justifications of providence to the ordinary, mundane lives of his loved ones. In paragraph 6, Fronto discusses his own grief for his grandson as a transition to the topic of his daughter's grief at paragraph 7. Stressing his own poor fit as a *consolator* for her, he observes that she will be better provided for by the sympathy of her husband than by "any songs of poets or sages' precepts" ("*neque ulla poetarum carmina aut sapientium praecepta...*" 2.7).¹³ At 8.1,

¹² David Konstan speaks of this cause for mourning in terms of the "extended self" in his study of Lucian's Περὶ πένθους. David Konstan, "The Grieving Self: Reflections on Lucian's *On Mourning* and the Consolatory Tradition," in *Greek and Roman Consolations: Eight Studies of a Tradition and its Afterlife*, ed. Han Baltussen (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2013).

¹³ The sentence continues from "*praecepta*" with "...*tantum promoverint ad luctum filiae meae sedandum et dolorem leniendum, quantum mariti v<o>x <ex> ore carissimo et pectore iunctissimo profecta.*" "Nor would any poets' songs or sages' precepts prevail so much at calming my daughter's sorrow and

Fronto returns to his own grief, and declares, “*Me autem consolatur aetas mea prope iam edita et morti proxima.*” “For my part, my life [*aetas*] being nearly spent now and my great nearness to death console me.” He also expresses how he will testify for the merit of his life at its end, cataloging his virtues through to where paragraph 9 breaks off. Large parts of this paragraph are poorly preserved, but one can perceive that Fronto looks forward to the moment of his death, from which point, according to the oldest traditions of Greek wisdom, he may look back upon his life with security that he has lived well.¹⁴ Fronto seems to be withdrawing into an area that he can control, his own exercise of virtue in the brief span of life granted to him, hoping to preserve in this way some moderate happiness through what remains of his life.

After the poorly preserved text, a few sentences of the letter’s conclusion survive.

Fronto writes,

*Multum et graviter male valui, mi Marce carissime. Dein casibus miserrimis
adflactus, tum uxorem amisi, nepotem in Germania amisi, miserum me!
Decimanum nostrum amisi. Ferreus si essem, plura scribere non possem isto in*

moderating her grief, as her husband's voice going forth from his dearest mouth and his heart joined with hers.”

¹⁴ Compare this with Solon’s advice to Croesus at Hdt. 1.32, or Aristotle’s counsel in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle had suggested that the best hope for a good life rests upon the practice of virtue, in spite of the likelihood that fortune may deprive the virtuous of external goods, the dearest of these being friends and children. He introduces what must have been a very common sentiment in classical Athens and throughout the whole of Greece, that the loss of loved ones is the worst stroke of luck and a strong argument against the self-sufficiency of the virtuous man. While Aristotle sees that it is difficult to place the prospects for a man’s happiness upon chance rather than his excellence, so that it depends upon powers beyond his control, he nevertheless concedes that a man who is ugly or low born, who has no children, and even more a man who loses his children and friends to death is not likely to be happy (Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1099b16-17).

*tempore. Librum misi tibi quem pro omnibus haberes.*¹⁵

I have suffered much and very seriously, my dearest Marcus. And then afflicted with the most terrible incidents, I lost my wife, I lost my grandson in Germany, poor me! I lost our Decimanus. Even if I were made of iron, I could not write more at this time. I've sent to you a book, which you may have in place of everything.

In these last sentences, the many deaths that rush upon Fronto from all sides, and especially the death of his grandson, seem to overwhelm both his confidence in the practice of virtue, to which he has committed himself and in which he has spent all his life, and his trust in the providence of the cosmos. Being only so able to console himself as his words in this letter show, Fronto recognizes that this will hardly do as a consolation to Marcus Aurelius. In the concluding sentence, Fronto offers a book in place of further words of his own, and thus ends his letter.

In the first letter, Marcus Aurelius trusted the emperor with managing their shared sense of disturbance at the death of Decimanus, Fronto's grandson, indicating that he will be calm once he knows his master is safe. If the emperor was truly as dependent upon the affects and moods of his master as he represents himself to be, then this conclusion must have been poorly received by its addressee. Fronto does not show himself to be fully the master of his emotions, but rather puts himself forward as a man struggling with them. If

¹⁵ This paragraph from the manuscript A 195 C.R. Haines placed at the end of the second letter. C.R. Haines, *The Correspondence of Marcus Cornelius Fronto with Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, Lucius Verus, Antoninus Pius, and Various Friends*, Vol. II, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1920): 232-233. Hauler and Van den Hout, the editors of the Teubner edition which I otherwise follow, place them at the end of the fourth letter in this series. I have differed with van den Hout, by taking these lines where Haines placed them in the Loeb.

Fronto could have written to Marcus Aurelius a more satisfying letter, indicating how he had risen above this adversity in serene contemplation of the good that organizes all things in the cosmos, taking care of their ends, then Marcus Aurelius would have been consoled by Fronto's own performance of self-consolation. But in the end Fronto cannot perform this gesture with confidence, and so he introduces the compensation of literature, a book that summarize his sentiments, to forestall the disappointment and grief that Marcus Aurelius, whom Fronto's letter will necessarily disappoint, will inevitably feel.

Consolation and the Problem of Self-Consolation

Comparing this letter with the pseudonymous epistle to Xanthippe, one can perceive numerous differences between the two, but above all they demonstrate the difference between consolation and self-consolation. While Aeschines offers consolation to Xanthippe, Marcus Aurelius puts Fronto in a position where Fronto must console himself in order to console Marcus Aurelius, since the emperor trusts Fronto's greater mastery in this philosophical practice. These two consolatory letters differ, then, according to what Foucault would call the "ethical conditions" of the *consolator*, that is, the qualifications and ethical composure establishing the speaker as a legitimate and acceptable practitioner of consolatory discourse.¹⁶ Where Aeschines addresses Xanthippe from the position of a philosopher secure in his philosophical subjectivity, deftly

¹⁶ See below pp. 40-48.

employing examples and precepts that will carry weight with his *consolanda*, the bereaved wife of Socrates, Fronto represents the opposite position. He is no longer confident that his precepts will be of any use to the bereaved, and he trusts more in his loved ones' support for one another than his own philosophical discipline. Obligated to fulfill the duty to console by Marcus Aurelius' placing of demands upon him, Fronto strives to offer words that will match this expectation, even if they are not his own words. Thus he introduces literature not so much to fulfill the emperor's need for consolation, as to displace his own responsibility. In the end, Fronto fails to meet the basic ethical conditions that facilitate felicitous consolatory performance. He lacks precisely the self-mastery that Aeschines exemplifies with respect to Xanthippe, and so Fronto and Marcus Aurelius remain at best sympathetic to one another, neither able to bring secure counsel to their epistolary exchange.

This difficult exchange between Marcus Aurelius and Fronto exemplifies a more general problem within the consolatory tradition than the letter itself indicates. One should not, therefore, mistakenly assign the two correspondents' insufficiencies to a weakness of philosophical mettle, as if their response to these arguments were entirely singular. Between Marcus Aurelius' expectations and Fronto's response, a basic problem emerges around the attempt at self-consolation, a problem that does not arise in the less complex case of the consolation. The *consolatio* or the λόγος παραμυθητικός presupposes as two conditions of its discourse: first, the ethical self-sufficiency of the philosophical *consolator*, his adequacy to the problem of grief as a wise man who has

both mastered his emotions and therefore knows which arguments and examples to introduce in each circumstance; and, second, the ethical inadequacy of the *consolandus*, the recipient of consolatory discourse who has been so upset by his grief that he requires the philosopher's counsel. The self-consolation additionally requires as a third condition that the first two conditions must be met by the same person, so that the self-consoler is both subject and object of his consolation. The reflexive self-consolation, then, unlike its simpler counterpart in the *consolatio*, involves a contradiction, insofar as the philosopher performing this act must be self-sufficient enough that he is up to the challenge of speaking to grief, but he also must be so compromised in his ethical composure that he requires consolation. Just as Fronto concedes his exposure and dependence upon others, thus undermining his claim to the self-mastery that would enable his consolation, so must all self-consolations depend upon these apparently contradictory discursive conditions.

And yet, as I will argue in this dissertation, there is a discernible tradition of self-consolation in Roman consolatory literature, from its earliest exemplar in Cicero's *Consolatio*, written upon the death of his own daughter, through Seneca's consolatory writings, down to the very end of Roman philosophical literature in the *De consolatione Philosophiae* of Boethius. If it can be established that self-consolation is a pervasive strategy of consolation in the Roman tradition of consolation literature, then the question necessarily arises: how did these Roman philosophical authors work within these seemingly irreconcilable conditions, overcoming impossible obstacles to console themselves even as they seemed least able to do so?

Literature Review: Past Attempts at a General View

The problem of self-consolation that I have highlighted has not been a commonly treated theme in the scholarship on the *consolatio*. It seems that the problem of self-consolation has been lost in the noise. Since the *consolatio* treats so wide an array of topics, the investigation of specific modes of consolation has been treated as secondary, investigation to be undertaken only after the problem of genre has been resolved. There is good reason for this. Moving beyond the divergence of the two letters that I have discussed, one finds that the *consolatio* has been characterized by a vast array of discrepancies, not only in content, but also in form. They seem to have been written for pets, kings, the war-dead of Greek city-states, new-born children who died at birth, the blind, and others, and to have taken the form of poems, letters, orations, essays, and treatises.¹⁷ Over a century of scholarship has concerned itself above all with defining a genre that would hold together all the things that consolation seems to be. General investigations of the *consolatio* have been so occupied with the problem of genre that self-consolation has only ever appeared as a curious eccentricity of one or another author's attempt to meet the demands of a fixed, traditional genre. In recent years, several scholars have noted self-consolation as an important principle of Cicero's composition,

¹⁷ For the great variety in content, see Sister Mary Edmond Fern, *The Latin Consolatio as a Literary Type* (Saint Louis: The Abbey Press St. Meinrad, Ind., 1941). For the great variety of forms, see Carolus Buresch, *Consolationum a Graecis Romanisque scriptarum historia critica*, vol. 9, 1, *Leipziger Studien* (Leipzig, 1887).

Fronto's letter that I discussed above, Seneca's *dialogi*, and Boethius' consolation, but these studies have been piecemeal, usually isolated to a single work by a single author.¹⁸

Part I: 19th century

Attempts to define the consolation go back to the nineteenth century's philological tradition. This first phase of scholarship succeeded in establishing those texts that belong among the consolations, and suggested some potential points of origin for the tropes and typical arguments of the consolation. Van Heusde made the first meaningful analysis of consolation in his dissertation by identifying the commonplaces (such as exile, old age, and death), authors, and texts.¹⁹ His principal criterion seems to have been the presence or absence of consolatory *argumenta* in an author's text. Certain important connections between declamation, lamentation, and funerary oratory were advanced here, but not explored in a meaningful way. From this early period there is also Paul Albert's essay, *Les Consolateurs*, which first identifies the consolation as a distinct genre of literature.²⁰ Albert credits the philosophers and orators with having established a "somewhat modern genre...grouping according to a clever progression a series of philosophical or oratorical arguments designed to calm affliction, demonstrating to the

¹⁸ See pp. 53-57.

¹⁹ A.C. van Heusde, *Diatribes in locum philosophiae moralis qui est de consolatione apud Graecos* (Utrecht, 1840). Especially insightful still is the discussion of the sense of *aegritudo* and *solari* on pp. 119-127.

²⁰ Paul Albert, "Les consolateurs," *Variétés morales et littéraires* (1879). Albert gave some consideration to the poets who preceded even Democritus (van Heusde's earliest reference) in developing consolatory arguments. But he focuses his account on philosophical texts.

patient the necessity of death and the uselessness of grief.”²¹ Alfred Gercke also wrote of “consolations properly so called” and a *genus* of consolations.²² His brief essay brings together the approach of Albert with that of van Heusde: a classical *genre* of consolation, collecting commonplaces of all kinds, treats death above all, but secondarily any other calamity one may experience.

Constant Martha’s essay proceeds in much the same way as Albert, citing Homer and the poets as a homogeneous group who developed consolatory arguments somewhat unconsciously, and then going on to credit the philosophers especially with cultivating the practice of consolation.²³ It was Martha, though, who first articulated what will be a guiding problem for the study of consolation: in spite of the abundance of consolatory texts and the even greater abundance of texts featuring consolatory arguments, there is little in them that the average reader will find even remotely convincing.²⁴ The reader with a philosophical proclivity, too, is bound to face much that provokes doubt. His own attempt at an answer, that the Greeks and Romans were spiritually less complex than modern peoples, cannot carry much weight, for it relies too heavily on the obsolete principles of *Geisteswissenschaft* and the progressive narratives that attend this totalizing

²¹ *Ibid.*, 3. See also p. 14, where Socrates is described as the advent that ruptured the prior unity of Greek intellectual and moral life. The bulk of Albert’s analysis treats Seneca and Plutarch, so his inclusion of orators must be considered in this light. For Albert, consolation is above all philosophical.

²² Alfred Gercke, "De consolationibus," in *Tirocinium philologum sodalium Regii Seminarium Bonnensis*, ed. Hermann Usener (Berlin: 1883): 28.

²³ Constant Martha, "Les consolations dans l'antiquité," in *Études morales sur l'antiquité* (Paris: Librairie Hachette et C, 1883).

²⁴ *Ibid.*

speculation. Aside from the fact that it was possible among the ancients themselves to sometimes find consolation not so very convincing,²⁵ few today accept that human history can be described as so many stages of a spiritual progression.

Two of the most important early studies on consolation come from 1887. In that year, Édouard Boyer published his dissertation, *Les Consolations chez les Grecs et les Romains*, and Karl Buresch published his *Consolationum a Graecis Romanisque scriptarum historia critica*.²⁶ The apologetic thrust of Boyer's dissertation both obscures and enlightens the reading of these consolations. His text is concerned in the first part with identifying the main arguments of the principal authors of classical consolations; in the second part, he tries to show the ultimate inadequacy of these arguments. In this second part his tone is often unduly dismissive, and his tendency to hasten to judgment obstructs his capacity for level understanding. Even still, his criticism is not without substance. When he objects that it is "*brutale audace*" to confront a weeping mother with the consolation that her tears are useless, one cannot but agree that consolation that goes to this length is misplaced.²⁷ However, Boyer goes too far and misrepresents the pre-Christian practice of consolation by introducing Christ as the only legitimate consolation. This position leads him to conclude that only the comportment of the ancient philosophers toward grief is correct, but that the resources they developed to confront

²⁵ Cic. *ad Att.* XII.14.3

²⁶ Édouard Boyer, "Les consolations chez les Grecs et les Romains" (1887); Buresch, *historia critica*, 9, 1.

²⁷ Boyer, "Les consolations," 38.

grief were deficient; only Christianity can offer what philosophy had promised. The picture on which Boyer relies is too teleological, posing the Christians of late antiquity as the rightful inheritors of a confused pagan past. The unfortunate consequence of this misdirected judgment is that one loses sight of the consolations themselves by moving too quickly from what they lack to what would later compensate for their alleged deficiencies. It is more rewarding to consider that these texts may have been unconvincing to the ancient readers as well, that their intentions may not have been to persuade in so straightforward a manner, to ask, why else might the texts have been written, if they did not offer immediately convincing arguments? Answering these questions only remains possible to the extent that one sets aside, at least temporarily, the search for a suitable replacement for consolation's seemingly inadequate arguments. Still one may take a lesson from this research, comparable to that which Martha had to teach: it is an unresolved problem that these consolations seem unconvincing to modern readers, and perhaps to ancient ones as well.

Buresch proceeded with much greater reserve than Boyer, and in so doing left a more useful piece of scholarship. His *historia critica* is the only nineteenth-century study that still regularly appears in the bibliographies of current scholarship. Although some of his specific conclusions are now outdated, generally it is fair to say that this is still the most comprehensive analysis of the Greek and Roman consolations. What Buresch accomplished here was an assembly of all surviving witnesses to the practice of the *consolatio mortis* in antiquity, from the “*initia incrementa*” of this “*species*” to its “*flos*

exitus,” its “sprouted flower;” a second volume—promised but never realized—would have treated the consolation tradition’s arguments, topics, and its “*indoles et natura*,” basically its “natural disposition.”²⁸ In this way, he also established the dates and authorship for most of these texts, and he worked out the source criticism appropriate to each. Buresch’s *historia* is a remarkable achievement of classical German philology, both at the level of theory and practice. His work is characterized by careful attention to the precise empirical data, what exactly survives and what we can truly determine with respect to the specific cases; just as much, the genetic theory of textual development upon which he relies acted as a powerful principle of organization for specific instances of this genre. While to some extent the renovation of classical scholarship in the wake of so-called French theory’s arrival has undermined confidence in this distinguished tradition of scholarship, it is perhaps not always recognized how far contemporary classicists remain dependent upon the conclusions reached during the period of that method’s dominance. In most cases, it is still basically Buresch’s general picture that contemporary scholars rely upon for the general orientation of their work.

In all, one finds in the early scholarship two general approaches. There is an approach that one may associate with Germanic scholarship (van Heusde, Gercke, and Buresch) that aimed to establish the genetic relationships between texts, arguments, and

²⁸ Buresch, *historia critica*, 9, 1: 6. Buresch died before he was able to achieve this task. He did, however, manage to comment on the so-called consolatory inscriptions: Carolus Buresch, "Die griechische Trostbeschlüsse," *Rheinisches Museum, Neue Folge* 46 (1894).

topoi in order to describe through the analysis of specific instances the development of a genre of consolation. Also from this tradition, a certain privileging of the *consolatio mortis* as the exemplary mode of consolation is established, this over consolations for exile, blindness, old age, and other such calamities that Cicero's testimony introduces.²⁹

Third and finally, this tradition succeeded in identifying nearly all of the texts that may be considered consolatory. On the other hand, there is a tradition of French scholarship (Albert, Martha, and Boyer) that allowed itself the space to offer criticism of the classical consolations. While this proclivity for criticism often limits the analyses in these texts, so that they are too bound to their historical conditions for contemporary use, the consequences of their critique, when read for provocative questions rather than hasty answers, provides a different manner of guidance from the German tradition's more purely scientific approach.

Part II: Early 20th century

The next phase of scholarship includes the first English language scholarship on consolation. It is surprising that no attempt to provide a general account of Greek and Latin consolation has ever been written in English. As far as I have been able to discover, Sister Mary Evaristus, by writing her dissertation at Catholic University in 1917, made

²⁹ Cic. *Tusc.* III.81.

the first attempt to work on the surviving Greek material,³⁰ and Sister Mary Edmond Fern published the first book on the Latin sources.³¹ Evaristus relies heavily on Buresch, and conceives her project as taking up that task which Buresch did not live to accomplish: “the gathering together and arranging of the individual arguments and topics of Consolation which ancients have used.”³² Evaristus’s work could not have matched the weight of Buresch’s *historia critica*, since she eschewed any “philosophical standpoint”—the very synthesis of theoretical and practical inquiry that gave Buresch’s commentary its potency. The isolation of these topics and arguments, separated from their literary context without any meaningful theoretical analysis compensating for their removal, renders this work largely insignificant for scholarship today.

Since Charles Favez focused on the Christian practice of consolation and I am concerned with philosophical consolations, his studies fall without the scope of my investigation; still, mention of his work is in order.³³ Favez followed up on details found in Gercke and Buresch, in order to isolate a Christian consolatory tradition that runs parallel to the philosophical one that I am pursuing.³⁴ His work also appears to have

³⁰ Sister Mary Evaristus, M.A., "The Consolations of Death in Ancient Greek Literature" (Catholic University of America, 1917).

³¹ Fern, *The Latin Consolatio*.

³² Evaristus, "The Consolations of Death," 9.

³³ Charles Favez, *La Consolation Latine Chrétienne* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin., 1937).

³⁴ Treating the Christian sources as well as the classical philosophical ones would be a vast undertaking. I am restricting my attention to the philosophical texts with the understanding that the discourse that I analyze here cannot ultimately be isolated from the field of cultural struggle in which Christian consolation also had a part. Beyond Favez, the following scholarship illuminates Christian consolation: Sister Mary Melchior Beyenka, *Consolation in Saint Augustine* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1950); Peter von Moos, *Consolatio: Studien zur mittellateinischen Trostliteratur über den Tod und*

influenced a number of scholars—Fern, to be treated immediately below, for one—who devoted their attention to what Favez called “la tradition païenne.” His investigation aimed to show that the Church Fathers whom he discussed, such as Ambrose, Jerome, and Cyprian, did not thoughtlessly take over the consolation tradition from the Greek and Roman philosophers; rather, they attempted to reform the genre for their own purposes.³⁵ His thesis bound him to some discussion of what was there before this work of reformation, so the first part of his study analyzes the dependence of the Church Fathers on the form, ideas, citations, examples, *praecepta*, and *solacia* of the Greek and Roman philosophers. Favez agrees with Martha, though, that the advent of Christianity fundamentally alters the meaning of consolation, so that even if Christian consolatory texts use the same words as their philosophical predecessors, the meaning is fundamentally different in the former case than it was in the latter. Where Buresch had seen a natural process in the growth of a genre from its first germinal elements to its mature form, Favez insists upon a fundamental difference between two uses of

zum Problem der christlicher Trauer, 4 vols., Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften (München: W. Fink, 1971-72); Robert Clark Gregg, "Consolation Philosophy: Greek and Christian *Paideia* in Basil and the Two Gregories" (University of Pennsylvania, 1974); Donelson, *Pseudepigraphy and Ethical Argument in the Pastoral Epistles*; Fiore, *The Function of Personal Example in the Socratic and Pastoral Epistles*; J.H.D. Scourfield, *Consoling Heliodorus: a commentary on Jerome, Letter 60* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Paul A. Holloway, *Consolation in Philippians: Philosophical Sources and Rhetorical Strategy*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

³⁵ Favez, *La Consolation Latine Chrétienne*: 38.

consolation. The recognition of this antagonism, a primary heterogeneity in different practices of consolation, remains the most important legacy of Favez's work.

While Evaristus reserved her attention for Greek consolation, Fern's *The Latin Consolatio as a Literary Type*, as the title indicates, restricts its focus to Latin consolation literature, from Cicero to Statius. Fern is especially concerned to identify the *consolatio* as a "type" of literature, akin to the epic, comedy, or tragedy, a specific literary genre in which Roman authors might try their talents.³⁶ Gavigan's short review identified the principle problem with this book: there is something dubious in classifying so many texts as consolations, when they have little in common other than their taking someone having died as their topic.³⁷ The range of texts that Fern discusses is truly remarkably diverse, and survey of the table of contents alone shows the reader not only letters, but the consolations of Seneca, sepulchral inscriptions, elegy, ode, *laudatio funebris*, and *epicedion*. It is unsurprising, then, that the "structure, or conventional form" that Fern extracts from her texts is general to the point of near vacuity. She describes it as featuring an introduction, in which the affliction and its cure are announced, a consolation proper, treating first the person afflicted and then the cause of his or her affliction, and finally a

³⁶ Fern's criteria for belonging to a literary type or form—she uses these terms interchangeably—are 1) "similar[ity] in subject matter" and 2) shared "conventions in method of presentation." She goes on to explain that though a pre-existent genre restricted the creative use of consolation, still there was room for them to explore somewhat freely within these confines. Fern, *The Latin Consolatio*: 4, 7.

³⁷ John J. Gavigan, "The Consolatio as a Literary Type (Book Review)," *The Classical Bulletin* 19 (Jan 1, 1942).

conclusion that closes the work.³⁸ What one finds here, then, aside from much analysis of individual texts that is good enough in its own right, is a deficiency in theoretical speculation that fails to reach the unity of theory and practice that Buresch had achieved.

In this second phase, then, there is now a recognizable scholarly conversation. Buresch stands as the clear authority on classical consolation, and Evaristus, Favez, and Fern all rely heavily on his achievement. Other important nineteenth-century voices helped Favez to see beyond Buresch's theoretical model though, and because of this independence he made the most important contribution to the study of consolation in this early period. I note, finally, the increasing tendency to think of the consolation as a genre. If only in most cases nineteenth-century scholars had treated the topics of consolation as proper to a well-defined genre of consolation, in the twentieth century it is taken for granted that the consolation was obviously a genre of ancient literature, and both Favez and Fern consider the definition of the consolation's form to be the most important task.³⁹

Part III: Later 20th century

In 1958, Rudolf Kassel published his *Habilitationschrift*, which stands next to Buresch's *historia critica* as the second most important work of scholarship on

³⁸ She also mentions several "details" that became regular, according to her conception: the declaration that one must address a vice with rational discourse before it becomes deeply rooted, and the rhetorical principle that examples should follow precepts. Fern, *The Latin Consolatio*: 7.

³⁹ Favez, *La Consolation Latine Chrétienne*: 39-46, 79-83. See also the preceding footnote.

consolation.⁴⁰ His *Untersuchungen zur Griechischen und Römischen Konsolationsliteratur*, cited in the current scholarly literature probably more than any other work, aimed for the same task as Evaristus' dissertation, which text seems to have been unknown to Kassel. That is, he aimed to take up the task left incomplete by Buresch's untimely death, to "lay out the groundwork for further research, contribute to the clarification of the material," and describe the "genetic and motivic connections more clearly."⁴¹ In other words, unlike Evaristus, Kassel returned to Buresch's work and adopted his theoretical conception of textual relations as well, so that the results Kassel discovers have greater organization and force than those presented topically in Evaristus's dissertation. In the first part of his publication, Kassel examines in six headings the *Ursprungsbereiche*, the "areas of origination," and the early influences on the fully developed consolation; he treats the fully developed consolation in the second part by discussing two exemplary texts: the *Consolatio ad Apollonium* and Sulpicius Rufus' famous consolatory epistle to Cicero (*Fam.* 4.5). Even in this organization one can see how Kassel's genetic theory determines the relations among texts. These "origins" located in 1) the Sophistic movement, 2) Cynicism, 3) the Stoa, 4) Epicureanism, 5) the Academy, *Peripatos*, and Neopythagoreanism of the fourth century B.C.E., and 6) the rhetorical practice of funeral oratory are conceived to have come to culmination in these

⁴⁰ Rudolf Kassel, *Untersuchungen zur Griechischen und Römischen Konsolationsliteratur* (München: C.H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1958). See also Coccia's review: Michele Coccia, "R. Kassel, *Untersuchungen zur griechischen und römischen Konsolationsliteratur*," *Rivista di cultura classica e medioevale* 1, no. 1 (gennaio/aprile 1959).

⁴¹ Kassel, *Untersuchungen zur Konsolationsliteratur*: 8.

two high achievements of Greek and Roman literature. As I said above, it is precisely such a developmental account of a unified *consolatio* genre that I call into question.

José Esteve-Ferriol, who concerned himself exclusively with the poetic texts of consolation, suggested one reason to reject such accounts.⁴² His work contributed to the study of consolation by drawing a clear separation between the traditions of consolation found in texts that he characterizes as rhetorical and the poetic consolation. He showed that the Roman authors of poetic consolatory texts imitated not the philosophers and orators, but rather the Greek poets. Esteve-Ferriol's work, then, like Charles Favez's before him, draws another line separating the philosophers not only from the Church Fathers, but also from the poets. It is at this point that the unity of a consolation genre, such as that described by Fern in the most general terms or that anticipated in the speculative models of Buresch and Kassel, begins to unravel.

Horst-Theodor Johann's structural and source-critical analysis of the philosophical *consolatio mortis*, following the suggestion of Buresch against Kassel's better judgment, led back the Roman period consolations to Crantor of Soli's famous

⁴² José Esteve-Ferriol, "Die Trauer- und Trostgedichte in der römischen Literatur" (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität zu München, 1962). Among these the most well known is the *Consolatio ad Liviam* on the death of Drusus included in Ovid's corpus, though probably written by a poet living under the reign of Tiberius. On this poem, see Henk Schoonhoven, ed. *The Pseudo-Ovidian ad Liviam and De morte Drusi (Consolatio ad Liviam, Epicedium Drusi): A Critical Text with introduction and commentary* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1992); with bibliography for poetic consolation on pp. vii-xiv; Jacqueline Amat, ed. *Consolation à Livie; Élégies à Mécène; Bucoliques d'Einsiedeln* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1997).

letter Περί πένθους.⁴³ Johann's work is divided into three parts. In the first, he examines the Stoic theory of the passions developed by Chrysippus; for it was against his theory of ἀπάθεια (impassivity to emotional affection) that Crantor first developed his own position, μετριοπάθεια (moderated exposure to emotional movement), as the properly human response to emotional movement. It is true that the importance of μετριοπάθεια for the consolatory tradition cannot be overstated, but Johann concludes that the reception of Crantor's ethical position, and the literary form he created to disseminate it, established the philosophical *consolatio mortis* as a fixed genre. The second section identifies all of the commonplaces of the Roman period consolation tradition, with the aim of tracking their genetic relations back to Crantor's text. Johann reconstructs Crantor's text in the third section, employing the findings of his second section to fill out the fragmentary remains of Crantor's letter. An incisive review by Karlhans Abel identified the reasons why Johann's reconstruction did not work.⁴⁴ What is most important for my analysis, though, is that Abel and Johann agree on the most important point: whether or not it was Crantor who established the *consolatio mortis* as such, this literature is best understood as constituting a genre.

Finally, I should mention from this period the contributions of several medievalists working on consolation, who treated classical consolation as background to

⁴³ Horst-Theodor Johann, *Trauer und Trost: Eine quellen- und strukturanalytische Untersuchungen der philosophischen Trostschriften über den Tod* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1968).

⁴⁴ Karlhans Abel, "Trauer und Trost. Eine quellen- und strukturanalytische Untersuchungen der philosophischen Trostschriften über den Tod by Horst-Theodor Johann," *Gnomon* 42, no. 3 (Jun., 1970).

their own investigations. Neil C. Hultin devoted a chapter of his dissertation on the development of the *consolatio mortis* through the medieval period to classical consolations.⁴⁵ There is little here that is novel, though, and the work mostly rehearses the findings of prior scholarship with the aim of highlighting those topics and venues of consolation that had an influence on medieval authors. Robert C. Gregg's dissertation also gave a chapter to the classical origins of consolation in the Cappadocian Fathers.⁴⁶ His presentation of consolation also relies upon conventional presentations of the consolation "genre." What he adds to the scholarship is not at all new at the conceptual level, but by focusing upon the Greek Fathers his contribution clarifies certain sources that Favez and Beyenka had neglected in their studies.⁴⁷ Unfortunately, Peter van Moos' monumental study in four volumes of the medieval Latin consolatory texts⁴⁸—an otherwise great achievement of profound erudition—only devoted a few introductory pages to classical precedents.⁴⁹ He did, however, make the following observation with respect to the scholarship, which ought to be noted:

Die antike *consolatio*, deren Strukturen durch mehrere philologische Arbeiten zu umschreiben gesucht worden sind, könnte eine feste Grundlage für die geplante Entwicklungsgeschichte bilden und zuversichtlich nach dem Fortwirken des Genus durch die Jahrhunderte fragen lassen. Trotz neuerer Forschungen scheint aber die Lage keineswegs so einfach, dass von einem klar umrissenen,

⁴⁵ Neil C. Hultin, "The Rhetoric of Consolation: Studies in the Development of the *Consolatio Mortis*" (Johns Hopkins University, 1965), 81-156.

⁴⁶ Gregg, "Consolation Philosophy."

⁴⁷ For Favez, see the previous section; Sister Mary Melchior Beyenka treated various consolatory topics in Augustine's writings: Beyenka, *Consolation in Saint Augustine*.

⁴⁸ Moos, *Consolatio*.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

eindeutigen oder gar normativen Urtyp gesprochen werden dürfte. Es hat vielmehr verschiedene rhetorische, poetische, philosophische Traditionen gegeben, deren gegenseitiges Verhältnis noch als kontrovers zu gelten hat. Wie es dem Nichtfachmann ansteht, soll dazu keine Entscheidung getroffen, sondern einzig auf Grund der letzten Ergebnisse referiert werden.

Von Moos was the first to express great reservation about the attempts to group the heterogeneous classical texts that scholars have classified as consolations into an all-encompassing genre. At this point, then, the synthesis that Buresch inaugurated and Kassel achieved has been rejected, though no argument has worked to deconstruct it.

Part IV: 21st century

Most current scholarship on consolation appears in articles or chapters focusing on specific authors and their use of consolation in specific texts. This current scholarship is best treated in the individual chapters, since they restrict their inquiry to those specific texts. Aside from this though, no major synthesis has been accepted since Kassel's, and he still tends to be cited as the authority on consolation. There are, however, a few scholars who have arrived at a more general view.

In German scholarship, Bernhard Zimmermann's chapter on consolation surveys the whole field of consolatory texts.⁵⁰ What is most peculiar in this article is the analogy

⁵⁰ This chapter appears in two places without any differences, save the title: Bernhard Zimmermann, "Philosophie als Lebenshilfe: Die Griechisch-Römische Consolationsliteratur," *Lexis: Poetica, retorica e comunicazione nella tradizione classica* 26 (2008); Bernhard Zimmermann, "Philosophie als Psychotherapie : die griechisch-römische Consolationsliteratur," in *Stoizismus in der europäischen Philosophie, Literatur, Kunst und Politik* (Berlin ; New York: de Gruyter, 2008).

that governs Zimmerman's conception of consolation, if not his presentation. That is, if his presentation of the development of consolation does not differ in any meaningful way from his nineteenth-century predecessors, he nevertheless conceives of consolation somewhat differently by introducing the guiding analogy of ancient *Lebenshilfe* or *Psychotherapie*. It is hard to understand why this new perspective did not result in a novel approach to the material, but perhaps the scale of Zimmermann's argument—he restricts himself to an article length study—and the range of his references (from Homer to Boethius) has something to do with this.

Among the Spanish scholarship on consolation that has emerged in the last decade, Fernando Lillo Redonet's book is the only work that makes a general statement on the practice of consolation in antiquity.⁵¹ While his analysis only deals with Latin material, by focusing upon the social practice of declamation and oratory and the theoretical analysis devoted to these practices, Redonet's work pushes beyond the limits of Buresch and Kassel's approaches. That is, where each of them had had great success they had focused upon the social context in which the consolation came into existence. Redonet does the same, but arrives at the profoundly different conclusion that there was no proper genre of consolation in antiquity; there was instead, he holds, a task of consolation that fell to the orator among his *officia*, and there were rules for how best he

⁵¹ F. Lillo Redonet, *Palabras contra el dolor. La consolación filosófica latina de Cicerón a Frontón* (Madrid: Ediciones Clásicas, 2001). For representative Spanish scholarship, see also the essays collected in Concepción Alonso del Real, ed. *Consolatio: Nueve Estudios* (Pamplona: EUNSA, 2001).

should go about this task. Redonet then argues for a definition of genre as the co-presence of determining elements in a text at five levels: 1) at the level of enunciation, there must be a consoler who transmits the consolation in writing or in person; 2) at the level of destination, the addressee has to be the one afflicted with grief, who would benefit from the consoler's text or utterance; 3) at the level of function, the primary task that the text fulfills must be the providing of counsel, although there may be secondary functions; 4) certain tropes and topics may be identified as reoccurring at a semantic level, though they need not always appear; and 5) at a formal level, the philosophical consolation also employs letters and treatises, setting aside the oration. By approaching the problem of genre in this way, Redonet differentiates the consolation from the *laudatio funebris*, *epicedium*, *lamentatio*, *meditatio*, and sepulchral epigram, and goes on to define a corpus of Latin consolatory texts from Cicero to Fronto. Certainly this marks a meaningful improvement upon the work of Redonet's predecessors. As a model for defining consolation at a general level, one could bring greater precision to the categories that Redonet establishes, but what he has done moves in the right direction.

Michael Fournier's dissertation eschews genre-based accounts of consolation to argue for a novel approach to the three major Latin authors of consolation. His work depends upon the analyses of Pierre Hadot and André-Jean Voelke, who focus upon the practical way of life that manifests in the ancient literary texts, but he expresses reservations that their work passes too quickly from the "composition of the texts"—the

problem in which Fournier takes an interest—to the “practices of the various schools.”⁵² Fournier instead focuses upon the Platonism that, as he argues, one may find in Cicero’s *Tusculanae Disputationes*, Seneca’s *Ad Marciam*, and Boethius’ *De consolatione Philosophiae*. In this way, he is developing the suggestion of Jean Hani, that the consolations may be read as “movement of the soul,” that is, as a structured argument embedded in a text that affects the soul of the reader rather than a primarily verbal social exchange represented in a text. By moving away from genre studies to approach consolatory arguments through their effects upon the reader, Fournier developed a reading of these consolations that escaped the confines of a narrowly conceived development of form. However, he does still see a progression at the level of content, since he describes Boethius’ *Consolation* as the “culmination of a tradition” of Latin consolation. To this extent, his narrow focus upon three allegedly Platonic texts—one of which, the *Tusculan Disputations*, is at least not obviously a consolation—has obscured the surviving tradition. He also underestimates the degree to which the non-rational literary devices each author employs supports the passage to a rational harmonization of the soul in each of these cases, so that his approach is closer to Hadot and Voelke than he seems to realize. In any case, by focusing upon the spiritual exercise each text should perform, his contribution is both novel and a meaningful advance in the understanding of consolation beyond what his predecessors had achieved.

⁵² Michael Christopher Fournier, "Cicero, Seneca and Boethius on Consolation" (Boston College, 2007).

David Konstan should also be singled out for a chapter on grief that briefly recounts the tradition of consolation literature.⁵³ Konstan's focus was not on consolation *per se*, but rather, in accordance with cognitive psychology and philosophy of mind's agreement that there is an important social and cognitive element determining emotional reactions, he gives his attention to the distinctiveness of ancient conceptions of the relationship between reason and the emotions.⁵⁴ While the contribution that Konstan made to the study of the consolation was thus limited, this work on the emotions nevertheless gave impetus to the scholarship of Han Baltussen, whose recent collection of conference papers frames consolation within this current interest in ancient emotions.⁵⁵

⁵³ David Konstan, "Grief," in *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks: Studies in Aristotle and Classical Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

⁵⁴ The scholarship on emotion and ancient philosophy is simply flourishing. Konstan is probably the leading scholar in this area, but other important works include: William W. Fortenbaugh, *Aristotle on Emotion: A Contribution to Philosophical Psychology, Rhetoric, Poetics, Politics, and Ethics*, 2nd ed. (London: Duckworth, 2002); Douglas L. Cairns, *AIDŌS: The Psychology and Ethics of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greek Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Martha Craven Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Carlin Bartin, *The Sorrows of the Ancient Romans: The Gladiator and the Monster* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Susanna Morton Braund and Christopher Gill, eds., *The Passions in Roman Thought and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Julia Sihlova and Troels Engberg-Pedersen, eds., *The Emotions in Hellenistic Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998); John Cooper, *Reason and Emotion: Essays on Ancient Moral Psychology and Ethical Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Carlin Bartin, *Roman Honor: The Fire in the Bones* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); William V. Harris, *Restraining Rage: The Ideology of Anger Control in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Margaret R. Graver, ed. *Cicero on the Emotions: Tusculan Disputations 3 and 4* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Susanna Morton Braund and Glenn W. Most, eds., *Ancient Anger: Perspectives from Homer to Galen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Simo Knuutila, *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Peter Toohey, *Melancholy, Love, and Time: Boundaries of Self in Ancient Literature* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004); Margaret R. Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

⁵⁵ Han Baltussen, ed. *Greek and Roman Consolations: Eight Studies of a Tradition and its Afterlife* (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2013). See also my review, Clifford A. Robinson, "Han Baltussen

Though Baltussen has not yet made any general argument supporting this view,⁵⁶ the introduction to his collection indicates how he would proceed. The major question driving this scholarship is whether the emotions make up a stable set of natural, universally human responses to given stimuli, or they are radically contingent, determined completely by the social circumstances in which humans are situated. Baltussen holds that “grief...can be regarded as an exceptional case, because death *is* a constant in human life and responses to grief occur in all humans and all cultures.”⁵⁷ One may doubt the weak behaviorism of this position, as well as the degree to which the natural necessity of death requires a specific response. The ancient sources themselves seem to betray a great variety of responses to death, and if grief seems to be among them, so too does joy, apathy, and bitterly sardonic jeering.⁵⁸ Of course, the natural necessity of death does pose a continuity in which all human cultures have their share, but it is simply too quick to leap from that to a natural and universal experience of grief.

A more flexible account is found in the same volume.⁵⁹ J.H.D. Scourfield argues for a “generic model” that bases its inclusiveness upon neither the form nor the content of

(ed.), *Greek and Roman Consolations: Eight Studies of a Tradition and its Afterlife*. Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2013. Pp. xxv, 200. ISBN 9781905125562. \$100.00." (Bryn Mawr Classical Review, October 2013). <http://bmcbr.brynmawr.edu/2013/2013-10-27.html>

⁵⁶ His major statement on this area is consistently listed as forthcoming.

⁵⁷ Baltussen, *Greek and Roman Consolations*, xviii.

⁵⁸ Think of Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*, for example.

⁵⁹ J.H.D. Scourfield, "Towards a Genre of Consolation," in *Greek and Roman Consolations: Eight Studies of a Tradition and its Afterlife*, ed. Han Baltussen (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2013).

the consolatory corpus. Emphasizing especially the plurality of textual forms, from letters to poems, from funeral oratory to more essayistic moral epistles, too long to be read quite simply as letters, he convincingly shows that even Cairns' "genres of content" will not do, since consolations may treat so many different misfortunes, including blindness, old age, death, and exile, and there is no closed set of topics that necessarily occur.⁶⁰ This negative work undermines any attempt to create a closed field of texts properly belonging to the consolation genre, so that Scourfield has expressed a compelling argument for the position first announced by von Moos.⁶¹ One may only see this as a complete reversal of the work of Buresch and Kassel, which had once been regarded as definitive. The positive side of Scourfield's work emphasizes that consolation is a social practice, and that analysis of each consolatory text must begin from the text's apparent social function. The private letters of Cicero, for example, cannot be treated in the same manner as the public spectacle of a funeral oration. Treatises such as the *Tusculanae Disputationes* should be regarded as "metaconsolatory," in the sense that they offer theoretical reflection upon the passions and their value, speculation that facilitates consolation, rather than consolation proper. This open field, Scourfield contends, will best advance scholarly work by preventing any premature closure of the texts that count. What does not appear in this essay is what Scourfield shares with Baltussen: universalism. Scourfield had advanced his first thoughts on the Greco-Roman consolation tradition in

⁶⁰ Ibid., 19.

⁶¹ See the block quote on p. 31-32.

the introduction to his commentary on Jerome's *Letter 60* to Heliodorus.⁶² In this work, Scourfield discusses the Christian consolation tradition at length, but he also gives seven pages to their predecessors.⁶³ He situates the classical consolation between two poles: on the one hand, he sees a universal impulse in human nature that reaches out to those grieving in order to offer them comfort, holding that it is just as universal to do so in words; on the other, he claims that the plurality of social practices, allegiances, and differences in judgment among not just poets and orators but also among different philosophical schools makes the unity of a genre of consolation a highly unlikely prospect. This full view then presupposes a fundamental and universal relationship with death and the need for consolation but mediates this through a vast multiplicity of social practices. The task is to understand how the work of mourning reaches bottom in each case, how each among such a plurality of texts mediates inevitably occurring emotions that require some form of address.

On Method: Discourse Analysis I and II

From this review of the scholarship on consolation, one can see that the principle aim of most scholarship on the consolation through the end of the twentieth century has been to classify or categorize it, to provide a generic model by which consolations may be identified and separated from the other surviving classical texts. In the most recent

⁶² Scourfield, "Introduction."

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 15-22.

moment, the scholarship has come under pressure from several directions to change its emphases. While Redonet and Scourfield have tried in different ways to renew the concept of genre itself, preferring not to abandon the concept entirely, Konstan and Baltussen have chosen to turn to new questions concerning the role consolation plays with respect to the emotions. Zimmermann has suggested a new analogy by which consolation may be understood, so that his conception of consolation as “psychotherapy” resembles Baltussen and Scourfield’s insistence that consolation be conceived primarily as a social practice. Similarly, Fournier analyzes the way in which consolation accomplishes movements of the soul, emphasizing the very activity of reading these texts. All of this indicates an opening of the field, so that the problem of genre has receded and now no longer seems to be the most pressing question. Still, it seems that some paradigm is required in order to map out the field, as Scourfield’s attempt to displace the concept of genre with a “generic model” shows.

Discourse Analysis I: Foucault on Subjectivation and Forms of Life

I suggest that a paradigm lies ready to hand in Michel Foucault’s method of discourse analysis. Discourse analysis attends to a variety of questions different from those with which traditional genre-based approaches to texts are concerned, such as: what was possible, or what was impossible, to say within a discursive formation? What power relations determine encounters between subjects? What conditions—ethical, contextual, or of whatever kind—must be fulfilled in order to support a practice of discourse?

Furthermore, what were the conditions that established the very existence of this discourse, and what among the heterogeneous origins of this discourse had to be suppressed or destroyed in order for this discourse to take shape? To what extent could that discourse be otherwise, how far could it go toward its own transformation without destroying itself entirely? Questions such as these were the ferment of Foucault's work of the seventies, and they are perhaps best captured as a theoretical program in the *Archaeology of Knowledge*.⁶⁴ Foucault's late work, both the volumes of *The History of Sexuality* and his lectures at the Collège de France, developed the achievements of the 1970s in new directions through a rewarding encounter with ancient philosophical texts. Though *The History of Sexuality* is well known within Classical Studies as an important and controversial statement on ancient Greek and Roman sexuality, Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France from 1982 until 1984 are less well known.⁶⁵ In them, he treated above all the problem of subject formation by analyzing the ethical practices that supported the philosophical discursive practice of *παρορησία*, "truth-telling." It is in these late works, the works that he did not recompose into published books, but left as the raw

⁶⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

⁶⁵ That these lectures have only now become available in mass-market publication is bound to change the scholarly reception of Foucault's late work, formerly most associated with *The History of Sexuality*. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, Inc., 1978); Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: Volume 2 of The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, Inc., 1985); Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self: Volume 3 of The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, Inc., 1986). For a helpful review of the early reception of Foucault's work in Classics, see David H. J. Larmour, Paul Allen Miller, and Charles Platter, "Situating *The History of Sexuality*," in *Rethinking Sexuality: Foucault and Classical Antiquity*, ed. David H. J. Larmour, Paul Allen Miller, and Charles Platter (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998): 22-33.

material of his lectures, that one finds most of the resources necessary for a reading of consolation based in Foucault's methods.

Though discussion of the practice of *parrhēsia* first appears in Foucault's writings in the context of his analysis of the relationship between subjectivity and truth, the topic of Foucault's 1981-82 lectures, the term becomes the main theme of his investigations only in the next year.⁶⁶ In these lectures from 1982-83, Foucault highlights the transformation of "parrhesiastic discourse" from its beginnings in the politics of the Athenian democracy to its philosophical application at the "margins of the political field" as a mode of ethical counsel or advice to tyrants and dictators.⁶⁷ The major theoretical development of this year's lectures comes as a rethinking of the agency of subjects with respect to discourse. Earlier work, such as *Discipline and Punish*, has been criticized as delivering over subjectivity to a total determination at the level of discourse by forces of domination that penetrate the passive subject's every thought.⁶⁸ In the ancient philosophers, though, Foucault seems to have found not the total determination of subjects by powers greater than themselves, but rather a set of three interlocking "axes"

⁶⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1982-1983*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

⁶⁷ Foucault treats the democratic mode of *parrhēsia* at *ibid.*, 41-186. He discusses the philosophical discourse at *ibid.*, 187-374.

⁶⁸ The change of direction is marked by the eight years of silence that separate the publication of Volume 1 of *The History of Sexuality* from the later volumes. In 1980, starting from a lecture course on Christian confession and *Oedipus Rex*, a new trajectory of research emerges that occupied Foucault until he died in 1984. Much of this history is recounted in Frédéric Gros et al., *Foucault et la philosophie antique*, Collection "Philosophie en cours" (Paris: Kime, 2003).

in which power, subjects, and discourse are coordinated.⁶⁹ Foucault defines his method as the “analysis of forms of veridiction” in terms of “procedures and techniques of governmentality” that constitute “the modalities and techniques of the relation to self” or “the history of the pragmatics of the subject.”⁷⁰ Said more plainly, in Foucault’s last works, he still begins from an analysis of discursive formations, but he gives special attention to discourse that claims to have a privileged or exclusive claim on articulation of the truth. He is furthermore alert to the ethical practices and the modes of self-relation that enable a subject to articulate professedly true discourse, so that discourse is not the total and exhaustive determinant of a “bracketed” subjectivity, as Agamben would say of Foucault’s earlier work,⁷¹ but rather discourse and subjectivity must be studied in their correlation with one another. The third term of his analysis, “the government of self and others,” indicates that the particular relation to self that Foucault is interested to study, the mode of self-relation or subjectivity of philosophers, insofar as they are practitioners of parrhesiastic discourse, from the Socratic movement down to the end of antiquity, seems to proceed according to a model of self-government.⁷² This aspiration towards self-government is then conceived in the sources as the condition for the possibility of

⁶⁹ The course context is helpful for details about the importance of Foucault's new theoretical position. Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*: 377-91.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

⁷¹ Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz : the Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1999): 145-46.

⁷² Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*: 325-38.

governing others. So, the true discourse of the philosophers enables them to practice the ethics that gives them a privilege to rule over others.

It is in terms of these three axes, then, that Foucault pursues his genealogical investigation of practices of *parrhēsia*. In the last two years' lectures, Foucault argues that in the Platonic dialogues one can perceive that Socrates and his followers transformed the democratic, political practice of *parrhēsia* into an ethical discipline, even into a way of life. Prior to the Socratic movement, Foucault claims, *parrhēsia* was a characteristically democratic Athenian practice of speaking. Developing a reading of Euripides' *Ion* in order to define *parrhēsia* and democratic discourse against the truth articulated through an oracle's pronouncements, Foucault shows that *parrhēsia* was originally the citizen's right and privilege to speak before the assembly, the possession of the privilege and obligation to stand before the community, employ one's speech at the risk of one's reputation and his safety, and defend a position on a crisis of the moment.⁷³ One can easily see how the discursive practice of *parrhēsia* requires certain subjective conditions, such as citizenship, ethnic belonging to the Athenian city-state, and that these subjective conditions situate the democratic citizen who employs *parrhēsia* as an active participant in the common project of democratic government. In the next year's lectures, Foucault's last lectures at the Collège de France, Foucault argues that this democratic practice underwent a "Platonic reversal" in the fourth century, so that the Platonic

⁷³ Ibid., 75-145.

dialogues stage a redefinition of *parrhēsia* as the bold and courageous address of true discourse not to the public assembly, but rather to the *psychē* of the tyrant.⁷⁴ Foucault's reading of the fifth, seventh, and eighth Platonic letters established in the 1982-83 lectures this new, philosophical practice of *parrhēsia* in its difference from the democratic discourse,⁷⁵ but it is not until Foucault comes to Socrates in the 1983-84 lectures that he identifies the figure from whom this new mode of discourse developed. In his reading of Plato's *Apology of Socrates*, Foucault shows that Socrates explicitly rejects democratic *parrhēsia* as not simply a necessary risk of his life on behalf of the truth, but as the waste of his life in the virtual certainty of death.⁷⁶ Instead, Socrates chooses to live not for fear of death, but for the sake of his mission. Foucault's reading goes on to detail a new modality of truth-telling that Socrates' mission establishes: against the prophetic veridiction of the oracle, the technical expertise articulated by the craftsmen, and the wisdom expressed by the sage, Socrates defines his practice in terms of vigilantly militaristic *parrhēsia* performed on behalf of the city,⁷⁷ but located at the point where public and private spaces meet. Socrates introduces a daily exercise of "the care of the self," a practice of ethical discipline undertaken for the sake of maintaining "the courage

⁷⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth (the Government of Self and Others II): Lectures at the Collège de France, 1983-1984* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, UK ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011): 33-71.

⁷⁵ Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*: 209-83.

⁷⁶ Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*: 75-78. In fact, Socrates did practice political *parrhēsia* when he had to do so, as his handling of the case of the proposed execution of the generals at Arginousae proves with respect to the democracy and his refusal to take action in the Leon affair proves with respect to the aristocratic regime of the Thirty Tyrants. Ibid., 78-79.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 85.

to speak the truth,”⁷⁸ which action takes care of the city in turn.⁷⁹ Finally, with his reading of the *Laches*, Foucault concludes with respect to Socrates that the practice of *parrhēsia* he forged ultimately relocates the ethical stakes of that practice in the “*bios*,” the “form of life” or “mode of life,” of the discourse’s practitioner and addressee.⁸⁰ Both the parrhesiast and the subject to whom the parrhesiast speaks are challenged to live in such a way that they may live up to the truth, leading “an unconcealed” or “a true life.”⁸¹ The political consequences of this displacement of *parrhēsia* from the democratic assembly to the “*bios*” of the philosophical subject were already stated in Foucault’s 1982-83 lectures, where he argues that there is a “necessary correlation” of politics and philosophy, but that the two may never “coincide,” so that the *parrhēsia* of the philosopher can only claim to be genuine if it puts itself to the test of addressing politics,⁸² but there can only be politics, in the sense in which the parrhesiast describes, if the governing subject is governed by philosophy in turn.⁸³ These concepts crystallize around Plato’s relationship with the tyrants of Sicily especially, but Foucault clearly means to show a parallel between the philosophers and these tyrants, on the one hand, and the Hellenistic monarchs as well as the Roman emperor, on the other. In every case, philosophical *parrhēsia* operates in a political space in which the city has been displaced as the major

⁷⁸ Ibid., 87.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 141-56.

⁸¹ Ibid., 217-30.

⁸² Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*: 285-98.

⁸³ Ibid., 223-44.

unit of government by a monarch's control over an empire.⁸⁴ With this last point, the three axes of Foucault's analysis can be identified on the other side of the Socratic transformation: the philosophical practice of *parrhēsia* establishes a harmony with a philosophical *bios*, a mode of existence, and this practice of taking care of the truth and oneself positions the philosopher as the necessary counselor of monarchs and tyrants, who can successfully govern others only insofar as they become subjects of philosophical *parrhēsia*.

Bringing Foucault's analyses to bear upon the *consolatio* or the λόγος παραμυθητικός redefines consolation as a mode of παρρησία, of "the frankness, freedom, and openness that leads one to say what one has to say."⁸⁵ Plutarch's *De exilio* provides an important point of reference for recognizing the relationship between *parrhēsia* and the *consolatio*: at 599b, Plutarch begins by contrasting his παρρησία with the lamentations of tragic choruses, claiming that the former will only exacerbate his exiled friend's grief while his discourse will rectify it. In this passage, one can see that philosophical consolation defines itself against other available modes of consolation.⁸⁶ But one can also distinguish different modes of consolatory discourse, such as the democratic mode of consolatory discourse featured in the funeral oration, poetic modes such as one discovers in Statius or the pseudo-Ovidian *Consolatio ad Liviam*, and a

⁸⁴ Ibid., 291-93.

⁸⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-82*, ed. Frédéric Gros, trans. Graham Burchell, 1st ed. (New York: Picador, 2005): 372.

⁸⁶ See the Conclusion below.

philosophical mode such as one finds in Cicero, Seneca, Plutarch, and Boethius. A complete account of consolation would situate all of this discourse's diverse contexts with respect to one another, from the most singular manifestation of a commonplace in Homeric epic to its most extended theoretical treatment in a treatise like the *Tusculanae Disputationes*. The scale of such a project would be vast, but one may focus the investigation by selecting a mode exemplary for the analysis of the other discursive modes. If Foucault is correct that parrhesiastic discourse underwent a transformation in the context of the Socratic movement, then the Platonic dialogues, where consolation is displaced from the funeral oration, the ultimate expression of democratic mourning, to philosophical counsel, demonstrate a similar interweaving of these three axes: the consolation presupposes an ethical subject well disciplined enough to deliver the truth, whose life harmonizes with the discourse, and who governs himself in such a way that his true life make his true discourse possible, proving the truth of its claims, in order that he may govern others. Taking the philosophical self-consolation as an exemplary mode of consolatory discourse, this project clarifies how one may proceed with the other modes of consolation found in poetry, funerary rhetoric, and Homeric epic.

Discourse Analysis II: Agamben and Lacan on Desubjectification

Foucault's theoretical investigations of *parrhēsia* provide a suitable paradigm for comprehending the persistent practice of consolation among the ancient philosophers, but the strategy of self-consolation presents difficulties that discourse analysis alone can only

expose, not explain. As I described above, there is a basic paradox around self-consolation, insofar as the self-consoler must at once meet and fall short of the ethical conditions necessary to the successful performance of self-consolation. Coming to the self-consolation through Foucault, one can define these conditions, but it is not possible to explain why these conditions came to define the practice of self-consolation.

The problem lies in his theory of subjectivity, or rather in his complete rejection of the concept of subjectivity.⁸⁷ Though Foucault's method provides a helpful framework through which the multiplicity of the *consolatio*'s discursive possibilities may be examined, referring that discourse back to the practices, habits, and form of life that govern the subjects of that discourse, nevertheless, the absolute critical limit of that subjectivity remains unexamined. That is to say, Foucault's work regularly finds points of antagonism, struggle, and opposition between different subjectivities, but his work lacks the dimension of radical negativity that marks a decisive break between one position and another.⁸⁸ Regularly he speaks of "transformations" of various problematics, as when he passes from treating the care of the self as it is applied to the youth of Athens to its function and application in the imperial Roman period, but he never identifies precisely the limit that had to be crossed in order for change to occur.

⁸⁷ See the positions against which Foucault defines himself in Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*: 41-42.

⁸⁸ Larmour, Miller, and Platter also critique Foucault from this point of view. Larmour, Miller, and Platter, "Situating *The History of Sexuality*."

It is this dimension of radical negativity that, above all, Giorgio Agamben has tried to reintroduce into Foucault's analyses.⁸⁹ Agamben has explained the difference between their positions by emphasizing that, where Foucault gave his attention to the process of subject formation or "subjectivation," Agamben has attuned his historical inquiries to the process of "desubjectification," or, said more plainly, the subject's dissolution, its passage from a constituted sense of self-relation through a moment of crisis to an indeterminate void of subjectivity, a self-relation preserved only to the extent that it is cancelled, nullified, and without content.⁹⁰ Agamben uses many figures to exemplify this condition, but for classicists just as for Agamben himself, certainly the most important figure is the Roman Republican *homo sacer*. In Agamben's account, the *homo sacer* persists in a "zone of indeterminacy," a space neither civic and human nor divine and consecrated to the gods, but rather "sacred," set apart in a double exception from both of those sites.⁹¹ The self-relation of the *homo sacer* cannot be mediated by the categories of civic belonging, and it cannot be mediated by its consecration to divine protection, since it has been removed from all of these relations. Agamben's analysis claims that the *homo sacer* is the earliest and most significant example of the zero-degree of subjectivity, the self-relation that, having been reduced to the poverty of the bare

⁸⁹ Antonio Negri, "Giorgio Agamben: The Discreet Taste of the Dialectic," in *Giorgio Agamben: Sovereignty and Life*, ed. Matthew Calarco and Steven DeCaroli (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

⁹⁰ Giorgio Agamben, "What Is an Apparatus?," in *What Is an Apparatus? and Other Essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009): 22.

⁹¹ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998): 71-103.

animal, only relates itself to a void. Though the historical credibility of Agamben's claims are questionable, and indeed far from proven, the theoretical value of his inquiry is beyond doubt: it is this void subject, the "bare life" of the *homo sacer*, as Agamben presents him, that poses a critical limit to Foucault's presentation of the vast multiplicity of forms of life.⁹²

Lacanian psychoanalysis, in a comparable way, has also made lack, the void, or the zero-degree the ultimate foundation of its theory of subjectivity. Lacan holds that "there is no sexual relationship," or, in other words, that desire has no natural object by which it would be fulfilled, so that human instinct or the "drive" is channeled toward no proper end, only a substitute that Lacan calls the "phallic" or the empty signifier.⁹³ That is, Lacan imagines that a fundamental lack constitutive of human desire in itself reduplicates itself in the language by which humans articulate their desires, so that the very language in which one expresses this lack must seem also to be insufficient in itself. The Lacanian subject proper only comes into being when one assumes responsibility for the groundless contingency of one's own being, traverses the fantasy that had sustained one's relationship to others, and projects oneself toward a future that takes that fantasy as

⁹² It is possible that a *rapprochement* between Foucault and Agamben could be staged in a cross-examination of Agamben's studies on "bare life" and Foucault's studies on the natural life, the true life of the Cynic philosophers. It is unclear to what extent Foucault's introduction of the Cynics into his last lectures acts as a limit concept for his discourse; Foucault's work in this area has not been studied in this perspective, but it would perhaps shed light on his finished project to put this work in dialogue with Agamben, and this is one of the theoretical stakes of my project. Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*: 217-324.

⁹³ Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995): 98-128.

one's field of action.⁹⁴ The radicality of this position goes beyond Agamben's genealogical analysis to assert that self-relation is not made negative or void by some historical act of divine violence enacted upon those subject to sovereign power. Rather, subjectivity is fundamentally void in itself, so that a subject's relation to "phallic" or empty signifiers ultimately can be shown by traumatic encounters for what it is, a cover for a void. It is in this sense that Lacan speaks of the Real—that which resists signification—as the truth of the subject: a subject's fantasy mediates its relation to the symbolic order by repressing the Real, this hole in the symbolic order opened up by the reaching of desire into and through that order.⁹⁵ A Lacanian reading of these self-consolations shows how in each case the discourse of self-consolation proceeds as a fantasy in which the desire of the self-consoling author is channelled toward a god's wisdom or knowledge as a proper object of desire; but in reality the truth of this desire for wisdom is that the fantasy conceals an "other scene," a political conjuncture within which each author's philosophical subjectivity was brought into crisis through persecution.⁹⁶ With respect to this conjuncture, in each case only an action, not contemplation, holds the potential promise of consolation.

I therefore supplement Foucault's analyses with these two theoretical positions in order to account for the discursive formation of self-consolation, a discourse that ought to

⁹⁴ Ibid., 61-68.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 24-34.

⁹⁶ Étienne Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene* (London and New York: Verso, 2002): vii-xiv.

have been strictly impossible, but nevertheless exists. Coming to the self-consolations from Agamben and Lacan, it is possible to see that the operation of self-consolation proceeds as an address of philosophical discourse to a philosophical subject, who has undergone a process of desubjectification, dissolution of his ethical grounding in philosophical discipline. That address elides the political context in which desubjectification was effected, so that it somehow necessarily misses the true cause of grief, only ever directing its *consolandus* away from politics towards another life.

Literature Review, II: Self-Consolation as a Mode of Philosophical Consolation

Self-consolation has received some attention in the very recent scholarship on philosophical consolation literature. Scholars have often lighted upon this concept in the context of analyses devoted to other topics, but usually the aims and agenda of the research underway have pushed the particular problem I have highlighted entirely out of view. At least some recent attempts have made self-consolation the thematic focus of their work, and I have followed these studies in charting my path through the primary sources. None, however, have isolated the impossible stakes of consolatory discourse passed from the self to the self, a view of self-consolation's conflicting conditions that only becomes possible from a horizon of interpretation informed by Foucault's analyses.

In the earliest phase of the scholarship, self-consolation never became a topic of thematic investigation, and through the twentieth century this did not change. It is only in

recent studies of the various authors in the consolatory tradition that self-consolation has been established as an important term for critical analysis. Still, none have tried to extend their analyses beyond one author's works, so that self-consolation would seem only to have significance for this author or that one, not for the entire Latin consolatory tradition. Above all, Han Baltussen has made self-consolation the theme of his research on Cicero's *Consolatio*. Two published essays on this work treat self-consolation as a distinguishing feature of this composition.⁹⁷ He argues for the therapeutic effect of Cicero's literary efforts, an effect that, as he admits, even Cicero himself seems not to have noticed. He proceeds according to a somewhat confused timeline though, so that the process of recovery that Baltussen describes disagrees with the historical reality Cicero's letters preserve.⁹⁸ He also holds that the self-consolation uniquely appears in Cicero's work, at least among ancient literature.

Elaine Fantham's analysis of Seneca's *Ad Polybium de consolatione* argues that the text displaces the consolation for death with a consolation for exile, and at least at one point frames this displacement in terms of self-consolation.⁹⁹ She goes no further than to suggest that self-consolation is one way in which Seneca's essay may be understood.

⁹⁷ Han Baltussen, "A grief observed: Cicero on remembering Tullia," *Mortality* 14, no. 4 (November 2009); Han Baltussen, "Cicero's *Consolatio ad se*: Character, purpose, and impact of a curious treatise," in *Greek and Roman Consolations: Eight Studies of a Tradition and its Afterlife*, ed. Han Baltussen (Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2013).

⁹⁸ See Chapter 5, below.

⁹⁹ Elaine Fantham, "Dialogues of Displacement: Seneca's Consolations to Helvia and Polybius," in *Writing Exile: The Discourse of Displacement in Greco-Roman Antiquity and Beyond*, ed. Jan Felix Gaertner (Leiden: Brill, 2007): 191.

George Boys-Stones devotes an essay to the pseudo-Plutarchan *Consolatio ad Apollonium*, arguing for a quasi-allegorical reading in which the reader of this text would understand the addressee and the speaker as parts of his own soul, so that the text effectively acts as a resource for the operation of self-consolation.¹⁰⁰

I already cited above Pascale Fleury's analysis of the consolatory letters of Fronto grouped together as *De nepote amisso*.¹⁰¹ Her analysis identifies the second letter in this series as an example of "l'auto-consolation," which she defines as the "constant presentation of the author" himself as the topic of the letter.¹⁰² She furthermore selects Cicero's *Consolatio* as an example of self-consolation, but argues that Fronto depends not upon that work, but rather upon Quintilian's preface to book six of the *Institutio Oratoria*.¹⁰³ Both this work and Fronto's letter, she holds, use "l'autobiographie" in a distinctive manner, in order to humanize consolation's more metaphysical speculations on life and death.¹⁰⁴ She argues also that the "self-praise" in paragraphs 8 and 9 of the letter constitute an effort to create a self-consolation of a practical variety, more attuned to Fronto's profession than the metaphysical speculation that the letter also features.¹⁰⁵ Along the way, she mentions Favorinus' discourse, passed down in the tradition as Dio

¹⁰⁰ George Boys-Stones, "The *Consolatio ad Apollonium*: Therapy for the dead," in *Greek and Roman Consolations: Eight Studies in a Tradition and its Afterlife*, ed. Han Baltussen (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2013).

¹⁰¹ One chapter of her book on Fronto's letters is especially helpful. Fleury, "Consolation."

¹⁰² Pascale Fleury, *Lectures de Fronto: Un rhéteur latin à l'époque de la Seconde Sophistique* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2006): 80.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 76, 87.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

Chry. *Or.* 37, and Julian's letter on the departure of Salutius as further examples of self-consolation, but, since these are unrelated to Fronto's letter, she only comments upon them briefly.¹⁰⁶

In a collection of conference papers on Julian's writings, Josef Lössl argues for a reading of Julian's *Consolation to Himself on the Departure of the Excellent Salutius*, basing his account on the text's status as a self-consolation.¹⁰⁷ He argues for the universalizing effect of Julian's turn to self-consolation, and compares the text to possible sources, such as Cicero's self-consolation.¹⁰⁸

Malcolm Davies, working with self-consolation in the *Iliad*, compares Agamemnon's *apologia* (*Il.* 19.78-144) with a speech of Achilles from book 18, in order to establish a pattern of movement from self-consolation to self-exhortation in each speech.¹⁰⁹ His contribution is only a short note, but, by establishing the *Iliad* as the only text from before the Roman Empire that clearly features elements of self-consolation, Davies highlights the early provenance of consolatory topics and suggests another application for this mode of discourse, early in the history of Greek literary expression.

Finally, Relihan and Donato have claimed that the *De consolatione Philosophiae* of Boethius can be read as a self-consolation. Relihan reads Boethius' text as a dialogue

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 88-89.

¹⁰⁷ Josef Lössl, "Julian's *Consolation to Himself on the Departure of the Excellent Salutius*: Rhetoric and philosophy in the fourth century," in *Emperor and Author: The Writings of Julian the Apostate*, ed. Brian Baker, Nicholas and Shaun Tougher (Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2012).

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 63-66.

¹⁰⁹ Malcolm Davies, "'Self-Consolation' in the *Iliad*," *The Classical Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (Dec., 2006).

of the self with the self, studying the two characters as inadequate imitations of two sides of Boethius the author's divided self.¹¹⁰ Donato refers to Chadwick and the medieval theologians as sources for this self-consolatory reading.¹¹¹ Donato himself does not discuss self-consolation at length though, and leaves it as an undeveloped subtext of his argument. Still, he is an important contemporary scholar who recognizes the possible importance of self-consolation as a theme of Boethius' consolation.

Thesis and Outline: Self-Consolation in Latin Philosophical Literature

All of this scholarship shares in common their concentration upon a single author, reserving comments on texts from other areas of the consolatory tradition for source criticism alone. This has kept the problem that I introduced above from coming into view. Although it is not impossible to perceive the problem self-consolation poses for philosophical subjectivity by analyzing only one of the texts mentioned in the previous section, it is at least difficult to do so. But by analyzing several texts that feature consolatory discourse addressed to its author, the pervasiveness of this problem should become clear. In this dissertation, therefore, I aim to establish at the very least that there is a tradition of self-consolation in the Latin philosophical literature of Cicero, Seneca,

¹¹⁰ Joel C. Relihan and William Earnshaw Heise, *The Prisoner's Philosophy: Life and Death in Boethius's Consolation* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007): 55, 63-69.

¹¹¹ Antonio Donato, *Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy as a Product of Late Antiquity* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013): 12-13. Henry Chadwick, *Boethius: The Consolations of Music, Logic, Theology, and Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981). See also p. 276 fn. 77 below.

and Boethius. But more than this, I argue that the literary performance of self-consolation unfolds, as I explained above, between contradictory discursive conditions, in which the *consolator* must be the *consolandus*: he must at once possess the perfect competence in consolatory performance to master the emotions of his addressee, a *consolandus* in need of therapy, and lack the resolve that would restore him to the self-possession foundational to the very consolatory performance in which he is already involved. These contradictory conditions cannot find philosophical compatibility, so that a literary resolution of their difference becomes necessary.

With this turn toward the literary, though, the world beyond philosophical withdrawal comes spilling back into these texts, so that Cicero, Seneca, and Boethius' consolations all involve themselves as much in the solitary emotions of their authors as in the public life that conditions the philosophers' withdrawal at a more basic level. Cicero has to turn to philosophical consolation because the political sphere of the *res publica*, to which he would have turned for consolation for domestic loss, had been suspended with the arrival of Caesar's dictatorship.¹¹² Seneca struggles in the *Ad Polybium de consolatione* with the possibility of a philosophical consolation for his exile and his addressee's mourning for a deceased brother, but cannot help but turn to the very emperor who exiled him as the most likely and capable source of consolation.¹¹³ Finally, Philosophia comes to Boethius in his cell not only to recall certain philosophical truths to

¹¹² See Chapter 5, below.

¹¹³ See Chapter 4, below.

her forgetful student and devotee, but also because she has been his accomplice to his alleged crimes against the ruling Theoderic.¹¹⁴ In each case, the discourse of self-consolation seems to have developed as a response to the displacements effected by the expanding presence of sovereign power in the lives of Romans. If self-consolation represents the impossible attempt of philosophical subjects to offer consolation to themselves from the point of its least likely felicitous performance, that is, from philosophers who, when they were faced with a real crisis, failed to live up to their philosophical discipline's highest demands, these Roman thinkers forged this discourse because they maintained a split allegiance to their *civitas* and their chosen mode of life, to the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa* equally. The self-consolation thus exposes the ultimate dependence of the philosophical mode of existence on the political space that these Romans could never truly escape, even if philosophy preached its ultimate insignificance. There is in the end a certain inadequacy in the arguments of philosophy, since the consolatory argument cannot finally migrate philosophy's subjects beyond their immediate context to a universal city that would act as its substitute.

Before outlining the chapters, I mention some exclusions from this analysis.

Although the current literature suggests that self-consolation also exists among the Greek authors who compose consolations, I have left the relationship between these and the Latin self-consolations unexplored in this already quite expansive investigation. I have

¹¹⁴ See Chapters 1-3.

also limited my analysis to the philosophical consolation, treating it apart from the consolations that are not strictly philosophical, such as the *Consolatio ad Liviam*, included among the manuscripts of Ovid, and the consolations of Statius.¹¹⁵ It is at least possible to argue that there are self-consolatory aspects of these poetic texts, but since I am concerned to analyze the specific discursive conditions in which philosophical texts unfold, I have set aside the poetic texts on the grounds that they involve different subjectivities and perform according to different rules. This leaves the Latin philosophical consolations, the *Consolatio* of Cicero, three *Dialogi* of Seneca (VI, XI, and XII), and finally Boethius' *De consolazione Philosophiae*.

In the five chapters of this dissertation, I develop readings that define these texts as self-consolations, in which the *consolator*'s own grief is the object of his therapy. The first three chapters provide context and criticism on the *De consolazione Philosophiae*. I argue for two senses in which Boethius' masterpiece may be understood as a self-consolation. First, this text features a prosimetric dialogue between Boethius, the persona of the author, and Philosophia, the personification of philosophy; through the course of five books, Philosophia acts as Boethius' *consolator*, bringing him to higher states of philosophical consciousness at each transition. So there is an obvious sense in which Boethius the author consoles Boethius the persona through the persona of Philosophia. I

¹¹⁵ On the pseudo-Ovidian consolation, see Schoonhoven, *The Pseudo-Ovidian ad Liviam and De morte Drusi*; Amat, *Consolation à Livie; Élégies à Mécène; Bucoliques d'Einsiedeln*. On consolation in Statius, see Paulo Asso, "Queer Consolation: Melior's Dead Boy in Statius' *Slivae* 2.1," *American Journal of Philology* 131, no. 4 (2010); Markus Donka, D., "Grim Pleasures: Statius's Poetic *Consolationes*," *Arethusa* 37, no. 1 (May 2004).

argue that there is a second sense, though, in which the *consolator* that comes to Boethius in prison is an imaginary fiction, so that the consolation proceeds as a psychagogic dialogue between two parts of the soul. By the end of the dialogue, it is apparent that Philosophia is a projection of the imaginary part of Boethius' mind, arguing on behalf of its rational part against the impulses, expectations, and attachments of his body and its sensitivity, all represented by Boethius' own persona in the dialogue. As the text comes to its closure, the different parts of Boethius' self may arrive at agreement and philosophical harmony, but it is at least possible to read the text as inconclusive, so that Boethius and his commitment to the material world are left to one side in Philosophia's account of providence, and Philosophia and her god's resolution only duplicates the violence of Theoderic's action against Boethius.

The ambiguous conclusion of Boethius' consolation calls forth an investigation of how self-consolation had been constructed prior to Boethius' attempt, in order to understand why Boethius' consolation is finally inconclusive by referring it to the pre-existing conditions of consolatory discourse. The fourth chapter therefore analyzes the three consolations included among Seneca's *Dialogi*, giving special attention to the *Ad Polybium de consolatione*, upon which text Boethius seems to have based his consolatory discourse in the *De consolatione Philosophiae*. I argue that the consolation to Polybius, which Seneca tries to offer in spite of the grief he feels for his own recent exile, contends with Seneca's attempts to secure through self-consolation the integrity necessary to the task of consolation to which he has appointed himself. The problematic panegyric for the

emperor and the consolation that, as Seneca imagines, the emperor offers must be understood in this light, as attempts on Seneca's part to introduce a more competent consoler than himself, a third party who will address both Polybius' and Seneca's causes for grief. In the end, Seneca shies away from the Stoic position on grief, that it must be controlled, and admits freely that the sage who offers this advice cannot know the true depths of mourning. Only an action on Seneca's behalf will bring him consolation, not the arguments of philosophy. Seneca's self-consolatory project, equally with Boethius' text, raises questions about the efficacy of self-consolation, insofar as the *ad Polybium* shows Seneca as inconsolable by any other means than a full restoration of his status as a subject of Roman imperial authority, welcome and flourishing in the emperor's presence, and the *Ad Helviam matrem de consolatione* shows him above and beyond all political ties, satisfied completely by his theoretical investigation of the cosmos. If self-consolation has been felicitous, its success vanishes in the untraceable time between the composition of his first and his second consolation from exile.

Since the conclusions of the investigations into Boethius' consolation and Seneca's consolations are equally ambiguous, I turn finally to the first self-consolation, in order to discover in the original formation of self-consolatory discourse the reasons why self-consolation presents itself as at once a success and a failure. The fifth chapter treats the topic of consolation in Cicero's letters *ad Atticum* and *ad Familiares* as the context for the creation of philosophical self-consolation in Cicero's *Consolatio*. In the letters, Cicero's peers try to console him for the loss of his daughter Tullia, so that two different

sources of consolation can be recognized: the civic space and the domestic space. For Cicero, however, two different modes of mourning become confused: the loss of a proper civic space to Caesar's dictatorship and the loss of a beloved daughter. Unable to find consolation in either space, Cicero turns to Greek philosophy in order to forge a new mode of consolation on the model of the λόγος παραμυθητικός, but with one important difference: since none of Cicero's peers offered him an adequately philosophical consolation, Cicero had to offer one to himself. Though only fragments of this text remain, they nevertheless show that Cicero's strategy in this text served two purposes. He was able both to demonstrate to his peers that he had done everything in his power to overcome his grief, so that he fulfilled the expectation of his peers that he should be consoled, and to introduce a philosophical, speculative vision within which he could refer his lost daughter to his own achievements, in order to make an argument for her status as a goddess. In the end, though, Cicero's self-consolation did not succeed in the first of these purposes, insofar as the second purpose demanded an action, a deed that would fill out the meaning of his written speech: the institution of cult in honor of Cicero's deceased and now deified daughter. This cult never came into existence, so that Cicero finally had to return to his *Consolatio*, rewriting its incomplete meaning with a more fully philosophical account of death and the immortality of the soul in the first book of his *Tusculan Disputations*.

I conclude, therefore, that self-consolation develops as a literary mode as a consequence of consolation's ultimate inadequacy to grief, as the apparent need for

complementary action, deeds that would ground discourse in reality, finally shows. As the readings in the five chapters of this dissertation demonstrate, self-consolation both requires and fails to deliver a *consolator* unassailed by the affects undermining the self-sufficiency of a *consolandus*. Instead, each text introduces an imaginary, sovereign authority, Philosophia's god, Seneca's Claudius, and Cicero's own daughter, each of whom act as a security in the here and now against the real political threat determining the grief of each author. The literary text searching for self-consolation betrays the author's dependence upon a political space threatened by the immense power of a sovereign ruler.

Part 1: Self-Consolation in Boethius' *De consolatione Philosophiae*

Chapter 1: Literary and Political Context for Boethius' *Consolation*

“Boethius was not a catalyst but a symptom.” – Patrick Amory¹

1.1 Introduction

For its masterful variation of poetic forms, its theological complexity, and its dramatic, dialogic presentation, the last classical work of literary consolation, Boethius' *De consolatione Philosophiae* (hereafter, the *Consolation*), towers as the most impressive of all the surviving ancient consolation texts. It is not so often appreciated in the scholarship that the dialogue underway in the *Consolation* is carefully crafted as a subtle mode of self-address.² Boethius' text stages a philosophical dialogue between himself and Philosophia, wherein Philosophia, the very personification of philosophy, offers consolation to him. The strategy results in a displacement of the consolatory discourse, so

¹ Patrick Amory, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy, 489-554*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, Fourth Series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 219.

² For recent scholarly discussions that treat the Consolation of Philosophy as a consolation, but not, importantly, as a self-consolation, see Donato, *Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy as a Product of Late Antiquity*; Danuta Shanzer, "Interpreting the *Consolation*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Boethius*, ed. John Marenbon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Relihan and Heise, *The Prisoner's Philosophy*; Joachim Gruber, *Kommentar zu Boethius « De consolatione philosophiae »*, 2., erw. ed., Texte und Kommentare; 9 (Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, 2006); John Marenbon, *Boethius*, Great Medieval Thinkers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Gerard O'Daly, *The Poetry of Boethius* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Thomas F. Curley, III, "The Consolation of Philosophy as a Work of Literature," *American Journal of Philology* 108, no. 2 (1987): 343-67; Thomas F. Curley, III, "How to Read the Consolation of Philosophy," *Interpretation* XIV (1986): 211-63.

that the *consolator*'s direct address to the *consolandus* is not, as it were, simply overheard in a one-sided way; rather, the consoler and the consoled are both depicted as interacting *personae*, so that each may respond to one another in turn. Comparison with Seneca and Plutarch's consolations clarifies the point. Seneca's three consolations all had specific individuals as their addressees: *Ad Marciam*, *Ad Helviam matrem*, *Ad Polybium*. They seem at least *prima facie* to proceed as a unified discourse delivered by one voice.³ Even more obviously non-dialogic are the consolations by the unknown author who addressed a consolation "ad Apollonium," and by Plutarch, whose *De exilio* is addressed to an exile from Sardis and whose other consolation is addressed *ad uxorem*, that is, "to his wife." The last of these consolations suggests a possibility that Boethius chose for some specific reason not to realize. If Boethius had wished to write a perfectly straightforward consolatory letter, his wife, as she is presented in the *Consolation*, would have been the obvious addressee.⁴ Philosophia speaks of her as follows:

Vivit uxor ingenio modesta, pudicitia [pudore] praezellens et, ut omnes eius dotes breviter includam, patri similis; vivit, inquam, tibi que tantum vitae huius exosa spiritum servat, quoque uno felicitatem minui tuam vel ipsa concesserim, tui desiderio lacrimis ac dolore tabescit. (prose II.4.6)⁵

³ However, see chapter four below. Seneca's persistent use of *prosopopoeia* introduces a complicated mode of dialogue through self-address.

⁴ See my discussion on the Republican practice of writing consolation letters in section 5.2 below.

⁵ There is no established convention for referring to sections and sentences of Boethius' *Consolation*. I have chosen to refer to these by "prose" or "poetry" first of all (where this may not be obvious), then by their book (Roman numeral), section (Arabic), and sentence or line (Arabic), however this may be. The text of Boethius' *Consolation* I use is presented in Boethius and Claudio Moreschini, *De consolatione philosophiae; Opuscula theologica*, Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana (Monachii Munich: K.G. Saur, 2000): 195-235.

Your wife lives, a woman of modest temperament, preeminent for her chastity and modesty and, so I might sum up briefly all her endowments, similar to her father. She lives, I say, and for you alone she keeps on breathing, though hating this life. And by this one thing would even I have conceded that your felicity is diminished: by her longing for you she wastes away in grief (*dolor*) and tears.⁶

Boethius' wife Rusticiana is described here in the typical guise of a good, Roman woman of the aristocracy. She is compared favorably with her father Symmachus, who looms large in Boethius' mind almost as the ideal sage. But most important here is that Rusticiana is shown in despair of such a kind that a philosopher would typically address with consolatory discourse. She "wastes away" in "grief," "hating life," mourning her loss of Boethius and suffering because of his absence. Moreover, Philosophia recognizes this as a real loss for Boethius; this parallels her recognition that he has actually suffered only by forgetting his own resolute self-determination as a philosophical subject. So, according to Philosophia, who follows the logic of most of the consolers with which I am concerned in this dissertation, both he and his wife are justifiably considered to have suffered only insofar as they are vulnerable to lamentation and grief. One could easily imagine, then, Boethius having written a "*Consolation to Rusticiana*" much like those that Plutarch and Seneca wrote, a quasi-epistolary text which would have had Boethius the philosopher console his wife, whose subjective loss would be equally as worthy of address as his own. That he did not proceed in this way demonstrates something singular

⁶ All translations from Boethius and Seneca are my own, though I have frequently compared my translation with the Loeb edition. For the fragments of Cicero, I have generated original translations.

about his relationship to philosophical consolatory discourse.⁷ It can mean nothing else than that he is putting a certain distance between his own voice and consolatory discourse. The dialogic form is that distance.

There is another way, though, in which Philosophia's consolation to Boethius acts as a mode of self-consolation. Donato has remarked that there is an obvious sense in which, by writing the consolation that Philosophia delivers to his own persona, Boethius has constructed a self-consolation from the "stronger part" of his mind to the "weaker."⁸ Donato only mentions this topic in passing, but I hold that the medieval interpreters of Boethius to whom Donato refers have brought an important problem of the text's movement to light. The medieval precedent is to read Boethius' *Consolation* as a

⁷ Strangely, scholars do not often read the *Consolation* in light of the consolatory works that preceded Boethius' composition. Certainly, there are attempts to read sections of the text against the inherited tradition; but these are not the classical consolations of Seneca, for example, they are his tragedies. A scholar exemplary of the disregard for consolatory sources is, for one, Shanzer, "Interpreting the *Consolation*," 230-31. Consider also the words of Courcelle: "Est-ce à dire que la *Consolation* appartient vraiment au genre de la consolation antique? On l'a n'est pas impossible que Boèce emprunte maint argument, voire maint développement, à Sénèque... Or ce n'est pas la pensée de la mort qui afflige Boèce, mais l'expérience du mal qui règne dans le monde: Philosophie le console de la vie. Notre *Consolation* s'apparenterait donc plutôt aux traités sur l'exil qui, eux aussi, consolent des maux de la vie... Philosophie est pressée de consoler Boèce pour passer à des objets plus intéressants que les malheurs particuliers; elle ne lui accorde la piètre consolation d'usage que pour qu'il soit en état de l'écouter jusqu'au bout; car elle prétend l'élever jusqu'à Dieu... Cette *Consolation* est en réalité...un Προτροπικὸς εἰς Θεόν." Pierre Courcelle, *La Consolation de Philosophie dans la tradition littéraire: antécédents et postérité de Boèce* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1967): 18. This last scholar should be read with Dronke's just evaluation of the work. Peter Dronke, "La Consolation de Philosophie dans la tradition littéraire: Antécédents et postérité de Boèce by Pierre Courcelle," *Speculum* 44, no. 1 (Jan., 1969). Relihan dismisses consolatory discourse too peremptorily, but this is strategic for his ironic reading. Relihan and Heise, *The Prisoner's Philosophy*: 47-51.

⁸ Antonio Donato, "Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy and the Greco-Roman Consolatory Tradition," *Traditio* 67 (2012): 12-13. Donato cites Chadwick at n. 40 in his article, but Chadwick does not refer to Boethius' text as a self-consolation there. Chadwick, *Boethius: The Consolations of Music, Logic, Theology, and Philosophy*: 224. The thinkers upon whom Donato actually depends in order to argue for the *Consolation's* status as a self-consolation are the medieval theologians and commentators on Boethius' text. Donato, "Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy and the Greco-Roman Consolatory Tradition," 13 n. 43.

dialogue of Boethius' reason with his irrational soul, so that Philosophia represents Boethius' rationality and his persona represents his own aberrant emotions. I contend that the allegory must be more exactly defined according to the terms that Boethius himself provides through the course of his dialogue with Philosophia; depending upon Boethius' later readers to decide the allegorical status of each persona can only provoke questions that the text of the *Consolation* itself must finally resolve. I show in my reading of the *De consolatione Philosophiae* that Boethius has designed his consolation as a dialogue not simply between his rationality and his irrational emotions, but that Philosophia is in fact a production of Boethius' own faculty of imagination, what remains of his mind, deprived of its higher rationality and intuition following his persecution by the Ostrogothic king Theoderic. The dialogue therefore proceeds between his imagination and his faculty of sensation, the two lowest faculties of the Neoplatonic hierarchy that Philosophia describes at prose V.4. By approaching the *Consolation*'s dialogue in this way, the exact status of the personae, Philosophia and Boethius, can be determined in their relation to one another. Through the course of their exchange, Philosophia aims to lead Boethius toward a higher degree of philosophical rationality, and in this way his imagination leads forth his faculty of sensation ultimately toward divine intuition, the mystical knowledge that grasps "in one stroke" the rational, imaginary, and sensible objects as one and the same. This is the self-consolation featured in the *De consolatione Philosophiae*.

But at the same time, the text presents another view of the dialogue's stakes, one that depends not upon Philosophia's psychagogic movement of the soul toward higher

levels of rationality. Boethius' poetic voice, and more broadly the voice of his persona in this text, articulates a marginal position that clings fast to the merely human experience of embodied thinking, attraction to worldly encounters, and above all political involvement. This worldly view ultimately stands in tension not only with the arguments of Philosophia, but even with the metaphysical scheme that she describes, in which she stands as a product of Boethius' imagination and he as the exemplar of the faculty of sensation. From this other horizon, in which poetry, politics, and worldly human life stand apart from the divinizing sublimations of Philosophia, her metaphysical aspirations appear as the machinations of a character in a tragic drama, not the sage's advice about the path to immortality. In the end, Boethius' text seems to commit to neither view, only to hold forth the tension between Philosophia's account of what is underway and this second, mundane view of their tragic encounter.

In this chapter, I demonstrate that Boethius' *Consolation*, the last consolation text from Greco-Roman antiquity, exhibits a fundamental ambivalence toward consolatory discourse. On the one hand, it establishes consolatory discourse as essentially empowering, returning a Boethius defeated and dehumanized by his experience of politics to his faculty of judgment. This reading understands the text as a felicitous performance of philosophical self-consolation. On the other hand, it communicates a certain reservation about the philosophical path down which Philosophia leads Boethius and about the conclusions reached at the discourse's end, suggesting that they may not be as final as the voice proclaiming them to a once again silent conversation partner would

have them. All of the political conflict that conditions Boethius' imprisonment and imminent execution is not worked through, but simply left to one side. Boethius' self-consolation thus exposes a tension inherent to consolatory discourse: it rescues its hero from despair, melancholia, and bathetic silence so that he can denounce his political enemies, but it does so in the end only to abandon his singular persona in its relentless pursuit of the abstract universal. This second reading, a poetic reading of the text, understands the *Consolation* as a tragedy of reason. Though I will not develop this reading to the fullest extent possible, it is important to see how it challenges the self-consolation unfolding in the text according to the philosophical reading.

1.2. Politics vs. Christianity

Taking the *Consolation* as essentially a political text, I am at odds with the main line of research on Boethius' *Consolation*, which understands the text as natural theology in an uncertain relationship with Christianity.⁹ However, Boethius' crafting of a dialogue between Philosophia and himself, at the precise moment when this text was written, can only be understood as an essentially political action, provided that one allows the progress of Boethius' philosophical text to redefine political activity, belonging, and judgment. Christianity does not have the central focus here because the *Consolation* is a

⁹ The scholarship is too vast to provide more than a summary account of this problem. Boethius' Christianity has not been in doubt since the publication of the *Anecdoton Holderi* in 1877, which established Boethius' authorship of the Theological Tractates. Of course, just because one writes theology or preaches—as hypocritical preachers continue to prove even today—this does not prove one to be a true believer. As far as I know, all contemporary scholars are convinced, having no other reason to doubt Boethius' faith. Momigliano seems to have thought Boethius abandoned his faith, but that he was at least at one time a believer. Of course, the issue is not as simple as all this—the various gradations of potential psychological states make the question of one man's belief far too complicated, so that a straight-forward positive or negative answer to this question is precluded in any case, let alone given by this text. All one can do is say how little or how much he understands the *Consolation* to be concerned with Christianity. My sense is that it definitely does weigh upon the text, as the lexical investigations of Mohrmann and De Vogel prove, but that there are other problems that weigh much more heavily upon the movement of the dialogue—above all the political context. Hermann Usener, *Anecdoton Holderi; ein Beitrag zur Geschichte Roms in ostgothischer Zeit* (New York: G. Olms, 1969); Shanzer, "Interpreting the *Consolation*," 240-45; Chadwick, *Boethius: The Consolations of Music, Logic, Theology, and Philosophy*: 247-53; Arnaldo Momigliano, *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963); Christine Mohrmann, "Some Remarks on the Language of Boethius' *Consolatio Philosophiae*," in *Latin Script and Letters A.D. 400-900. Festschrift Presented to Ludwig Bieler on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday*, ed. J. J. O'Meara and B. Naumann (Leiden: Brill, 1976): 54-61; Cornelia J. De Vogel, "Boethiana II," *Vivarium* 10 (1972). Relihan's provocative reading, that Christianity is the absent center to which the text ironically refers, I have found useful, but I think his conclusion is too hasty. The text ends much less in disagreement, as I will argue, than in confusion. He presents his argument in Relihan and Heise, *The Prisoner's Philosophy*: 127-36.

political text, concerned with the relationship between philosophy's claim on the life of its adherents and sovereign power's claim on the life of its subjects.¹⁰

Boethius has Philosophia, not some Christian allegorical figure, act as *consolator* to his own persona. Philosophia has many connections with Boethius, but one point of identification between them takes precedence over all. In the *apologia* at prose I.4, Boethius has his persona describe the circumstances that led to his fall. It becomes clear by the end of this speech not only that the Ostrogothic king Theoderic has charged Boethius with treasonous conspiracy, but that he has also been accused of *sacrilegium* for no other reason than his deep commitment to philosophy. At prose I.4.41-42, Boethius explains that his accusers took his well-known study of philosophy as security for their charge that he was indulging in *sacrilegium*.¹¹ He exclaims to Philosophia, "it is not enough that I had benefitted in no way by my reverence for you, beyond that you are even wounded with my offense."¹² The accusation against Boethius is thus conceived as Philosophia having been jointly accused of *sacrilegium* with him.¹³ One must see the two

¹⁰ On the political significance of this relationship, see Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*: 285-97.

¹¹ Philip Rousseau, "The Death of Boethius; the Charge of 'Maleficium'," *Studi Medievali* XX (1979): 876-77.

¹² "*Ita non est satis nihil mihi tuam profuisse reverentiam nisi ultro tu mea potius offensione lacereris.*" Prose I.4.42.

¹³ On this matter, Philosophia and Boethius are agreed. Shanzer is mistaken to see Boethius' question at prose I.3.3 as ironic; he has only just recognized her and could not have the cognitive power at this point to pose his questions so artfully. The tone strikes me rather as that of a simpleton or a dumb-founded fool. Danuta Shanzer, "The Death of Boethius and the 'Consolation of Philosophy'," *Hermes* 112, no. 3 (1984): 365.

conversation partners—I should even say the two fellow conspirators—represented in this text as the two accused.

This point has not been sufficiently appreciated, either in the tradition of Boethius' *Nachleben* or in the scholarship. From Bovo II,¹⁴ a tenth-century abbot at Corvey monastery, to Henry Chadwick,¹⁵ there has been a felt need to explain why Boethius “the theologian” in his “hour of utmost need” turned to “philosophical contemplation based on natural reason” rather than “Christian revelation” for consolation.¹⁶ This scholarship on Boethius' *Consolation* has most often proceeded on the assumption that the work consists of philosophical thought represented in writing, as if the work were simply a treatise on natural theology. The foundational assumptions that constitute this scholarship almost unavoidably arrive at the question of whether or not Boethius' Catholicism, as represented by the Tractates, informed his writing of the *Consolation*.¹⁷ It is as if Boethius' soul were on trial and his orthodoxy in question, so that the principal interest of the text consists of so much testimony responsive to an

¹⁴ Marenbon's comments suggest that the commentator is misrecognizing Boethius as a fellow commentator. “[Bovo] knows that Boethius is the author of the *opuscula sacra*, but he finds, to his surprise, that there are things ‘contrary to the Catholic faith’, both in the poem he is commenting [III.9] and in many places elsewhere. For Bovo, Boethius's aim is to expound the views of the philosophers, especially the Platonists, as the fact that he makes Philosophy his interlocutor shows.” Marenbon, *Boethius*: 174.

¹⁵ Chadwick, *Boethius: The Consolations of Music, Logic, Theology, and Philosophy*: 251-52.

¹⁶ It is not difficult to see why these theological questions would be favored over political ones. The stakes of Boethius' actions under Theoderic's reign, whatever they were, had been rendered null and insignificant even before 535 AD (when Justinian's general Belisarius chose to invade Italy in 535 and initiate the Gothic Wars) since Theodahad had already imprisoned Amalsuntha, the late King Theoderic's daughter and regent to his son's throne. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971): 44.

¹⁷ See fn. 9 above.

inquiry into his faith. While I would not dismiss the significance of these questions—it certainly would be important to determine what Boethius' purposes were as he wrote the *Tractates* or the *Consolation* and how he understood their relationship—I suggest that treating this text as addressed to a very specific set of political conditions offers another way into its arguments, another reading of their precise force. This other line of investigation culminates in the question of what Boethius achieved by constructing this particular dialogue: what political act does the composition of this work perform? In this way, the well-worn question of Boethius' faith may be set aside, so that the text may acquire a certain freshness by a new line of inquiry guiding the investigation.

Philosophy takes the foreground because Boethius' Christianity was no source of open controversy for his contemporaries. This is proven by the fact that nowhere does Boethius tell us that his Christianity was implicated in his charge. After all, it would hardly have sat well for the King Theoderic, who was an Arian, to punish the Catholic Boethius for his Catholicism in the heart of the Italian peninsula. Furthermore, any review of the history of this period shows how important mutual tolerance was to Theoderic, and how delicate the balance between Arian and Catholic co-existence must have been.¹⁸ Boethius' interest in philosophy was however quite rare, proper only to his close circle and above all to him. Viewed from this perspective, Boethius' text is

¹⁸ Amory, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy, 489-554*: 195-235; Peter Heather, *The Goths, The Peoples of Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996): 242-48; "Nevertheless, Theoderic was a tolerant man who, until the end of his reign, did nothing to harm the Catholics of his kingdom..." John Moorhead, "Boethius' life and the world of late antique philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Boethius*, ed. John Marenbon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 17.

concerned with the relationship between philosophy and politics, not theology. The question, then, ought not to be why Boethius turns to dialogue with Philosophia as he works his way through the suffering of his last days—for Boethius explains that Philosophia has been accused along with him, and shares in his sentence—but rather, why so many scholars feel the need to introduce Christianity into a text that simply does not explore the Christian faith in a meaningful way.

My strategy will be somewhat different. I follow first of all a line of more recent scholarship that begins from an appreciation of the literary quality of the *Consolation*, and then tries to understand the philosophical content—most often too narrowly conceived as only the arguments that Boethius and Philosophia debate—as essential to the effect the literary work achieves.¹⁹ Crabbe's work was foundational here,²⁰ as was Lerer's pursuit of the relationship between voice and literary technique in Boethius' text.²¹ Curley's 1987 article is recognized as a turning point, though, since he put the

¹⁹ Consider, for example, the manner in which Marenbon proceeds. Here the question of Boethius' philosophical significance, his importance as a philosopher, is measured only by the question whether he has developed any original arguments. Then the arguments are treated separately from the literary interpretation of the text. Certainly he is correct that the arguments must be analyzed for their validity, but they must be read as inseparable from the literary use to which they are put. Marenbon, *Boethius*: 96-145. One may also evaluate Boethius' significance as a philosopher otherwise, by returning philosophical thought to the ancient practice of the philosophical life. This approach is most powerfully defended by Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002): 1-8.

²⁰ Anna Crabbe, "Literary Design in the *De Consolatione Philosophiae*," in *Boethius. His Life, Thought, and Influence*, ed. Margaret T. Gibson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher Ltd., 1981).

²¹ He also limited himself to investigating the question of voice and its relationship with silence. Seth Lerer, *Boethius and Dialogue: Literary Method in the Consolation of Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985): 94-236. For another view of the place of silence, see Gaëlle Jeanmart, "Boèce ou les silences de la philosophie," in *Boèce ou la chaîne des savoirs*, ed. Alain Galonnier (Louvain; Paris;

problem on truly solid ground by foregrounding the crucial task of literary criticism, emphasizing the genre to which Boethius' *Consolation* belongs.²² Dronke has followed his work quite closely, and, as will become apparent, has made two minor suggestions that have far-reaching implications for this critical mode of working on the text.²³ However, his contribution has been limited, since he has not yet engaged the *Consolation* in the kind of depth that the text requires. Finally, Relihan has advanced the most sophisticated literary reading of the *Consolation*, stressing that the text must be understood not only as ironical satire, but also as "the only moral act of which the isolated prisoner is capable."²⁴ In other words, Relihan has approached a step that his predecessors in his area have not yet taken by raising the issue of the "performative" operation of Boethius' text.²⁵

Dudley, MA: Éditions Peeters, 2003): 118-27. Shanzer wrongly dismisses Lerer's work as typical of the "critical Zeitgeist" of the seventies and eighties. Shanzer, "Interpreting the *Consolation*," 236.

²² As he states it in his own programmatic terms: "What I should like to do, and the present paper is merely a *premier essai* in this direction, is to determine Boethius' literary purposes and to suggest what implications the literary aspects of the work may have on its philosophical content." Curley, "The Consolation of Philosophy as a Work of Literature." See also, Curley, "How to Read the Consolation of Philosophy."

²³ I discuss these contributions where they become relevant to my argument. Peter Dronke, *Verses with Prose From Petronius to Dante: The Art and Scope of the Mixed Form*, Carl Newell Jackson Lectures (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994): 39-52.

²⁴ Relihan and Heise, *The Prisoner's Philosophy*: 81-82.

²⁵ "Performative" is not quite the right term. Austin spoke of "illocutionary" and "perlocutionary force" to get at what I am after: the specific effects of an utterance (or literary production) on its recipients. He only used "performative" as a transitional term to move the discussion away from "constative" utterances (that is, speech that merely observes facts). The current critical vocabulary has so far deployed the term "performative" to speak of this dimension that it would be improper to return to the other terms at this point. For an introduction to speech-act theory, see J. Hillis Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature*, Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001). The *locus classicus* is J. L. Austin, *How to*

My own approach does not neglect the literary qualities of the *Consolation*, but I frame their effect within the political dynamics that situate Boethius' act of composition. I agree with Relihan that the chosen literary form, Menippean satire, allows Boethius to put many literary genres into conversation with one another, including elegy, tragedy, hymnody, and philosophical dialogue. But the question must be what the ultimate effect of these juxtapositions is, how in the final analysis do they relate to one another? In the end, one may relate the act of composition and the final created product to their absolute context, the meaning of existence and the place of writing and thinking in human life as a whole, or one may relate the work to its immediate context, the political situation that Boethius' describes in Book I of the *Consolation*. The text invites the reader to reflect on its meaning from both horizons. One may arrive at the latter account of the *Consolation*, the political context in which it was written, by way of discursive analysis that takes into consideration not only the positions of both personae in the text, but also the position of the author within the field of political tensions that delivered him to prison. This is not to say that the author's intention governs the meaning of the text,²⁶ nor is it quite as simple

Do Things With Words, 2nd ed., The William James Lectures (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975).

²⁶ For a presentation and critique of the New Criticism, formalism, and related theoretical positions, see Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Anniversary ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008): 15-46.

as the notorious “death of the author” that gives license to the reader’s free play.²⁷ I take a position that assumes that the author is definitely saying something, but also that the author is unable to say just what he means (and *only* what he means). This returns the text to all the bustle and chatter of the world, to all things political, allowing the author’s voice to speak, and yet not pretending that it just speaks over or beyond all of the troubled affairs of the day.²⁸ It is necessary, then, that one not fail to connect one’s reading to the exceptional place Boethius held in his contemporary political situation.²⁹ For the purposes of this analysis, though, in which I am concerned above all to identify the dynamics of self-consolation in Boethius’ text, the role of each literary genre and their political effect will necessarily be subordinated to the main goal of identifying the textual elements that contribute to the attempt at self-consolation. This does not mean that

²⁷ My position on this issue is that authorship must be as subtly complex as what is described in Jane Gallop, *The Deaths of the Author* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011): 1-26. Neither simply dependent upon the French master theorists, nor a return to the old formalism’s adherence to the author’s final authority, a multiplicity of theoretical perspectives come together here in appreciation of the number of factors precluding a facile distinction between the free pleasure of the text and the author’s final word.

²⁸ I will add more precision to this theoretical position as I proceed with my analysis. For now I am trying to say only what is most to the point. Essentially, I rely upon a careful blending of Foucault’s presentation of biopolitics and the Lacanian theory of subjectivity (mediated by Agamben’s work on the state of exception), as Santner has recently shown to be not only possible but quite effective. Eric L. Santner, *The Royal Remains: the People’s Two Bodies and the Endgames of Sovereignty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011): ix-xxii.

²⁹ I am preceded here by only a few studies, as far as I know. Rousseau in many places intersects with my argument, although he is more concerned with the historical situation than the place of the literature within that situation. I return to his work in section 1.6 below. There is also from O’Meara a recent study of the political philosophy proper to Neoplatonism, but it does not explore the Neoplatonism of Roman Catholics operating under Ostrogothic rule. Boethius is only mentioned once in a footnote. Finally, Donato has emphasized the ideology of Roman senatorial aristocratic identity as the hermeneutic context for this text, linking this with the philosophical politics of Boethius’ Platonism. Rousseau, "The Death of Boethius; the Charge of 'Maleficium'."; Dominic J. O’Meara, *Platonopolis: Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Donato, *Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy as a Product of Late Antiquity*: 7-56.

there will be no place for political commentary or literary analysis in this reading, but only that the reading will be primarily devoted to pursuing the path towards self-consolation, and that literary elements and political consequences will be treated insofar as they figure into this path.

1.3. Socratic Dialogue and Menippean Satire

Since it is important to work out the literary provenance of this text, I identify two major literary forms that Boethius employs in his *Consolation*: Socratic dialogue and Menippean satire. For, one finds in Boethius' *Consolation*, as I have emphasized, not simply consolatory discourse from the consoling author to the consoled reader. Instead, one finds consolatory discourse as a fully realized mode of philosophical address situated within a dialogic genre.³⁰ In the Platonic dialogues there is nothing like this, and in fact nothing like this was possible then. It is true that Socrates speaks there often enough in ways that seem much like consolation, but there is nothing like a normative philosophical manner of addressing those grieving their losses, just Socrates' habitual way of thinking and arguing represented and deployed for various ends.³¹ Only after Socrates and many generations of Socratic philosophy was it possible for the consoler himself—or rather,

³⁰ This same displacement appears also in Dio Cass. 38.18-29, where a Cynic philosopher addresses a consolation to Cicero, who responds in dialogue, and in Dio Chrys. *Or.* 30, where Dio and one Timarchus converse before reading together the consolation written by Timarchus' son, Charidemus, on his deathbed.

³¹ Cf. Pl. [Ax.] 365c-372a. Those norms are actually in the process of formation in the Platonic texts.

more accurately and surprisingly, *herself*—to appear in a dialogic context comparable to that from which it first began to develop.

But in Boethius' text one encounters not only Socratic dialogue, as Aristotle defined it or Plato and Xenophon practiced it, but also Menippean satire. At first glance, this seems to be more fundamental to the formal structure of this text than the consolatory discourse it includes in its form. The Menippean satire, no less than its Socratic origins, proves a rather difficult topic of research, since, as with the consolations I am studying, the Hellenistic and early Roman examples of this genre have not survived except in fragments.³² Still, certain features of Boethius' text mark it as indisputably a Menippean satire. Above all, the dialogism of this text is Menippean. Furthermore, the text, at least on Relihan's reading, is thick with the irony, fantastic presentation, and σπουδογέλιον (or "serious play") that are typical of all the works of this kind.³³ The Menippean satire also displays a formal mixture of verse and prose, the *prosimetrum*, a feature to which the *Consolation* remains true.³⁴ The first two of these qualities seems classically Socratic, but the third does not; that is, the *Consolation* itself bears witness to the notorious Socratic-

³² For a summary of what has and has not survived, as well as an attempt at a synthesis of the data into an operating definition, see Joel C. Relihan, *Ancient Menippean Satire* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993): 12-36.

³³ *Ibid.*, 21-25.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 17-21.

Platonic hostility to poetry (prose I.1.7-12), even though verse makes up no less than half of this text.³⁵

It is not necessary to go deeply into this problem here, since Relihan's recent investigations have already reviewed the entire field of Menippean satire³⁶ and offered a provocative reading of Boethius' *Consolation* in light of this research.³⁷ Instead, it is enough to establish the broadly Socratic orientation of this genre, so that the relationship between the genre and the primary discursive mode (consolation) featured within this form becomes clear. Most often in antiquity Menippus of Gadara was recognized as the "founder" of Menippean satire, as the genre's name indicates.³⁸ Menippus seems to have

³⁵ It will not be possible to treat here the relationship between poetry and philosophical prose in this text. This field is in great need of more thorough research though. The first major study in this area, still useful but somewhat out of date, was Helga Scheible, *Die Gedichte in der Consolatio Philosophiae des Boethius*, Bibliothek der klassischen Altertumswissenschaften (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1972). The work consists of a commentary and synthesis that professes to present "the not previously described philosophical system of Boethius." There is also O'Daly, *The Poetry of Boethius*. This study organizes topics and in an artificial manner inappropriate to Boethius' metaphysics such as "nature" and "the tyrant," and presents what use the *Consolation's* poetry makes of these topics.

³⁶ Relihan, *Ancient Menippean Satire*: 39-218.

³⁷ Other scholars that share this conception of the *Consolation* as Menippean satire include Dronke, *Verse with Prose From Petronius to Dante: The Art and Scope of the Mixed Form*; Curley, "How to Read the Consolation of Philosophy," 211-63; Curley, "The Consolation of Philosophy as a Work of Literature," 343-67. Relihan's reading has been the subject of controversy in recent scholarship. Shanzer wrongly dismisses it as so much "quasi-deconstructionist" excess of interpretation. Shanzer, "Interpreting the *Consolation*," 235-36. For a sympathetic but nevertheless critical view, see Marenbon, *Boethius*: 161-62. Relihan responds to critics and makes the case for his ironic reading of the *Consolation* in Relihan and Heise, *The Prisoner's Philosophy*: 1-92.

³⁸ Though some have drawn the Menippean satire as close to Socrates as Antisthenes, who was among the first to write Socratic dialogues, this is not necessary. Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel," in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986): 51-55. Kristeva is dependent upon Bakhtin, whom, along with Northrop Frye, Relihan discusses at Relihan, *Ancient Menippean Satire*: 3-11. For Menippus as "founder," see William Desmond, *Cynics*, *Ancient Philosophies* (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008): 239. In antiquity Menippean satire was not a recognized genre, in the formal sense, as tragedy and comedy for example. One may still use the term 'genre' in a loose, non-technical sense to refer to this mode of writing. Relihan, *Ancient Menippean Satire*: 39-47. See also Joel C. Relihan,

been considered a Cynic philosopher, although the sources are not entirely unambiguous about this and many ancient critics hostile to Menippus try to destroy his claim to belonging within the Cynic lineage.³⁹ Relihan's explanation is helpful here: "We may see Menippus as a radical interpreter of Cynicism, one who pushes the teaching and example of Diogenes to what none of his contemporaries would call a *logical* extreme."⁴⁰ In any case, the Menippean satire seems to have been originally associated with the Cynics above all, despite the distance the ancient tradition attempts to put between Menippus and the other Cynics. So there can be no doubt about the originally Cynic orientation of the Menippean satire, whether Antisthenes or Menippus introduced it, and the Cynics were nothing if not Socratic.⁴¹ So, although it is true that Menippean satires were written that did not have an obviously Cynic or Socratic orientation, it was at least originally associated with this milieu; one may therefore reasonably expect Boethius to have been aware of this and possibly to have availed himself of this expectation from the genre.

Boethius' *Consolation* is then doubly Socratic, in that it draws on two independent modes of philosophical writing, Socratic dialogue and Menippean satire,

"Menippus in Antiquity and the Renaissance," in *The Cynics: The Cynic Movement in Antiquity and Its Legacy*, ed. R. Bracht Branham and Marie-Odile Goulet-Cazé (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996): 265-80.

³⁹ Relihan, *Ancient Menippean Satire*: 43-44.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁴¹ A.A. Long, "The Socratic Tradition: Diogenes, Crates, and Hellenistic Ethics," in *The Cynics: The Cynic Movement in Antiquity and Its Legacy*, ed. R. Bracht Branham and Marie-Odile Goulet-Cazé (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996): 31-41. For the most recent survey of Cynicism, see Desmond, *Cynics*. For a more theoretically sophisticated approach, see Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*.

both originally connected to the circles around Socrates. No other author of a classical consolation has attempted such a synthesis. What is this mixture supposed to achieve, and what does it mean to have written a *consolatio* as philosophical dialogue featured within a Menippean satire? Though it has been established that there was no Socratic/anti-Socratic tension between the philosophical dialogue and the Menippean satire, there may well be a tension within the Socratic legacy that Boethius is exploiting.

Michel Foucault, in the last years of his life, became deeply interested in the ethical practices, discursive formations, and regimes of governmentality belonging to the ancient Stoics, Epicureans, Platonists, and Cynics. As I explained above, Foucault's late lectures treated the ethical practice that supported the philosophical discursive formation of *παρρησία* or "truth-telling."⁴² This line of investigation, interrupted by Foucault's untimely death, concludes prematurely by dividing ancient philosophy, which linked *ἐπιμέλεια* or "care of the self," to *παρρησία*, "the courage to tell the truth," into two "extreme forms, two opposed modalities:" the "Platonic modality" and the "Cynic modality."⁴³ The former modality Foucault associates with self-contemplation, "the importance and the extent of the *mathēmata*," "ontological recognition of what the soul is in its own being," the "double division" that articulates a separation "of the soul and the body" and "of the true world and the world of appearances." All of this Foucault sums up by identifying the importance of this Platonic modality as its "having been able to link

⁴² See pp. 40-48.

⁴³ Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*: 339.

that form of the care of self to the foundation of metaphysics.” He qualifies this importance by observing that the “distinction between esoteric teaching and the lessons given to all” made the Platonic modality rather impotent politically. The latter, the Cynic modality, on the contrary, arrived at self-knowledge through “exercise, test[s], and practices of endurance;” it also “reduce[d] as strictly as possible the domain of the *mathēmata*,” led back the truth of the human being to “its stripped down animal truth,” withdrew from “metaphysics,” “remain[ing] foreign to its great historical posterity.” “Nevertheless,” Foucault claimed, “it left a certain mode of life in the history of the West, a certain *bios*, which, in different modalities, has played a crucial role.”⁴⁴

In Foucault’s view, the Cynics and the Platonists—with the latter of these two groups Boethius, as a Neoplatonist, associated himself—appear at the opposite poles of the Socratic movement and its legacy. While Foucault works at a level of generality that makes his claims somewhat imprecise, one can safely say that Boethius’ text operates within the tension of this bipolarity. That is, one may take the abstract schematic that Foucault has described and situate its terms as a tension operating across all of the ancient philosophical schools, so that, whether a philosopher professes to be a Cynic, an

⁴⁴ The philosopher’s last words to his audience read as follows: “By raising the question of the relations between care of self and courage of truth, Platonism and Cynicism seem in fact to represent two major forms which face each other and each of which has given rise to a different genealogy: on one side the *psukhē*, knowledge of self, work of purification, access to the other world; on the other side, the *bios*, putting oneself to the test, reduction to animality, battle in this world against the world. “But what I would like to stress in conclusion is this: there is no establishment of the truth without an essential position of otherness; the truth is never the same; there can be truth only in the form of the other world and the other life (*l’autre monde et de la vie autre*).” Ibid., 340.

Epicurean, or a Peripatetic, the texts, practices, and positions that a philosopher takes up all somehow set forth this tension between different forms of life. So, although consolatory discourse seems to have been practiced by philosophers belonging to almost any Socratic affiliation, it remains important that Boethius, an avowed Platonist, chose to situate his consolatory discourse within an originally Cynic mode of writing. Perhaps the text he composed is playing the Menippean satire against the consolatory discourse in order to work across this field of tension between Platonism and Cynicism. He may be attempting to point up the inadequacy of consolatory discourse to the reality of his predicament. Or alternatively he may be undermining the Cynic's σπουδογέλοιον by way of consolation. I take it as a hypothesis that Boethius works across this tension that Foucault describes as running through ancient philosophical thought and practice; the test of this hypothesis must come from the text itself and the reading I develop over the next three chapters.

1.4. Philosophia's Arrival

In the *Consolation*, it is Philosophia who, as *consolator*, offers consolation to Boethius. In order to understand the consolatory discourse that Philosophia delivers, one must attend to her depiction in the text. Comprehending what each persona says and does must proceed from the recognition that it is said by a singular persona who is fully equipped with all the advantages and disadvantages of having to communicate by way of

language and bodily gesture.⁴⁵ That is, Philosophia, as much as Boethius, seems to be an embodied being, and must therefore have desires and purposes of which she is more or less aware as she addresses the ailing Boethius. One would do well, then, to pay attention to those moments where she reveals, not always with full knowledge she is doing so, what these desires and intentions are.

Philosophia's arrival is commonly understood in scholarly work as an epiphanic vision.⁴⁶ While this is not misguided, neither is it exhaustive.⁴⁷ I stress instead the torn garment that she claims to have woven by herself. Relihan has emphasized that Philosophia, reduced to rags by the snatching hands of Stoics and Epicureans, appears exactly as any of the famous Cynic philosophers would have looked.⁴⁸ Boethius writes:

Vestes erant tenuissimis filis subtili artificio, indissolubili materia perfectae, quas, uti post eadem prodente cognovi, suis manibus ipsa texerat; quarum speciem,

⁴⁵ Lerer, perhaps more than any other critic, attunes his analysis to the personae in the *Consolation*. Lerer, *Boethius and Dialogue*: e.g. 100-02, 21-23.

⁴⁶ For classical comparanda see Gruber, *Kommentar zu Boethius « De consolatione philosophiae »*: 67, n. 3; Marenbon, *Boethius*: 153-54; Stephen Blackwood, "Philosophia's Dress: Prayer in Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*," *Dionysius N. S.* 20 (2002); Chadwick, *Boethius: The Consolations of Music, Logic, Theology, and Philosophy*: 225-28; Henry Chadwick, "Theta on Philosophy's Dress in Boethius," *Medium Aevum* 49, no. 2 (1980). On epiphany more generally in Greco-Roman antiquity, see G. Petridou and Verity Platt, eds., *Epiphany: Envisioning the Divine in the Ancient World* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming); Verity Platt, *Facing the Gods. Epiphany and Representation in Graeco-Roman Art, Literature and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); G. Petridou, "On Divine Epiphanies: Contextualizing and Conceptualizing Epiphanic Narratives in Greek Literature and Culture (7th C BC - 2nd C AD)" (PhD diss., University of Exeter, 2006); R. Koch Piettre, "Le corps des dieux dans les epiphanies divines en Grèce ancienne" (PhD diss., École pratique des hautes études, Paris, 1996).

⁴⁷ Many scholars have emphasized the connection between her garment and her divinity. She seems also to resemble Athena, with her *peplos*, in particular. For classical parallels, see Gruber, *Kommentar zu Boethius « De consolatione philosophiae »*: 67-68.

⁴⁸ Relihan goes on to understand this as a "comic" juxtaposition. I see it rather as her crucial contribution to the Socratic community, almost as if the animalistic Cynics and the otherworldly Platonists are meeting to resolve their differences. Joel C. Relihan, "Old Comedy, Menippean Satire, and Philosophy's Tattered Robes in Boethius' *Consolation*," *Illinois Classical Studies* XV, no. 1 (1990): 188.

veluti fumosas imagines solet, caligo quaedam neglectae vetustatis obduxerat. Harum in extremo margine Π graecum, in supremo vero Θ, legebatur intextum atque in utrasque litteras in scalarum modum gradus quidam insigniti videbantur, quibus ab inferiore ad superius elementum esset ascensus. Eandem tamen vestem violentorum quorundam sciderant⁴⁹ manus et particulas quas quisque potuit abstulerant. (I.1.3-4)

Her garments had been perfected with the finest threads by a subtle craftsmanship, and with an inseparable material (*materia*) which, as I discovered after she informed me, she had woven herself with her own hands. Of which garments the appearance (*speciem*), as is usual for smoky funeral masks (*imagines*), the darkness of a certain neglected longevity had overshadowed. And on the lower border (*margine*) of these garments there was inscribed an inwoven Greek *Pi*, and on the higher border rather a *Theta*. But between these letters there appeared marked down a certain progression in the manner of steps, by which there was an ascent from the lower to the higher element. The same garment, though, the hands of certain violent men had torn in pieces and had snatched off what little bits (*particulas*) each had been able [to grab].

At this stage of the argument, Philosophia appears as a Cynic philosopher, since the Cynics are associated in classical literature with such ragged garments and a grimy appearance. We may consult Diogenes Laertius' *Lives*, Book 6, for comparison. He tells us that Antisthenes once told Diogenes the Cynic, who had asked him for a tunic, simply to fold his cloak (Diog. Laert. 6.6-7), and that he established a fashion of doubling his cloak without a fold, and with no other garment (6.13). Laertius presents Diogenes of Sinope as the first to wear two cloaks, in order that he might sleep in them (6.22; or on them 6.62-63). The writer also mentions Diogenes' cloak while relating the

⁴⁹ "For *scindo* = *futuo*, *pedico*, see Laber, 25 'an concupiisti eugium scindere', Priap. 54.2 'qui medium vult te scindere', 77.9 'furum scindere podices solebam', there are various such metaphors in the spare fragments of mime and farce. Both genres must reflect low sexual slang and crude popular humour. Some similar metaphors, as we shall see, are found in Plautus." J. N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990): 150.

circumstances in which he was found deceased from self-suffocation (6.77). For one more comparison, I may mention Crates and his wife Hipparchia. There are two lines of Menander preserved in Crates' *Life* that present the charming image of the cloak that the two Cynics shared. Diogenes Laertius includes an anecdote in the latter's *Life*—the only one of the *Lives* devoted to a woman—in which she argued with one Theodorus the Atheist (6.98), whom she excused herself for verbally abusing. The anecdote continues:

He did not reply to what she had said, but lifted up her garment; but Hipparchia was neither frightened nor ashamed, as a woman [would have been]. But even when he spoke to her, [asking if] she was “the woman who left the shuttle so near the woof,” she said, “I am, Theodorus, but I cannot seem to you to have planned poorly in this matter, if, the time which I would spend at the woof, this I give up to practicing philosophy [*paideia*].”⁵⁰

These comparisons illustrate how Boethius' text draws upon well-known images of the Cynic school to present this aspect of Philosophia. Just as in the case of Hipparchia, Philosophia's weaving is the practice of philosophy—the substance of her garment, as has been pointed out, is the progress from practical to theoretical philosophy⁵¹—and her garment features in a sexual violation that results from a philosophical dispute. It is not that Philosophia only appears as a Cynic, to the exclusion of her other associations, or that Boethius had this narrative from Diogenes Laertius before him as he wrote, but rather that she is presented both in the appearance of a divinity bursting beyond the

⁵⁰ “ὁ δὲ πρὸς μὲν τὸ λεχθὲν οὐδὲν ἀπήντησεν, ἀνέσυρε δ' αὐτῆς θοιμάτιον· ἀλλ' οὔτε κατεπλάγη Ἴππαρχία οὔτε διαταράχθη ὡς γυνή. ἀλλὰ καὶ εἰπόντος αὐτῆ, αὕτη ἐστίν, ἢ τὰς παρ' ἰστοῖς ἐκλιπούσα κερκίδας;” (Eur. *Bacch.* 1236) “ἐγώ,” φησίν, “εἰμί, Θεόδωρε· ἀλλὰ μὴ κακῶς σοι δοκῶ βεβουλεύσθαι περὶ αὐτῆς, εἰ, τὸν χρόνον ὃν ἔμελλον ἰστοῖς προσαναλώσειν, τοῦτον εἰς παιδείαν κατεχρησάμην;” Diog. Laert. 6.98.

⁵¹ As pointed out by Chadwick, *Boethius: The Consolations of Music, Logic, Theology, and Philosophy*.

highest point of the heavens and as a Cynic typically would be shown, lower than even the animals.

This first point about her appearance allows us to identify Philosophia in this scene as a Cynic philosopher, who has come to Boethius to console him in his grief; she exploits at least this one association. That Philosophia here adopts a Cynic guise distinguishes her from Boethius whose affiliation was decidedly Neoplatonic. To this point, it is worth quoting again Boethius' repeated declaration of purpose from the second commentary on Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*: bringing the views of Plato and Aristotle into a "certain harmony" ("*quodammodo... consonantiam*").⁵² So the two positions here represented fill out the whole gambit of philosophical theory and practice, as Foucault has outlined them.

To understand why at least in this opening scene Boethius has positioned his persona opposite a Cynic Philosophia, one must look to prose I.3, where Boethius, having reclaimed his power of speech (thanks to Philosophia's first treatment of him, rubbing his eyes with her garment), asks her why she has come to his prison. She responds by asking,

An...te, alumne, desererem nec sarcinam quam mei nominis invidia sustulisti communicato tecum labore partiter? Atqui Philosophiae fas non erat incommittatum relinquere iter innocentis. Meam scilicet criminationem vererer et quasi novum aliquid acciderit perhorrescerem? Nunc enim primum censes apud improbos mores lacessitam periculis esse sapientiam? (I.3.4-6)

Do you suppose that I would desert you, my nursling, and not share the burden, which you have borne for the hatred of my name, with the labor divided between

⁵² *In de interpretatione* 2.3. For this reference, see Relihan and Heise, *The Prisoner's Philosophy*: 203 n. 3.

us? But it would not be right for Philosophia to abandon the innocent on an unaccompanied path. I would be afraid, wouldn't I, that I would stand accused and, just as if something unprecedented were happening, I would be horrified? But do you think that now for the first time wisdom is threatened with dangers among evil habits?

This sequence of rhetorical questions is never answered directly; in this important way she evades the question in what sense she will share the "*labor*" of Boethius' persecution. Instead, Philosophia lists a series of philosophers of many different Socratic sects, Anaxagoras,⁵³ Socrates, and Zeno, Seneca, Canius, and Soranus, who all have been persecuted for her sake (I.3.6-10). It will become clear that she expects the same for Boethius. That she regards this as a noble cause we may gather from her calling Socrates' execution the "victory of unjust death" ("*iniustae victoriam mortis*," I.3.6). Immediately following this, she suggests that Socrates' "*hereditas*" was snatched up and torn apart by the "mob of Epicureans and Stoics, and certain others." The conceit of Philosophia's garment appears here again, so one learns that these destroyers of Socrates' legacy, who "set about to seize it" ("*raptum ire*"), raped Philosophia herself: "The garment which I had woven with my own hands they tore up and, believing that I had yielded all of myself, with little scraps ripped away from it they took off," ("*vestem quam meis texueram manibus disciderunt abreptisque ab ea panniculis totam me sibi cessisse credentes abiere*," I.3.7). What the Stoics and Epicureans snatch away only "*in partem*"

⁵³ Anaxagoras seems to have been included here, despite his "presocratic" status (a modern notion we should not expect to find in the ancients), because he so closely resembled Socrates that in Plato's *Apology* Socrates could say his accusers mistook him for Anaxagoras (*Ap.* 26d).

(I.3.6), only as the “*vestigia* of our *habitus*” (I.3.8), Socrates, in all his robust sexuality, seems to have had entirely. This is where Boethius’ well-known admiration for Platonic thought becomes most important. With his trust in the old Socratics, the Socratic “*hereditas*” violated by rape among the Stoics and Epicureans, Boethius holds the potential to be a true “lover of wisdom,” the kind of lover that Socrates once was. Philosophia, here taking the Cynic’s pose and representing the opposite pole of the philosophical spectrum actually complements Boethius’ Platonism, as the bearer of a Socratic truth that contrasts with his own master’s (Plato’s) Socrates. Boethius’ downfall, from Philosophia’s point of view, offers a unique opportunity to repeat the death of Socrates, to stitch up her ragged garment and reunite the disparate threads of argument, and constitute once again the divided philosophical community. It will be required of Boethius, then, that he should go to his exemplary death as memorably and courageously as Socrates did so many centuries before him. But he also must go having Philosophia “*tota*,” as it were, and not only in part as the martyred Stoics who preceded him at Rome. A parley will be necessary to ensure that Boethius carries this truth.

But when she discovers Boethius in his cell rolling the honeyed words of the Muses over his tear-stained lips, she sees right away that it is no time for such bold plans and schemes so grand. One could imagine a somewhat different Boethius seated quietly in his cell, awaiting Philosophia’s arrival with the still certainty of a sage. It would have been a very different dialogue. But this is not the man whom she finds; no, she has a

weepy poet on her hands.⁵⁴ One must understand her response to the Muses not as one of calculated strategy (she had other plans for her philosopher), but rather of surprised improvisation. Her immediate response is to cry out, “*Quis..has scenicas meretriculas ad hunc aegrum permisit accedere, quae dolores eius non modo nullis remediis foverent, verum dulcibus insuper alerent venenis?*” “Who allowed to approach this sick man these stagy whores, who having no remedies not only exacerbate his grief (*dolores*), but nourish it with sweet venom?” (I.1.8). As if the tone of this question were not clearly one of great agitation, Boethius describes her in saying this, with language typical of epic as “*commota paulisper ac torvis inflammata luminibus,*” “irritated for a spell and enflamed in her wild eyes” (I.1.7).⁵⁵ She proceeds to declare her rights and claims Boethius as her own. Since she “nursed him” as a young man on “Eleatic and Platonic studies” (“*Eleaticis atque Academicis studiis innutritum*” I.1.10), the Muses must “leave to *my* [that is, *Philosophia*’s] Muses this man to be cared for and to be healed” (“*...meisque eum Musis curandum sanandumque relinquit!*” I.1.11).

⁵⁴ On the complicated antagonism between poetry and philosophy in Boethius’ *Consolation*, see Raymond Barfield, “Boethius, Dionysius, and the Forms,” in *The Ancient Quarrel between Philosophy and Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁵⁵ In truth, her closest analogue here is Virgil’s Juno from the *Aeneid*, infamous for her inescapable wrath and undying hatred of the Trojans. This will be important in Chapter 3, pp. 205-278, for a proper understanding of the Hercules’ poem that ends Book IV of the *Consolation*. On Virgil as an intertext for the *Consolation*, see Ann W. Astell, *Job, Boethius, and Epic Truth* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994): 41-67.

Just so the consolatory discourse is introduced. Philosophia's "Muses" make up all but three of the poems in the text.⁵⁶ Here she connects her role as his nurse to her role as his healer, and indicates that the principle medium for this will be her music. So the consolation proper and the Menippean structure of the text are the products of Philosophia's diversion from her initial plans upon arrival. She will have to heal Boethius in order to do that which she originally intended to do. Thus the critics who emphasize the protreptical character of the *Consolation* are not entirely amiss,⁵⁷ but they err in that consolatory discourse is always in some sense protreptical, in that it addresses someone who is less than accomplished and perfected in their philosophical wisdom. The question must be, why in each case is a protreptical, consolatory address necessary? In Boethius' case, he is completely void of philosophical wisdom now. Protreptical address is required here for a man who to all appearances had acquired what philosophy had to teach him, who already knows all of what Philosophia must recall for him (prose III.12.1). For he has been nursed on philosophy, as he testifies in several places.⁵⁸ Boethius narrates how he came to recognize Philosophia at I.3.2, whom he recalls as "*nutricem meam, cuius ab adulescentia laribus obversatus fueram*," "my nurse, at whose *Lares* I had often been present from my adolescence." Philosophia must come to help Boethius because he has already been a brilliant philosopher in the past, one of her favorite sons. When she says,

⁵⁶ The Muses deliver one by depriving Boethius of his voice, and Boethius recites two of his own.

⁵⁷ E.g. Courcelle, *La Consolation de Philosophie dans la tradition littéraire: antécédents et postérité de Boèce*.

⁵⁸ See also the prose passages at I.1.10, I.2.2, I.3.2, II.4.1, II.4.14, and V.5.3.

“But it would not be right for Philosophia to abandon the innocent on an unaccompanied path,” Philosophia emphasizes that it is the duty of the philosopher, and so her own as well, to come to other philosophers and remind them of what their shared way of life demands of them.

Dolor, as Philosophia’s behavior seems to suggest, is the affect against which philosophical consciousness is structured. It is the inability of philosophers to complete their impossible mourning for Socrates that establishes them in their form of life. For Boethius, firmly positioned within this philosophical lineage, can only repeat the loss of Socrates by choosing “the victory of an unjust death” (“*iniustae victoriam mortis*,” prose I.3.6); he cannot resolve it. The attempt to distance himself from philosophy, creating an independent voice for Philosophia and showing himself as a miserable poet, in order to enable self-consolation inevitably fails to the extent that Philosophia, and not the Muses, takes up the task of consolation. As the instantiation of Boethius’ own subjective commitment to philosophy, Philosophia herself also testifies to this incomplete mourning, this peculiar melancholia, that characterizes the philosophical life.⁵⁹ And so, she is ever in search of a new Socrates, someone who, as the *Phaedo*’s Socrates suggests, may charm

⁵⁹ Here I am using melancholia in a modern, psychoanalytic sense. This is a point that I will be developing throughout the other chapters of the dissertation. For psychoanalytic interpretations of melancholia, see Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works* ed. James Strachey (New York: 1917); Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); Slavoj Žižek, “Melancholy and the Act,” in *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?* (London and New York: Verso, 2002).

away the fear harbored in dying (78a).⁶⁰ For there can be no grief among the wise; a requisite disavowal of all that would be cause for grief is the condition for practicing Socratic philosophy.⁶¹ The community of sages is founded upon this refusal of mourning, and there is no stronger argument for the philosophical defeat of the fear of death than a sage who dies fearlessly. If Philosophia will make a second Socrates of Boethius, she will first have to get him past whatever it is that has plunged him into inescapable melancholia.

1.5. Boethius' Melancholia

Philosophia must console Boethius in order for Boethius' self-consolation to succeed. But at another level, internal to the text's movement, this consolation is the condition for her achievement of her purpose, re-establishing the philosophical community upon the exemplary death of Boethius, the very repetition of Socrates' death that the philosophical community requires in order to realize itself. In this section, it is necessary to discuss Boethius' illness and Philosophia's diagnosis of that illness, in order to understand what the terms of Philosophia's consolation must be. I show that Boethius' illness represents the major characteristics of melancholia, both as the ancients

⁶⁰ Though this issue surfaces as early as book one of the present text, and at least marginally in the other texts that I will discuss, it will not be possible to arrive at an answer to philosophy's compulsion to speak to grief until the conclusion of this dissertation.

⁶¹ Consider the prohibition on lamentation among heroes and gods in poetry from the *Republic* 386a-388d, as well as 603e-608a.

understood it and at least in part as it appears in contemporary psychoanalysis as well.⁶² For, Boethius' melancholia conceals by disavowal his political failure, as it appears in prose I.4, allowing Philosophia to engage Boethius at the level of his fantasy, rather than confronting the traumatizing reality of Boethius' circumstances directly—the Senate's betrayal and Theoderic's persecution of him.⁶³

Boethius' melancholia is first conveyed by way of the poem composed in elegiac couplets, the meter traditionally associated with Latin love elegy. It is worth quoting the poem at length to appreciate how Boethius exploits the traditional associations of genre and theme at the opening of the *Consolation*:

⁶² Relihan first suggested this redefinition of Boethius' condition. Relihan and Heise, *The Prisoner's Philosophy*: 54. He does not, however, connect Philosophia's misdiagnosis with the foreclosure of the political context for Boethius' downfall.

⁶³ I will be using terminology that comes from Lacanian psychoanalytic discourse. There is only space to introduce the specific terms I am using here. The following self-critique I have found especially helpful as an introduction to the major technical terms: "*The Sublime Object* fails to deploy the complex interconnections within the triad Real-Symbolic-Imaginary: the entire triad is reflected within each of its three elements.

"There are three modalities of the Real: the "real Real" (the horrifying Thing, from Irma's throat to the Alien); the "symbolic Real" (the real as consistency: the signifier reduced to a senseless formula, like quantum physics formulas which can no longer be translated back into—or related to—the everyday experience of our life-world); and the "imaginary Real" (the mysterious *je ne sais quoi*, the unfathomable "something" on account of which the sublime dimension shines through an ordinary object). The Real is thus, in effect, all three dimensions at the same time: the abyssal vortex which ruins every consistent structure; the mathematized consistent structure of reality; the fragile pure appearance. And, in a strictly homologous way, there are three modalities of the Symbolic (the real—the signifier reduced to a senseless formula; the imaginary—the Jungian "symbols"; and the symbolic—speech, meaningful language); and three modalities of the Imaginary (the real—fantasy, which is precisely an imaginary scenario occupying the place of the Real; the imaginary—image as such in its fundamental function of a decoy; and the symbolic—again, the Jungian "symbols" or New Age archetypes)." Slavoj Žižek, "Foreword to the Second Edition: Enjoyment within the Limits of Reason Alone," in *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London and Brooklyn: Verso, 1991): xii. For a more thorough and lucid introduction, presented by way of an analysis that treats Lacan in Platonic terms, see Micaela Janan, "From Plato to Freud and Lacan: A History of the Subject," in "*When the Lamp is Shattered*": *Desire and Narrative in Catullus* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994): 15-32.

- 1 *Carmina qui quondam studio florente peregi
flebilis heu maestos cogor inire modos.
Ecce mihi lacerae dictant scribenda Camenae
et veris elegi fletibus ora rigant.*
- 5 *Has saltem nullus potuit pervincere terror
ne nostrum comites prosequerentur iter.
Gloria felicis olim viridisque iuventae,
solantur maesti nunc mea fata senis.
Venit enim properata malis inopina senectus
10 et dolor aetatem iussit inesse suam.
Intempestivi funduntur vertice cani
et tremit effeto corpore laxa cutis.
Mors hominum felix, quae se nec dulcibus annis
inserit et maestis saepe vocata venit!*
- 15 *Eheu, quam surda miseros avertitur aure
et flentes oculos claudere saeva negat!
Dum levibus male fida bonis Fortuna faveret
paene caput tristis merserat hora meum:
nunc quia fallacem mutavit nubila vultum
20 protrahit ingratas impia vita moras.
Quid me felicem totiens iactastis, amici?
Qui cecidit, stabili non erat ille gradu.⁶⁴*

This carefully crafted opening poem divides into two almost exactly equal halves, 1-12

(twelve lines) and 13-22 (ten lines); 1-12 breaks up again into two groups of six, and 13-

⁶⁴ An English translation of this verse: "I who once wrote songs with flowering zeal, tearful, oh! I am forced to enter grievous modes. Look, the fierce Muses dictate to me what to write and elegiacs wet my mouth with true tears. No terror that our companions might follow this path has been able to conquer completely these ladies, at least. Once the glory of felicitous and green youth, now they console my fates of mournful age. Old age, unexpected, has come, hastened on by evils, and grief ordered that its season be upon me. Untimely whiteness pours over the top of my head and loose skin shakes on my wasted body. Felicitous for men is Death, who enters not in sweet years, and comes often called to those mourning! Oh how with deaf ear she turns from the miserable and cruelly refuses to close my eyes! While Fortune, hardly faithful, favored my trivial goods, not yet had the sad hour bowed my head; now because the shady girl changed her lying face, my cursed life drags along thankless delays. Why did you so often take me to be felicitous, friends? Who has fallen, he was not stable of gait."

22 into three parts, four lines, four lines, and a two-line closing couplet.⁶⁵ In the first part (1-6), the poem establishes itself as written verse, and contrasts the happy composition of more youthful poetry with the exercises the fallen Boethius composes for himself. One finds here a defeated man, as the chiasmic arrangement of the first four complete metrical units, in the first couplet, artfully highlights: “*Carmina qui quondam*” and “*cogor inire modos*” contrast two different modes of poetic art,⁶⁶ each appropriate to the respective opposing affective conditions, described by “*studio florente peregi*” and “*Flebilis heu maestos*” (I.1.1-2). Moreover, the heavy ‘o’ front-vowel sounds that close the pentameter of line 2, following the more open, and thus lighter, ‘e,’ ‘eu,’ and ‘ae’ before the caesura, reinforce this effect, leading into a rather somber pause at the line’s end.⁶⁷ The next two lines introduce the Muses, who force him to write in “elegiacs” (“*elegi*,” I.1.4); they do not provide him with a voice for his sorrows but rather “dictate” (“*dictant*,” I.1.3) what he should sing. Nevertheless, in 5-6 the poet expresses moderated gratitude that no “*terror*” chases away the Muses. The “*terror*,” isolated as it is in line 6, is most significant: Boethius fears that his “*comites*” will end up on the same path as him. These companions

⁶⁵ Gruber, *Kommentar zu Boethius « De consolatione philosophiae »*: 54-61; O'Daly, *The Poetry of Boethius*: 106-07; Scheible, *Die Gedichte in der Consolatio Philosophiae des Boethius*: 12-16.

⁶⁶ If Crabbe correctly associates these opening lines with Ovid’s *Amores*, then these two modes would be epic and elegy respectively. Crabbe, “Literary Design in the *De Consolatione Philosophiae*.” There is nothing, however, that suggests Boethius had ever composed epic. His borrowing from Ovid may contrast the *De Institutione Musica* with the poetry he writes now, so that two poetic styles are not contrasted, but rather philosophical “music” and poetry proper.

⁶⁷ On the intertextual relationships with the epic and elegiac traditions evoked in these four lines, see Astell, *Job, Boethius, and Epic Truth*: 41-42; Lerer, *Boethius and Dialogue*: 96-97.

are usually understood to be the very Muses of whom Boethius is speaking,⁶⁸ so that all the way through line 8 his train of thought remains focused on them. The restriction of this clause to one line possibly suggests a digression; after all, the first-person plural “*nostrum*” could be taken to include the Muses in the possessive, so that the *comites* are as much the Muses’ as Boethius’ *comites*. The “*nostrum*” could, on the other hand, be the so-called “royal we,” common enough in classical Latin that one may reasonably expect it here. However, Boethius everywhere else in this poem refers to his persona with singular possessive adjectives and singular pronouns. The question is whether there is any compelling reason to introduce some other outsiders who could be the *comites* of Boethius and the Muses. I believe there is. At I.4 Boethius will explain in more detail, after Philosophia has returned him to his voice and responded to his question that she will be his fellow-traveller (I.3.4-6),⁶⁹ that he fears his having been ruined by his enemies will embolden those enemies, and that his allies and friends will be further persecuted by them (I.4.46). It is crucial for my argument though that at this point he cannot come any closer to this fear though than he does here. It is if his consciousness, even in as dim a state as it is represented here, is shying away from recognizing some terrible danger. Still, it may be that Boethius does not fear that the Muses would have failed to join him in his

⁶⁸ Gruber, *Kommentar zu Boethius « De consolatione philosophiae »*: 57; Scheible, *Die Gedichte in der Consolatio Philosophiae des Boethius*: 13.

⁶⁹ See section 1.4 above.

imprisonment, but rather that he fears for these others who are only evoked covertly yet suggestively in this text.

From these unnameable others Boethius then turns away and focuses inwardly on his suffering and degeneration. One learns of Boethius' physical degeneration, corresponding to his psychological state, from lines 6-12; indeed, he has the overall appearance and comportment of the living dead. Passing from the "glory of his green youth"—which he describes as *felix* here at line 7 for the ironic twist in line 13, where death is *felix* for those who have fallen on hard times—he goes on to describe himself as "in bitter old age," indeed, as having aged so prematurely that the hair "on the peak" on his head has "whitened," that his "loose skin hangs on his used up body" ("*maesti...senis*," I.1.8; "*vertice cani / et tremit effeto corpore laxa cutis*," I.1.11-12).⁷⁰ It is at line 10 though that the programmatic "*dolor*" appears, the affect that belongs commonly to all consolation literature as its target to be overcome. The mention of *dolor*'s "*aetas*" here introduces the commonplace of the seasons of life—the "season" of grief can only mean autumn here, contrasting with his "green youth" the darker season in which Death (*Mors*) pervades the world. And so she makes her entry in line 13.

Lines 13-22 by discuss in an allegorical presentation the state of Boethius' desire, or lack thereof, corresponding to his physical ruin. This section may be divided into three parts: first, his current state of desire, second, the cause of that state, and, third, the

⁷⁰ On the distinction between *felix* and *beatitudo* developed in this text, see section 2.3.2 below.

closing couplet that brings the poem to a close. From 13-16 he declares that “felicitous for men is Death who enters not in the sweet years but comes often called to those mourning” (“*Mors hominum felix quae se nec dulcibus annis / Inserit et maestis saepe vocata venit.*” I.1.13-14), and laments that Death “turns away with deaf ear” from him and “denies that his weeping eyes may close” (“*flentes oculos claudere...negat,*” I.1.16). It would not be a stretch to imagine lines 14-15, in which “*Mors,*” Death, is personified, as referring to any lover who refuses to yield, but lines 13 and 16 contrast strongly in tone, though, since in these lines it is apparent that his desire is not for sexual gratification or happiness in love, but an ultimate end to his suffering.⁷¹ Such personification serves to establish this poem as a Roman love elegy of an especially morbid kind, a variation on the model handed down from Ovid, Propertius, and Tibullus, in which Boethius desires not a beautiful young woman but the end of his life. But this personification of death quickly passes to the personification of “*Fortuna,*” so that the reader is confused and must ask just who it is that Boethius really wants. This slippery identification of Fortuna and Mors anticipates another uncertain identification of Fortuna with Philosophia. It is as if all three of these women whom Boethius loves share some virtual unity.⁷² For now, I only stress the quick passage from Mors to Fortuna though.

⁷¹ See also below at section 2.3.1, where Boethius is convinced that the humans are essentially animal, rational, and mortal. The desire for death does not stop at the annihilation of his worldly body, but she points toward a deeper desire for non-existence.

⁷² This is in fact precisely what I will argue. All of the characters are simply projections of Boethius’ strained imagination. This is both factually what the literary act of invention involves, and reflexively what

Boethius continues, complaining that, with his “hardly faithful Fortune” having “changed her lying face,” now he feels his “disgraceful life drags on through unwanted delays.” (“*fida...Fortuna*,” I.1.17; “*fallacem mutavit...vultum*,” I.1.19; “*protrahit ingratas impia vita moras*,” I.1.20). That Fortuna can change her face anticipates the prosopopoeia at II.2 where Philosophia will “change her face” and adopt the mask of Fortuna. But as for Boethius, by losing Fortuna, he has suffered a great loss in love, so he imagines, and now suffers from a death wish. He lacks, however, the fortitude and the active power to realize this desire.

In summary, Boethius appears in total ruin: he is physically wasted, he has no trust in his fortunes, and above all he no longer has any will to live. He is powerless to remove himself from life, and death will not take mercy upon him. He exists in a state of total passivity, in a life that is nothing more than the inertia of its own persistence. This impression is reinforced by the prose passage that follows this short elegy. There the text provides the context in which this short elegy is supposed to have been written. Beyond his physical and spiritual exhaustion, Boethius persists in a state of total mental passivity as well; as I emphasized already, the Muses have captured his intelligence and use his voice as a medium for spewing their “sweet venom.” But it is his reaction, or lack thereof,

Boethius seems to have conceived them to be within his own metaphysical division of being. See sections 2.2 and 3.5 below.

when Philosophia enters to send away the Muses and return Boethius to himself that demands attention:

At ego, cuius acies lacrimis mersa caligaret nec dinoscere possem quoniam haec esset mulier tam imperiosae auctoritatis, obstipui visuque in terram defixo quidnam deinceps esset actura expectare tacitus coepi. (I.1.13)

But I, whose vision was obscured, because it was plunged in tears, could not distinguish who this woman of such commanding authority could be; I was stunned and with my gaze fixed on the earth I, in silence, waited for just what she was about to do.

Again, Boethius is “*tacitus*,” silent, and, “*expectare*,” “awaiting” the action that his visitor, unrecognizable to him, will take. This point is reinforced when Philosophia in the second prose section of Book I declares that Boethius is oppressed by a “*stupor*,” so that he remains silent and does not recognize her (“*Agnoscisne me? quid taces? pudore an stupore siluisti? mallet pudore, sed te, ut video, stupor oppressit.*” I.2.4). Returning to the passage immediately above, Boethius’ mind is vacant, and his gaze is “obscured” and planted on the “earth” (“*visuque in terram defixo*”). The passivity of Boethius is figured in Neoplatonic terms as a reduction of his being to its pure materiality, the lowest order of being within this philosophical system.⁷³ Boethius has undergone a radical reduction to his minimal existence.

⁷³ The four vehicles of knowledge in Boethius’ Neoplatonic doctrine are *sensus*, *imaginatio*, *ratio*, and *intelligentia*, or sense, imagination, reason, and intellect. The sensible “has no power outside matter” and stands as the “inferior” form of knowledge with respect to the other three types of knowledge. Gerard Watson, “The Concept of Phantasia from the Late Hellenistic Period to Early Neoplatonism,” *ANRW* 36, no. 7 (1994): 4806-7; John Cornell Magee, *Boethius on Signification and Mind*, *Philosophia antiqua* (Leiden: Brill, 1989): 93-149.

At I.2, Philosophia scrutinizes carefully Boethius' condition, and determines that he is "suffering from *lethargia*, a common illness of deluded minds" ("*lethargum patitur, communem illusarum mentium morbum*" I.2.5). Emphasizing her claim upon him, she adds that "he has forgotten himself for a spell," and that "he will easily recall himself, if he indeed knew us once before" ("*Sui paulisper oblitus est. Recordabitur facile, si quidem nos ante cognoverit,*" I.2.6). It is possible that Boethius has put little more than a pun in her mouth, as the etymology of "lethargy" suggests the "forgetting" that Philosophia mentions. However, a study by Schmid, in which he went through all the relevant medical literature, shows that this diagnosis is not completely artificial. Rather, it depends upon a close correspondence between the symptoms Boethius shows and the symptoms one suffering in the condition of lethargy would show.⁷⁴ One must remember, though, that the diagnosis of lethargy does not come from outside the text, as if Cassiodorus or Procopius had told us that Boethius had been especially lethargic following his exile. No, it is Philosophia, a persona unique to the *Consolation*, who decides that Boethius is lethargic.⁷⁵

There is another possibility. Schmid interrupts the argument of his paper to ask quite rightly, "warum hat Boethius sein πάθος nicht lieber unter dem Bilde der

⁷⁴ Wolfgang Schmid, "Philosophisches und Medizinisches in der "Consolatio Philosophiae" des Boethius," in *Römische Philosophie*, ed. Gregor Maurach (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1976): 341-70.

⁷⁵ It was Relihan's observation that Philosophia's diagnosis may indeed be motivated, an attempt to make herself "useful" to the afflicted Boethius, associating his condition with the forgetfulness that she is especially well qualified to treat. Relihan and Heise, *The Prisoner's Philosophy*: 54.

Melancolie dargestellt, die mitunter... wenigstens teilweise in eine gewisse Nähe zur Lethargie gerückt wird?"⁷⁶ Schmid had already mentioned elsewhere that

Die Krankheit wird nicht selten zusammen mit der den äussersten Gegensatz zu ihr darstellenden φρενίτις behandelt; wenn sie in Aufzählungen mehrfach auch neben der Melancholie erscheint, so wohl deshalb, weil die 'melancholischen' und 'lethargischen' Krankheitsformen bei aller Unterschiedlichkeit gewisse Ähnlichkeiten aufweisen.⁷⁷

Schmid answers his question by referring to 953a10 of the Aristotelian *Problemata* XXX and Cicero's *Div. I.81* (referring to the Aristotelian text),⁷⁸ where a melancholic temperament belongs properly to those nearest to god, to those heroes, philosophers, and poets who nearly transcend their human limits. But Boethius, as Schmid points out, is in a state of utter "privation" from philosophy when the *Consolation* begins. "Sein *morbus illusae mentis* (1, pr. 2, 5) erweist sich als dem wahren philosophischen Wesen völlig konträr: nur insofern diese Krankheit das echte Erkennen erschwert, ja unmöglich macht, bedarf sie der Behandlung." He observes conclusively that "Ist dies ein Grund, der gegen die Wahl der Melancholie als Krankheitsbild sprechen konnte [...]."⁷⁹ Yet, to achieve this dismissal of melancholia, Schmid must explain why Boethius does not experience the "nearly ineliminable need for sleep" that Celsus said was typical of lethargy ("*inexpugnabilis paene dormiendi necessitas*," *Med.* 3.18-20). He could perhaps have

⁷⁶ Schmid, "Philosophisches und Medizinisches in der "Consolatio Philosophiae" des Boethius," 359.

⁷⁷ He cites Chrysippus' fragment 238 and Diocles of Carystus' *Epistle to Antigonus* 3 as evidence for this claim. *Ibid.*, 347.

⁷⁸ This same Aristotelian passage appears also in Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* at I.33.80. This dialogue may well be the source of the five-book structure of Boethius' *Consolation*. On Cicero as a source for Boethius' text, see Lerer, *Boethius and Dialogue*: 32-45.

⁷⁹ Schmid, "Philosophisches und Medizinisches in der "Consolatio Philosophiae" des Boethius," 360.

escaped this difficulty by claiming that Boethius is dreaming when Philosophia comes to him, so that this would be a dream vision of the sort one often finds in late ancient literature.⁸⁰ That solution is not without its difficulties though, not the least that Boethius never arises from any slumber, a theme that Schmid rightly recognizes would be expected in a philosopher “awakened” to the meaning of his life.⁸¹

I suggest another course. Perhaps Philosophia’s diagnosis elides the ambiguity of the symptoms; if it can be shown that Boethius’ symptoms fit better, or at least just as well, the diagnosis of melancholia, then we may understand her diagnosis as a certain philosophical *misprision* or *méconnaissance* of the symptoms.⁸² If, as the Aristotelian text suggests, melancholia is distinctive of exceptional men in general and of philosophical temperaments in particular,⁸³ then perhaps one may be guided to seek another motivation for Philosophia’s diagnosis. From the close reading of the programmatic first poem of the *Consolation* and the prose section that immediately follows, the following symptoms can be identified as indicative of Boethius’ “illness:” he experiences terror and *dolor*, he has entered the “season” of old age prematurely and his flesh hangs loose from his body, he

⁸⁰ Patricia Cox Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity: Studies in the Imagination of a Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994): 14-123.

⁸¹ See also Philip Edward Philips, "Lady Philosophy's Therapeutic Method: The 'Gentler' and the 'Stronger' Remedies in Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae*," *Medieval English Studies* 9, no. 2 (2002): 9-14. In this article, Philips tries to show through Caelius Aurelianus that Boethius could be lethargic, even though he never mentions sleep on the basis it is “meant to be inferred” (16).

⁸² Relihan seems to have arrived at the same diagnosis, and the same sense that Philosophia is interpreting the symptoms to her own advantage. His reading does not develop the line of reasoning that I follow though, instead giving no more than one paragraph to Boethius’ melancholia. Relihan and Heise, *The Prisoner's Philosophy*: 54.

⁸³ This is an observation of which we know Boethius was aware since he has Philosophia refer to Cicero’s *De divinatione* at prose V.4.1.

persists in a suicidal state though he is powerless to act upon this impulse, he experiences a delusional attachment to a lost love object (Fortuna), he is taciturn and indeed voiceless, and last of all he is fixated on the earth element, unable to rise to the contemplation of celestial forms.

Jackson's analysis of melancholia briefly discusses the theoretical position of Galen, whose positions were essentially canonized in the medical schools of late antiquity.⁸⁴ As is well known enough, Galen bases his theoretical work on the four temperaments, and "melancholia," or black bile is one of the humors which, in combination with the other humors (phlegm, blood, and yellow bile) and combinations of wetness, dryness, heat, and cold, make up the four temperaments.⁸⁵ Moreover, there is an ancient tradition according to which melancholia, or black bile, seems to have had a special place among these as somehow the fundamental humor.⁸⁶ It is characterized by a combination of cold and dry components, and in this way associated with the earth

⁸⁴ For a general introduction to Galen and his place in the history of ancient medicine, see Vivian Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, Second ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2013): 222-53. It is possible that Boethius was familiar with Galen's works. Schmid observes a passage where the same terms in Galen (V.376, Kühn) and Boethius' *Consolation* (prose I.6.21) describe the weaker and stronger remedies. Schmid, "Philosophisches und Medizinisches in der "Consolatio Philosophiae" des Boethius," 371; Stanley W. Jackson, *Melancholia and Depression: From Hippocratic Times to Modern Times* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990): 46-47. The standard edition of Galen, to which I am referring, is Galen, *Galen Opera Omnia* (Leipzig: Hildesheim, 1965). On melancholia in classical and late antiquity, see further Peter G. Toohey, "Acedia in Late Classical Antiquity," *Illinois Classical Studies* XV, no. 2 (1990); Peter G. Toohey, "Some Ancient Histories of Literary Melancholia," *Illinois Classical Studies* XV, no. 1 (1990); Peter G. Toohey, "Love, Lovesickness, and Melancholia," *Illinois Classical Studies* XVII, no. 2 (1992).

⁸⁵ R. J. Hankinson, "Philosophy of Nature," in *The Cambridge Companion to Galen*, ed. R. J. Hankinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 217-23.

⁸⁶ Arist. [Pr.] 30.6. J. Pigeaud, *Aristote: L'homme de génie et la mélancholie. Problème XXX, 1* (Paris: Editions Rivage, 1988); Philip Van der Eijk, *Medicine and Philosophy in Classical Antiquity: Doctors and Philosophers on Nature, Soul, Health and Disease* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 279-98.

element. Furthermore, melancholics tend towards fear and despondency and suffer from “abnormal sensory images.” Galen mentions fantastic delusionals, such as a man who believed he was turned into a snail and would be crushed and another who was frightened that Atlas would grow tired of supporting the world.⁸⁷ He associates the illness based upon the temperament (but distinct from it) with a hatred for life, and admits suicidal tendencies in some, though not all, cases; fear of death is also just as likely. Finally, there is an association between the melancholic temperament and autumn, the cold and dry season (as this theoretical system has it).⁸⁸ I add that Galen’s system includes *taciturnitas* as typical of the melancholic temperament, and testifies to the close association between melancholia and the aphrodisia—an important point given Boethius’ erotic fascination with Fortuna and Mors.⁸⁹ This brief review of Galen’s thought shows that Boethius’ symptoms, as I have recorded them, are all typical of melancholia. Importantly, there is no need to explain away Boethius’ wakeful state, since melancholia has a long tradition of association with the philosophical temperament.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Galen, *De loc. aff.* 3.10 (8.190 Kühn); *De symptomatum causis liber 2.7* (7.202-204 Kühn). See also P.N. Singer, ed. *Galen: Psychological Writings: Avoiding Distress; Character Traits; The Diagnosis and Treatment of the Affections and Errors Peculiar to Each Person's Soul; The Capacities of the Soul Depend on the Mixtures of the Body*, Cambridge Galen Translations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013): x-xi, xiii, xvi, xviii, xxxvii, 154-55, 60, 208, 64-65, 364. Jackson, *Melancholia and Depression*: 41-45.

⁸⁸ Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*: 83-85, 124, 147, 215, 230, 349 n. 105; Jackson, *Melancholia and Depression*: 41-45.

⁸⁹ XVII. A. 213, Kühn. A brief text summarizing the ancient positions on melancholia (representing the range of interpretation) is included in Gal. *Opera Omnia* at XIX.699-720, Kühn.

⁹⁰ In any case, we need not follow Schmid, who goes to lengths that may not be necessary to account for an absent symptom. Of course, Boethius was under no obligation to include every symptom of an illness in order to make clear what it was. I admit that my account is equally threatened, perhaps, by Boethius’ not

Although one ought not to regard Boethius' text as a technical presentation of an illness—poetry and philosophy can hardly be approached in the manner of a case study in a medical treatise—still there is something important in recognizing the presence here of what Agamben has called “the melancholy constellation,” a certain cluster of ideas and conceptions that attach to this condition and provide the illness with a certain archetypal persistence.⁹¹ I suggest that we may understand Boethius as an important mid-point in the genealogy of melancholia. The earliest theoretical elaboration of this condition turned to material causes to understand the origin and treatment of this affection; contemporary psychoanalysis has gone the complete opposite direction, understanding the condition as the product of traumatic loss. Boethius' self-presentation sits precisely between these two, showing the physical symptoms of the condition as they were understood before him, but placing the cause, as I will argue, in relation to traumatic loss (i.e., not in the *hypochondria*'s production of atrabilious fluids).⁹² While Boethius probably does not

having excessive flatulence in the *Consolation* (Galen, *Opera Omnia*, XVI.244, Kühn). I should hope that this diagnostic standard is not expected. Anyway, all I need establish for my argument is that Boethius is equally likely to have been melancholic and misdiagnosed by Philosophia.

⁹¹ Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, trans. Ronald L. Martinez, vol. 69, *Theory and History of Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993): 19.

⁹² Soranus, as his teachings have been relayed in the translation of his work by Caelius Aurelianus, anticipates Boethius in this revised aetiology. Mentioning “grief” and “fear” as possible causes, Aurelianus writes (*On Chronic Diseases* I.VI.181) “[melancholia] frequentat autem in masculis magis et mediis aetatibus, difficile vero in feminis vel aliis aetatibus. sed eius antecedentes causae sunt hae: indigestio, iugis vomitus post cibum, medicamina pota, acres cibi, maestitudo, timor, et cetera quae etiam valent sufficere.” The result of this change is that the causes may be either psychological or physical, rather than exclusively a question of humoral temperament. I.E. Drabkin, ed., *Caelius Aurelianus: On Acute Diseases and On Chronic Diseases* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1950): 560-63. There is also Cicero,

theorize melancholia according to his own scientific principles, the way that his text treats this condition leaves the question of his condition's cause unexplained if one remains within the ambit of ancient medical theory. Since Boethius' text presents the condition in this way, I contend that contemporary psychoanalytic theory may elucidate different aspects of the text that would otherwise resist clarification. In other words, I turn to psychoanalytic theory to represent in speculative terms that which Boethius could only express by way of dramatic technique and literary artifice.⁹³

Boethius' programmatic poem vacillates between two possible causes for his grief: the "terror" that does not utterly defeat the Muses, and Fortuna's abandonment of him. Everything else in the first poem and the prose section linked to it must be understood as so many products of these two factors. Psychoanalytic practice teaches that, because repression structures the relationship between the ego and its symptom, one must be attuned to that which is half-said, to that which cannot make it to full expression. If one tracks the movement of the poem I have quoted above, the sixth line, which contains the fear clause in which Boethius expresses the object of the fear he feels, does

whose *Tusculan Disputations* at III.5.10-11 attributes the condition of melancholia not to humoral causes but to the passions.

⁹³ Dronke has expressed this very well, treating the hermeneutic gap opened up between the poetry and the prose. He says, "There is I think still another rôle for the poetry in the *Consolatio*, which Curley did not mention...The poetry is there at times in order to say what could scarcely be said any other way: poetic images can sometimes show what is beyond the power of prose statements to express." By this, he certainly means that there are transcendent truths that move beyond the capacities of ordinary language, but certainly this is also true for many intuitions of the nature of the mind. Dronke, *Verse with Prose From Petronius to Dante: The Art and Scope of the Mixed Form*: 43.

not lead into the seventh line; rather, the seventh line represents a return to the juxtaposed contrasts more characteristic of lines 1-2 that I discussed above. “*Gloria*” launches line seven as if from nowhere. Boethius may speak in such vague terms of the cause of his fear because that fear is linked more closely to his trauma than anything else mentioned in this poem. The sharp change in tone between lines 5-6 and line 7 would then appear to be the typical emotional excitation one expects as the voice approaches the Real.⁹⁴ If this “*terror*” is the affect corresponding to the unnameable cause, then Fortuna must be doing something else. Above all, one should notice that this presentation of Fortuna is allegorical. As the elegiac *puella* for whom Boethius the elegiac poet longs,⁹⁵ she is in one sense absolutely central to the poem, since it simply would not be a love elegy were it not for her presence. Her place in the rest of the text is also crucial; Book II is almost exclusively concerned with her “goods.” In another sense, she seems to have a certain spectral identity with death, and, as I will show, with Philosophia as well. For now, it is enough to observe that there is nothing in the narration of her faithlessness (lines 17-20) to indicate that Boethius could not reconcile himself to his loss. In fact, the “*quia*” of line 19 is precisely the reason that we should regard Boethius pose as a jilted lover with skepticism. If he had the kind of intellectual clarity required by such reconciliation with

⁹⁴ That is, the symbolic Real, according to the scheme at p. 52 above.

⁹⁵ On the *puellae* of Roman love elegy, see especially Sharon L. James, *Learned Girls and Male Persuasion: Gender and Reading in Roman Love Elegy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003): 3-34; Paul Allen Miller, *Subjecting Verses* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Micaela Janan, *The Politics of Desire: Propertius IV* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Godo Lieberg, *Puella divina: die Gestalt der göttlichen Geliebten bei Catull im Zusammenhang der antiken Dichtung* (Amsterdam: P. Schippers, 1962).

one's loss as this identification of Fortuna indicates he has, then there would be no illness to speak of, and no need for a dialogue. The true cause must lie closer to the fear that his "companions may follow the path" down which Boethius has walked with such an unstable step (line 22). It is not his fear, though, but what lies behind the fear, what psychoanalysis calls "ein andere Schauplatz," an "other scene," that will reveal the true cause.⁹⁶

1.6. Political Downfall

1.6.1. Transference and the Other Scene

The "other scene" of Boethius' "terror" is treated in his *apologia* at prose I.4. The speech he delivers there takes the form of a high classical forensic oration, as Gruber has proven, and offers a defense, not wholly unambiguous, of Boethius' political action.⁹⁷ For my purpose, it is necessary to show how the political breakdown resulted in Boethius' ruin, and, furthermore, that this, his political failure and subsequent persecution, is what he refers to when he mentions his "terror" for his "comites," a fear that they may follow the same "iter" that he is bound to travel.

⁹⁶ Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*: vii-xiv.

⁹⁷ There is no need, with Gruber, to suppose another, lost work in which Boethius provided a fuller defense of his actions. I prefer to understand the confusions of Boethius' defense here as deliberate, as the author placing himself on uncertain terrain. Gruber, *Kommentar zu Boethius « De consolatione philosophiae »*: 129 n. 25.

After Philosophia has accounted for her visit to Boethius, “in the solitude of [his] exile” (“*in has exsilii nostri solitudines*,” I.3.2-3), he responds to Philosophia’s demand that he must “uncover [his] wound” if he “expects the help of a healer” (“*si operam medicantis exspectas, oportet vulnus detegas*,” prose I.4.1). He opens his *exordium* with a series of rhetorical questions, and makes plain that he is no longer in his “library,” the place where Philosophia “chose a seat most secure for [herself] among [his] Lares” (“*haecine est bibliotheca, quam certissimam tibi sedem nostris in laribus ipsa delegeras...*” prose I.4.3). One is led to believe that the place where he is must be someplace dreadful enough by one of his questions: “does the very appearance of this place not move you in the slightest?” (“*nihilne te ipsa loci facies movet?*” prose I.4.2). Later in this same speech, he indicates that the “*locus*” where he now meets Philosophia is some five hundred miles removed from the location where, were he allowed, he would have spoken against the accusations that have put him in these circumstances.⁹⁸ It remains unclear exactly what the nature of his holding cell is, but in any case it is clear that he is confined there and, more importantly, that he has been “condemned to death and proscription” (“*nunc quingentis fere passuum milibus procul muti atque indefensi ob studium propensius in senatum morti proscriptionique damnamur*,” prose I.4.36). All of this amounts to punishment at its harshest or persecution at its very worst: a

⁹⁸ The prison seems to have been located in Pavia. On some of the logistical questions that provoke one to believe that Boethius’ imprisonment was probably more like a house arrest than what the modern imaginary usually makes of a prison in the Middle Ages, see Crabbe, “Literary Design in the *De Consolatione Philosophiae*.”

condemnation to death (“*morti*”), the confiscation of goods (“*proscriptioni*”), and the repression of his voice (“*muti atque indefensi*”). Why has he been removed from his home and country, placed under arrest, charged and convicted without defense to death and proscription of all his possessions?

There is vast literature on this question, and the matter will probably never be entirely cleared up.⁹⁹ A picture transparent enough though can be pieced together from Boethius’ narration of the events and the commentary of other historians.¹⁰⁰ Three accusations for which Boethius was punished emerge from the defense speech at I.4. The first crime, if (against what Boethius seems to have believed) there was a criminal act at all, was something such as what he claims at I.4.20-21: “*Senatum dicimur salvum esse voluisse. Modum desideras? delatorem, ne documenta deferret quibus senatum maiestatis reum faceret, impedisse criminamur.*” “I am said to have wanted that the Senate be saved. You want to know in what way? I am charged with hindering the accuser, so that he could not bring forth documents with which he would make the Senate a culprit charged with treason.” It is important to recognize that “*maiestas*,” translated as “treason” here, does not mean precisely what we mean today when we speak of treason.¹⁰¹ The term was

⁹⁹ John Moorhead, *Theoderic in Italy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992): 222-35; Shanzer, "The Death of Boethius and the 'Consolation of Philosophy'."; E. Reiss, *Boethius*, Twayne's World Authors Ser. (Boston: Twayne Publ., 1982): 80-102. On Boethius' transformation from a dead political figure into a martyr of the church, see Phoebe Robinson, "Dead Boethius: Sixth-Century Accounts of a Future Martyr," *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 35 (2004): 1-19.

¹⁰⁰ See also, *Anon. Vales.* 85-87; Procop. *Goth.* 5.1.32-39.

¹⁰¹ Jill Harries, *Law and Crime in the Roman World*, Key Themes in Ancient History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 83-84.

over-determined progressively in each generation from the time of Augustus. Jill Harries explains that the charge, by Boethius' time, could be leveled on the accused for a wide variety of reasons, ranging from outright conspiracy against the Roman *res publica* to insulting the dignity of the *res publica* or, after Augustus, the dignity of its *princeps*.¹⁰² Boethius' punishment is consistent with the normal punishment for "*maiestas*"—proscription and death. It must be emphasized though that there is a troubling ambivalence in charges of this kind. Harries explains:

It was...expected that the punishment should be exceptional, that all should be empowered to inform if all might be put at risk, that all measures, including torture of anyone, regardless of status, were legitimate if the security of the community was to be safeguarded. But if the fear was overdone, the result could be the subversion of the values of the community, which the treason law was supposed to protect.¹⁰³

If the treason law was "supposed to protect" the community and its Senate, then things must have come to a very confused state if Boethius was charged with treason because he "wanted the Senate to be saved" (prose I.4.20).

It must be recognized though that in this confusion Boethius was not simply charged with *maiestas* for wrongdoing associated with him alone; there was already a charge against the Senate that was then transferred onto him. Boethius became implicated

¹⁰² Harries' s discussion is especially interesting given my point of view. She continues, relating an episode from the reign of Valens, who "discovered in 371 that a group of philosophers at Antioch had been holding a series of séances to find out the name of the next emperor." This is interesting as a precedent for Boethius' trial and punishment. Ammianus Marcellinus, who relates this narrative (29.I.5-38), seems to have regarded Valens' extreme reaction as "abuse of the treason law...equivalent to the suspension of all law." There also, Ammianus' view on the treason law is compared to Tacitus' view, who also seems to have regarded it as the suspension of all law. Ibid., 82-83, 72-83.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 83-84.

in that charge because he refused to bring forward certain “*documenta*” that allegedly would have secured the Senate’s guilt (I.4.21). But as Boethius reminds Philosophia, it was Theoderic himself who facilitated this transference.

meministi, ut opinor, quoniam me dicturum quid facturumve praesens semper ipsa dirigebas, meministi, inquam, Verona cum rex, avidus exitii communis, maiestatis crimen in Albinum delatae ad cunctum senatus ordinem transferre moliretur... (I.4.32)

You remember, I believe, since you yourself were always present directing what I would say and do, you must remember,’ I said, ‘how at Verona the king, eager for their common ruin, tried to bring over to the whole senatorial order the charge of treason (*maiestatis*) brought against Albinus...

This further detail introduces two new points. First, there was a treason charge against one Albinus, who seems to have been accused of conspiring with officials in the Eastern Empire to undermine the Ostrogothic King Theoderic.¹⁰⁴ Secondly, Boethius communicates that Theoderic himself, represented here as having been “eager for the common ruin” of the Senatorial order, attempted to displace Albinus’ charges onto the whole Senate. The documents Boethius refused to bring forth would have facilitated this

¹⁰⁴ Cyprian, the *referendarius* charged with bringing matters of importance before the King, said this letter to Justin, the new emperor in Constantinople, spoke with hostility toward Theoderic’s kingdom. For references, see Moorhead, *Theoderic in Italy*: 219 n. 35. Moorhead: “The healing of the Acacian Schism”—a struggle between the Churches in Rome and Constantinople, brought to an end upon the ascendancy of Justin in 518—“may have told against Albinus, for he was known to have been interested in relations between the Churches of Rome and Constantinople, and innocent correspondence could have been construed as having political implications.” Moorhead, “Boethius’ life and the world of late antique philosophy,” 19.

displacement that Theoderic, Boethius tells us, had tried to achieve, not documents that would have convicted Albinus alone.¹⁰⁵

This brings us to the second charge. The Senate did not show any great appreciation to Boethius' for his efforts; rather, they displaced the charge against themselves onto Boethius. This transference seems to have been effected by a letter—plainly regarded as a most incredible forgery by Boethius—in which it was said that Boethius spoke of his hopes for “Roman liberty” (“*libertatem...Romanam*,” I.4.26), which would be taken to mean the overthrow of the Ostrogothic ruler and his regime in this context.¹⁰⁶ Again, these cannot be the documents that Boethius suppressed, since the arrangement of Boethius' oration indicates the Senate betrayed him by way of these letters (I.4.32), which the accusers of Boethius must have been able to employ against him. If they were indeed the *documenta*, they would have implicated the Senate as well as Boethius, and the displacement the Senate wished to achieve would not have succeeded. It would seem, then, that for the connection to be made between Albinus, the Senate, and Boethius himself, Theoderic must have believed the Senate was conspiring to eliminate him from his rule; conversely, Boethius states plainly, as I have quoted above, that he believed the king wanted to eliminate the Senate. On Boethius' version, his imprisonment and imminent execution followed upon what must be considered a political

¹⁰⁵ Moorhead is perhaps not wrong though to say that these documents were “connected to the correspondence Albinus was accused of carrying on with the emperor.” In either case, the situation is not clarified by the available evidence. Moorhead, *Theoderic in Italy*: 220.

¹⁰⁶ Rousseau, "The Death of Boethius; the Charge of 'Maleficium'."

crisis of the first order, a dissolving of all the bonds that held together the institution of the Senate and the *de facto* ruler of all Italy. So the Senatorial order transferred the treason charge from themselves to Boethius, the one figure who, in his capacity as *magister officiorum*, acted as intermediary between the Roman Senate and the Ostrogothic royal *domus*. Boethius' treason, portrayed as a challenge to the authority of Theoderic, appears to be what is at stake in both of these charges.

This brings us to the third charge against Boethius. The accusers took Boethius' enthusiasm for philosophy as proof that he had committed this crime. What Boethius' says with respect to the charge proper though is this: "*Cuius dignitatem reatus ipsi etiam qui detulere viderunt; quam uti alicuius sceleris admixtione fuscarent, ob ambitum dignitatis sacrilegio me conscientiam polluisse mentiti sunt,*" "The worth of which [charge] the accusers themselves who brought it forth know: in order that they might blacken it by mixing it up with some wickedness, they lied, saying that, for the sake of reaching high office, I polluted my conscience with sacrilege" (prose I.4.37). This charge is rightly regarded as the most mysterious accusation against Boethius.¹⁰⁷ The crucial phrase seems to be "*ambitum dignitatis,*" and the question is how exactly to understand

¹⁰⁷ A more thorough investigation of the meaning of this charge in late antiquity would be most valuable. Following up such an avenue will have to wait for later research though. My sense is that the "sacrilege" here does not simply indicate the practice of black magic, as some would have it, but, much closer to Agamben's account of the holy person of the emperor, refers to an attempt to undermine that sacred authority of the emperor. Consider the following comment from the New Pauly: "Under the rule of the Christian emperors, sacrilegium came to encompass all heinous crimes against religion in general and was even applied to the disregard of imperial decrees, which were seen as on a par with the *ius divinum* (*Cod. Theod.* 16.2.25; *Cod. Iust.* 9.29)." Jerzy Linderski, "Sacrilegium," in *Brill's New Pauly* (Brill Online, 2012).

this. Tester's translation simply relies upon the phrase found in Lewis and Short, "canvassing for high office."¹⁰⁸ But Boethius' office could not have been higher: he already had the consulship and now both his sons occupied the two seats; at the time of his fall he had become "*magister officiorum*," the most high-ranking of all the Roman officials. To what position did his accusers imagine Boethius to be aspiring? One prominent historian and critic has suggested a possibility that ought to be entertained. Perhaps the charge means to indicate that Boethius was aspiring to be "Boethius *augustus*."¹⁰⁹ While it is unclear whether Boethius had ambitions toward seizing away

¹⁰⁸ Boethius, *Boethius: The Theological Tractates and the Consolation of Philosophy*, ed. G.P. Goold, trans. H. F. Stewart, E. K. Rand, and S.J. Tester, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1918): 157.

¹⁰⁹ From O'Donnell's review of Moorhead: "At several times, Moorhead seemed to this reader to be close to broaching a hypothesis that he never mentions, and I will close the review by drawing on his study to give it context. Moorhead shows well and I think convincingly that Boethius fell because he deserved it. The *libertas Romana* that Boethius speaks of so piously in the *Consolation of Philosophy* as the cause for which he was indicted is shown to be a slogan inviting Byzantine intervention. Boethius emerges here as a strong figure, moving in his last years quite close to the reins of the Ostrogothic regime, himself an ex-consul presiding over the truly extraordinary sight (in that period) of his own son's double consulship in the Roman colosseum, the moving to Ravenna to serve as *magister officiorum*. In the intrigues that followed, he, his father-in-law Symmachus, and his ally pope John all found imprisonment and death. His relatives in the *gens Anicia* survived in Constantinople, and in Constantinople 25 years later a dynastic marriage was somewhat artificially grafted on to the Anician family tree to give it legitimacy in Italian eyes.

"So far so good, for the most part uncontroversial, but with some important novelties. But what Moorhead drives us to ask, whether he means to or not, is what alternate regime Boethius and his friends could have imagined. Surely they did not hope for Byzantine reconquest and an exarchate: there was no model to suggest such a thing, and the exarchate when it did come to pass proved ruinous for Boethius' class.

"No, it is surely far likelier that Boethius and his ilk would have thought the best goal the re-establishment of a resident emperor in Italy. The nostalgia for 476 that dates to their period (seen best in Latins writing in Constantinople like Marcellinus Comes and Jordanes) would point in the same direction. I do not see that Moorhead asks the question, or that anyone has seriously asked the question, just *who* Boethius and his friends would have liked to see on the Italian imperial throne. But perhaps to ask the question in this context as I have just done is to make explicit the suspicion to which Moorhead gives, brilliantly or unwittingly I cannot tell, rise: did no one then dream of Boethius *augustus*? If not Boethius, who? If Symmachus, then Boethius as son-in-law and heir is scarcely less important. It is ironic that in our

from Theoderic his quasi-divine power, it is possible that his accusers suggested this and stressed his philosophical temperament as a way to lend weight to this accusation.

Rousseau has argued, from a similar point of view, that the *sacreligium* charge against Boethius was perhaps rooted in his accuser's exploitation of a likely misunderstanding; few would have been able, Rousseau claims, to appreciate the distinction Boethius tries to draw between Philosophia's making him "similar to god" ("*consimilem deo*," I.4.39), and the more sinister sacrilege associated with *maleficium*, black magic that puts one in contact with demons who would aid Boethius in his rise to power (I.4.27-42).¹¹⁰ Rousseau suspects that Boethius could not see how this would have looked to others (only a collaborator like Cassiodorus can reveal that).¹¹¹ But it must be remembered that the persona of Boethius speaks at I.4. This persona explains that he was charged with *sacrilegium* on account of his alleged "*ambitum dignitatis*," and he speaks in the next breath of how Philosophia urged him with the Pythagorean maxim, "ἔπου θεῶ," preparing him to be made *consimilis deo* (I.4.39). But this persona cannot be taken as quite simply the same voice as the author, who writes this text. As an interpretive principle, one must recall that Boethius may suggest to us with his own persona a truth of

great reverence for the cloistered intellectual, we may have blinded ourselves to his true role in history." James J. O'Donnell, "John Moorhead, *Theoderic in Italy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992. Pp. 300. \$65.00. ISBN 0-19-814781-3." (Bryn Mawr Classical Review, April 2010).

<http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/1993/04.04.10.html>.

¹¹⁰ Rousseau, "The Death of Boethius; the Charge of 'Maleficium'," 877.

¹¹¹ A.H.M. Jones, "The Constitutional Position of Odoacer and Theoderic," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 52, no. Parts 1 and 2 (1962): 126-30.

which he is aware but his persona is not. Whether or not Boethius had designs to seize away the divine power of the *imperator* from Theoderic, there are signs that indicate Boethius bases some of the textual play in the *Consolation* on his accusers' suggestion that this ambition was not beyond him.

But how can Boethius' alleged aspiration to oust Theoderic be construed as *sacrilegium*, unless Theoderic also assumed the position of the emperor? There is a long-standing question in the scholarship concerning exactly what constitutional position Theoderic (and his predecessor Odoacer) held at Rome, since neither he nor his predecessor assumed the titles *imperator* or *augustus*, but rather were most often identified simply as *rex*.¹¹² Theoderic and his associates could only construe Boethius' crime as *sacrilegium*, if Theoderic also claimed to occupy the Roman imperial seat. In order to clarify the stakes of this charge, it is necessary to investigate in depth the position that Theoderic established for himself with respect to the Roman institutions that pre-existed his arrival.

1.6.2. Theoderic's Sovereign Power and the State of Exception

It is essential to my argument that Theoderic be considered analogous to the Roman emperors. For, if Theoderic is not analogous to the emperors that preceded him,

¹¹² Cañizar Palacios and José Luis, "La utilidad política y social del vocabulario religioso en la legislación del « Teodosiano »,» in *Droit, religion et société dans le « Code Théodosien » : troisièmes journées d'étude sur le « Code Théodosien » : Neuchâtel, 15-17 février 2007*, ed. Jean-Jacques Aubert and Philippe Blanchard 55 (Neuchâtel: Faculté des lettres et sciences humaines / Université de Neuchâtel, 2009).

then it is unclear in what sense his rule sustains that apparatus, reactivating its legal resources in order to deploy them for a new purpose: negotiating the Gothic settlement of Italy with Roman resistance. While few would argue that Theoderic was not in at least a qualified sense an absolute ruler analogous to his imperial predecessors, still it is important that I lay out exactly how this analogy works. Otherwise, it will not be possible to account for the position from which Boethius writes, and why his discourse in the *Consolation* takes on the exact shape that characterizes the work.

In order to understand Theoderic's rule, I have turned to the theoretical reflections of Giorgio Agamben.¹¹³ What can be found theorized in Agamben and nowhere else is a direct link between exceptional sovereign power and the absolute limit of life as such, "bare life," life nakedly exposed in a state of radical passivity. What Agamben has argued is that there is an essential link between bare life and sovereign power, a bipolarity, such that the two necessarily appear together. It is specifically this link between what Agamben calls bare life and sovereign power that sheds light upon Boethius' circumstances, and the text that he produced in those circumstances.

¹¹³ Agamben's political thought is presented partially and often elusively in the four parts of his "Homo Sacer" series. For a description of the entire project, see Ulrich Raulff, "An Interview with Giorgio Agamben," *German Law Journal* 5, no. 5 (2004). This series so far includes the following works: Agamben, *Homo Sacer*; Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government (Homo Sacer II, 2)*, trans. Lorenzo Chiesa (with Matteo Mandarini) (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011); Giorgio Agamben, *The Sacrament of Language: An Archaeology of the Oath (Homo Sacer II, 3)*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011); Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*; Giorgio Agamben, *Opus Dei. Archeologia dell'ufficio. Homo Sacer, II, 5* (Bollati Boringhieri, 2012); Giorgio Agamben, *Altissima povertà: regole monastiche e forma di vita : Homo Sacer, VI, I* (Vicenza: N. Pozza, 2011).

Agamben's genealogical treatment of sovereignty goes back to the earliest phase of the Roman Republic, and treats the political order constituted there as determinative—though not *necessarily* determinative—for each subsequent distribution of power in Western history. This is not to say that transformations of that distribution have not occurred, or that the state of exception and the supremacy of sovereign power are actual constants bound to reappear throughout Western political history. What Agamben indicates, instead, is just how difficult it is to make a clean break with the past, how, even following the most far-reaching revolutions, the transformation of power's distribution effects displacements or rearrangements of those structures of power rather than *creatio ex nihilo*.¹¹⁴ Or, better, his work indicates that *creatio ex nihilo* can only become meaningful by displacing and transforming power structures that pre-exist such creation. The object of the genealogist, then, is to describe adequately the way in which, in a given historical moment, the contingency of events intersects with the apparatuses of power so that those apparatuses both persist and mutate. Here I trace the way in which one must understand the transformations of power that led to the circumstances in which Boethius was charged and executed. For it is probably never the case that someone has just been violently killed without any symbolic negotiation of that act; the deed must always take place in relation to a structured social and political reality.

¹¹⁴ Agamben's rhetoric often leads to the misunderstanding that his work presents an over-arching theory of history, so that life becomes the key to all of Western political history, as the Marxists once thought class was the key. I do not plan to argue for this position or against it, only to employ his analysis as a paradigm by which Theoderic's regime may be understood. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*: 11-12.

Now, as I have said, Agamben's analysis locates the origin of the sovereign power he is investigating at the beginning of the Roman Republic. Relying upon a definition from Festus' *De verborum significatione*, Agamben analyzes the *homo sacer*, a figure who, upon having been found guilty of some crime, may be killed with impunity, but is never sacrificed.¹¹⁵ Agamben concludes that this legal oddity endorses an arbitrary and extra-legal practice of violence beyond the carefully regulated modes of punishment applicable to Roman citizens who have not been exposed as *homines sacri*. There is a structure of double exclusion from the *ius humanum* and from the *ius divinum* that isolates the *homo sacer*, a position correlative to the double exclusion that positions the sovereign both within the law as its condition and outside the law as its superior. What constitutes the sovereign as sovereign is his privileged ability to punish, to separate life from itself, establishing the bare life of *homo sacer* as the exception and the life of qualified citizens as the rule.¹¹⁶ As Agamben says, "the *vitae necisque potestas* attaches

¹¹⁵ Understood as a historical treatment of Roman social and political history, see Michèle Lowrie's criticisms in Michèle Lowrie, "Sovereignty before the Law: Agamben and the Roman Republic," *Law and Humanities* 1 (2007): 34-39. Compare also Agamben, *Homo Sacer*: 71-74. In spite of her reservations about Agamben's historiography and his oversimplification of the Roman Republican legal and political institutions, she still affirms the importance of his work as critical theory. See Michèle Lowrie, "Inside Out: In Defense of Form," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 135 (2005): 43-46.

¹¹⁶ This is easily misunderstood. For Agamben often claims that all members of a political order are "virtually" bare life, which seems somehow implausible, as if at any instant all members will find themselves without rights and proper belonging to institutions, exposed to unspeakable violence. What must be understood is that in all cases, according to his theory, sovereign power constitutes a caesura or separation of bare life from the qualities that life possesses, boasting to be the source of the qualities as well as the life that is taken as the condition for those qualities that are then regarded as separable from the life to which they are attached. Only rarely does sovereign power set itself the task of eliminating those qualifications, actually producing bare life. More often it calls upon subjects to cultivate and develop its

itself to every free male citizen from birth and thus seems to define the very model of political power in general. Not simple natural life, but life exposed to death (bare life or sacred life) is the originary political element.”¹¹⁷

In the first century B.C., a crucial transformation in the structure of sovereign power relocates sovereign power in the person of the *princeps*, rather than the plebs. Agamben only briefly touches upon this transformation, but he indicates what one must comprehend in order to recognize the difference between sovereignty under the Republic and sovereignty under the newly formed principate. He explains that the “birth of the new absolute power” invested in the *princeps* is demonstrated clearly by Augustus’ assumption of the *potestas tribunicia*, which established his person as *sacrosanctus*. When Augustus acquired this power, taking it over from the tribune of the plebs, he was charged with the same inviolability that characterized the Plebeian courts as inviolable in the early Republic. From that point forward, with each succession of one emperor after another, the sacrosanctity of *potestas tribunicia* was transmitted along with the sovereign power vested in the *princeps*.¹¹⁸

The passage of that power from one emperor to another is treated as well.

Agamben sees in the *funus imaginarium* an attempt to ritualize proper relations with a

powers. See Negri's illuminating comments in Antonio Negri, "Il frutto maturo della redenzione," Il Manifesto - quotidiano comunista, <http://www.generation-online.org/t/negriagamben.htm>.

¹¹⁷ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*: 88.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 84.

surplus of life in the figure of the *princeps*, who has both a “natural life” and a “sacred life,” an excessive remainder that clings to his person because the “supreme power” of the sovereign figure “required that the very person of sovereign authority assume within itself the life held in its power.”¹¹⁹ That surplus of life “can only ascend to the heavens and be deified” by way of the *funus* for a colossus, an image of the emperor that was burned in effigy along with the emperor’s body proper. The heavens in turn then select the new emperor and invest him with this sovereign authority over the life and death of his subjects.

It will be important in all the periods to be treated in this dissertation to consider exactly where bare life may appear, given the structure of power at each moment. It is essential to see that the constituting relationship between bare life and sovereignty did not vanish at this point, when Augustus consolidated the principate. It is not the case that, the sovereign power of the plebeian courts having been established by its relationship to bare life (*homo sacer*), upon transforming into a sovereign principate, no longer made reference to bare life. Instead, one should expect that the *princeps* would acquire a decisive relationship with bare life, and this is exactly what happens.¹²⁰ What can be said is that *homo sacer* no longer needs to be the decisive point of reference. *Homo sacer* is

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 101. The critical theory with which I am involved often uses various different terms to refer to a “remainder,” or an “excess,” that has a certain traumatic presence over and against whatever equation of which it is a remainder. It should be noted that this is one of the many places where I see a strict overlap between the ways in which the Lacanians and Agamben are speaking of the issues at stake in this argument. For Agamben’s presentation of this concept, see Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*: 112.

¹²⁰ In Chapters 4 and 5 I deal with how this operates in more depth.

exemplary, insofar as sovereign power, as Agamben describes it, was first constituted by its relationship with that figure. But one does not have to be *homo sacer* in order to be bare life—sovereign power can find other ways to engender that paltry condition.

Now the question imposes itself, whether Theoderic may rightly be understood as belonging within this genealogy. For, as a Gothic king, he does not obviously fit within the links that Agamben has drawn. It is simple enough, though, to show that Theoderic was *augustus* in all but name only, as our most reliable source claims.¹²¹ Consider for one Theoderic's visit to Rome in 500 CE (he held his court at Ravenna, following the precedent of Odoacer before him). Theoderic was celebrating his *tricennalia*, and did so in grand style with a visit called by one witness a "triumph" (significantly, triumphs had been reserved for the *princeps* alone since the time of Augustus).¹²² His visit, described by O'Donnell,¹²³ culminated in euergetism of the expected sort: food rations, renovations of old public buildings, repairs to the walls and the palace of the emperor. So much is supposed to evidence the abundance of power and the amplitude of vitality that flows from the presence of a semi-divine master, whose works are like the blessings of gods. While there at Rome Theoderic donned the royal purple—for, by 500 he had been able to have the regalia of the Western emperor returned to him from Constantinople. Significantly, from my point of view, he executed an alleged conspirator against him; this

¹²¹ Procop. *Goth.* I.29-32.

¹²² J.J. O'Donnell, *The Ruin of the Roman Empire* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008): 56.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 54-57.

colonel named Oduin, one of the Goths under his authority, was beheaded in the Sessorian basilica, where Constantine had established a shrine to his mother's "relics of Jesus' cross."¹²⁴ This execution, O'Donnell rightly stresses, signifies an agreement of divine and human authority over justice served to those who attempted to challenge Theoderic's position. In these six months, Theoderic "played the part of devout *princeps*...in the grand style."¹²⁵ That Theoderic occupied the palace of the emperors on the Palatine is also of the first significance. For it is precisely the power that the *princeps* has over his own *domus*, his well-established and increased domestic abundance, that establishes him as the *parens patriae* or *pater patriae*, as *Augustus* (the word itself refers to his capacity to "increase").¹²⁶

Consider also what has come to be identified as Theoderic's court ideology.¹²⁷

The fabric of the society over which Theoderic ruled was tenuous, consisting of a delicate

¹²⁴ Ibid., 57.

¹²⁵ "His arrival in Rome in 500, then, let him play the role of "almost emperor" down to the last detail. To appear in Rome in the grand style, to wear the purple, to reside in the ancient palace of the emperors on the Palatine hill, to address the senate, to confirm the laws of empire, and even to be seen to administer the brutal justice of judicial murder: all this was what emperors did." Ibid., 57, 69.

¹²⁶ Consider the remarks of Micaela Janan on "the formal logic of Octavian's rule:" "The language of hereditary right framed as a biological and natural claim to power appears early in Octavian's career... Octavian is *by nature* distinguished from his subjects, naturally suited to his place as *the* point at which power is concentrated (and perceived to be concentrated) in the Roman Empire," Janan, *The Politics of Desire: Propertius IV*: 47-48. It is worth noting that the *princeps* appears to be exceptional, in Agamben's sense, according to this account also. His social position is fixed because only his position corresponds to his nature—that is, his social position is such as it is only insofar as it is not strictly speaking a social position.

¹²⁷ The debate between Peter Heather and Patrick Amory exhausts this topic at present. It essentially amounts to a question of whether, with Heather, Ostrogothic identity long pre-exists Theoderic, or whether, with Amory, Theoderic's court engineered this novel identity—both Amory and Heather agree that the findings of ethnography in the twentieth century put it beyond doubt that the Ostrogothic ethnicity is a matter of perception and not natural, genetic makeup. I add to this that even if Heather is correct that

weaving together of Ostrogothic and Roman identities. This ideology was basically biopolitical in character, insofar as the natural life of the subjects incorporated into the social body are incorporated as life qualified ethnically. In an extensive ethnographic study of Cassiodorus' *Variae* and the *Edictum Theoderici*, Patrick Amory has shown that not Cassiodorus or Ennodius but rather the King's entire court, from the 490s to 520s, advanced a complicated rhetoric of cooperation between Romans and Goths, in which the distinctive *civilitas* of the Romans was to organize under the rule of law the distinctive *bellicositas* of the Goths, who would then in turn protect the Romans, in a "mutually beneficial" arrangement.¹²⁸ Within this system, Theoderic stood as the "quilting point" that held together the ideological synthesis, as occupant of the *principatus populi Romani* and the *regnum gentis* (this *gens* being the Ostrogoths). O'Donnell helpfully describes the problem facing Theoderic:

Ostrogothic identity long pre-exists Theoderic's rule, still it may be an essential part of an ideology emanating from that ruler's court. Consider the argument of Slavoj Žižek, from a talk delivered at Duke University's John Hope Franklin Center on Nov. 11, 2009: racial and gender stereotypes may even sometimes be true, but there is a difference between passively being aware of these stereotypes and becoming subjectively involved in them; the anti-Semite does not just understand that Jews are like this or that, but needs for them to be in that way he imagines them to be, whether they are or not, as part of his own constituted subjectivity. Similarly, it is not a question of whether "Ostrogoths" are taken to demonstrate "*bellicositas*" and "Romans" to demonstrate "*civilitas*" only after or both before and after Theoderic's court developed an ideology around them. The ideology of the court may very well incorporate older ideologies into its own apparatus. The important point is that it is constructing subjectivities in terms of these "natural" qualities—a reality upon which both Amory and Heather agree. The positions of each scholar are summarized in Peter Heather, "Merely an Ideology? - Gothic Identity in Ostrogothic Italy," in *The Ostrogoths from the Migration Period to the Sixth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. Sam J. Barnish and Federico Marazzi (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2007): 31-58.

¹²⁸ Amory, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy*, 489-554: 53.

What differentiated Theoderic from Odoacer—other than good luck and a long life—was his identification with the people on whose military loyalty he depended. The creation of Ostrogothic identity—or, if he did not create it, the exploitation and orchestration—is Theoderic’s most audacious and impressive achievement. [...] In shaping the clay from which Ostrogoths emerged, Theoderic was at a disadvantage, as well, for he needed the collaboration of the native population to reinforce, or reinvent, an older artificial notion of a unified native people—the so-called Romans. In ruling those two peoples, Theoderic was the author of an extraordinarily successful constitutional novelty.¹²⁹

Although these identities established by the ideology of the court do not correspond exactly to the reality of what Romans and Goths could actually do under Theoderic (there are “Romans” in the military, as well as “Goths” in civil society), they do operate at the level of fantasy, as the texts that Amory analyzes demonstrate. The Romans were taken to be *by nature* civilized, capable of imparting culture to the Goths, who, in turn, were *by nature* militant, able to defend the civilization that the Romans had cultivated.

We may look to the *Edictum Theoderici*, supplementing that text with the contemporary letters of Cassiodorus, something like a court secretary for Theoderic, in order to see how this system operates.¹³⁰ The prologue of this document reports Theoderic’s “emendation” and “compilation” of vulgar Roman law—it was not a novelty except in its presentation of Roman law, and in its source of support (the Ostrogothic king). Amory explains that one may gather from the prologue that the king, who admits that he cannot “unjustly” change anything “under the authority of the laws” (“...*quamvis*

¹²⁹ O'Donnell, *The Ruin of the Roman Empire*: 106.

¹³⁰ For this text, see MGH, *Leges*, folio 5, pp. 152-168. On the Ostrogothic provenance of this text, see Amory, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy, 489-554*: 78-79, fn. 185.

nullus iniuste factum sub legum auctoritate defendere” 11), is merely “append[ing] the following edicts” for the sake of general peace (“*praesentia iussimus edicta pendere*” 14).¹³¹ That is, these are not new laws (*leges*), only “edicts.” It appears in the language of the text that “*barbari*” are identified as those “tax-collecting soldiers” who serve “the Italo-Roman state.” Amory explains that we must understand by “*barbari*” the same group that Cassiodorus refers to elsewhere as “*gothi*.” These “*barbari*” are opposed to the “*Romani*” who make up the “other part of the functional division of *civilitas* rhetoric.” Amory also points out that these two components do not include slaves or Jews—neither group belongs to the official rhetoric of *civilitas*, which is only shared between the *barbari* and the *Romani*. Jews and slaves may very well be “necessary members of society” but “these groups were not part of civil society.” In essence, civil society is structured in two parts as a complete social body, and at once as a divided social body that must then be brought back together by the *auctor civilitatis*, as the king was identified in Cassiodorus’ *Variae* (8.2.2). One should note how close “*auctor*” is to “*augustus*”—this cannot have been a coincidence of expression.¹³² Cassiodorus could be employing this term as a near substitute for the more traditional title that, probably for caution before the Eastern emperor, Theoderic never did use. All of this demonstrates quite well how Theoderic’s sovereign power disseminates an ideology whereby the

¹³¹ Ibid., 78-84.

¹³² See Agamben’s comments on Augustus’ transfer of control of the Republic from his own person to the senate, and his legal function as *auctor optimi status* in this context. Agamben, *State of Exception*: 82.

particular qualities that members of society possess are constructed as the product of the sovereign's effect on a life that is constructed as bare, powerless without the sovereign's supplementation of it. If the *auctor* were not to bring together the Goths and the Romans, society would be impossible, so the ideology claims.

The final point to be made about the rhetoric of *civilitas* is its manner of incorporating subjects into that ideology. The edict's prologue and epilogue make use of a phrase that resembles a legal formula: in the epilogue, it appears as "*...quod pro omnium provincialium securitate provisum est, universitatis debet servare devotio*," "...the devotio of the whole community must preserve that which has been provisioned for the security of all the provincials" (19-20); in the prologue, as "*...legibus omnibus cunctorum devotione servandis...*" "all the laws that must be preserved by the devotio of all" (15). The word "*devotio*" appears in both places governing genitives ("*cunctorum*," "*universitatis*") that establish the reference of this term as broadly as possible: it is everyone who must demonstrate this "*devotio*." It also appears in both places with forms of the verb *servare*. It belongs to this "*devotio*" "to preserve," "to protect," as the infinitive translates. In each case, the laws appear as the object to be preserved. In the prologue, the ablatives "*omnibus*" and "*servandis*" modify "*legibus*:" "all the laws are to be preserved by the devotio of everyone." In the epilogue, indeed, the very last line of the text, the relative clause that begins from "*quod*" should be taken as direct object of the infinitive, and picks up its reference from the prologue, so that the "laws" are the object of "*servare*" here also; they are "what has been established for the sake of the security of

all the provincials, [which] the ‘*devotio*’ of all ought to preserve.” I have so far refrained from translating *devotio*. Amory identifies this as one of the crucial terms that the Ostrogothic court borrowed from Roman law in order to incorporate the Goths into the Roman legal apparatus. The term means something like “fealty,” but a simple translation of the term does not suffice to capture its force. Conti has gone through an exhaustive analysis of the term, as it changed in meaning from the time of the tetrarchy up to the Carolingian period.¹³³ For the Ostrogothic period, Conti, making reference to the *Theodosian Codex* and the *Variae*, explains that

Since both ‘*devotio*’ and ‘*devotus*’ were...used indifferently to indicate as much the special relationship of officials with the sovereign as the generic fealty of subjects, on each occasion leaving the precise perception of their value entrusted to the intuition of those who...could immediately assess all the differentiating elements that often elude us in the present, there is no manner of ascertaining with complete—or else only with good—security whether the ‘*devotio*’ to which Theoderic made reference by way of Cassiodorus consisted simply of political support, and so was therefore configured only metaphorically as ‘*devotio*’, or instead had been established by a solemn promise of a specific fealty, which, sworn or not, was fulfilled by the highest officials for that one who was about to become the *de facto*, new sovereign of Italy.¹³⁴

This semantic uncertainty of the term that Conti describes here, I suggest, is a product of the unstable position of the sovereign himself. *Devotio* at once seems to be all-inclusive, so that all subjects must show their submission to the sovereign, and at the same time seems to have been a special bondage that belonged to the high officials who were

¹³³ For the Ostrogothic period, see Pier Maria Conti, ‘*Devotio*’ e ‘*virii devoti*’ in Italia da Diocleziano ai Carolingi (Padova: Casa Editrice Dott. Antonio Milani, 1971): 83-122.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 95.

devoted to the sovereign. I showed above that in the *Edictum* “*devotio*” is taken to be the particular quality that all must demonstrate in order to preserve the adjustments or supplements to the law that the document enumerates. Having turned to Conti, it is possible to see now that this fealty extends both to the sovereign and to his edicts. There is then a kind of virtual identity of the two that never comes to full expression but is left at the level of implication in these texts. *Devotio* to these edicts is also *devotio* to the sovereign, the *auctor civilitatis*. Both groups included in the divided social body of *Gothi* and *Romani* brought together by Theoderic are expected to demonstrate this obeisance to the edicts and the sovereign. The vacillation between a rhetoric that emphasizes the avowal of high officials and one that stresses the avowal of all the Goths and Romans as subjects depends upon the unsettled place of the sovereign himself.

I have lingered over this point because it is precisely the *devotus* that appears as a strict analogue of *homo sacer* in Agamben’s work, where he analyzes a famous passage of Livy (8.9.4ff) on the *devotio* of Quintus Decius Mus.¹³⁵ The *devotus* reveals the excessive power of sovereignty holds over its subjects; as Livy explains, not only enemy combatants but also the magistrate himself or any subject may be given up as a *devotus*, a subject consecrated to death and the gods of the Underworld by the dictator, consul, or praetor. This power of the magistrates to devote themselves, their subjects, even their

¹³⁵ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*: 96-99.

enemies to the gods testifies to the “power to threaten death” that virtually determines the relationship between sovereign and subject.

Now, *devotio* in the Ostrogothic period cannot have meant exactly what it meant in the period Livy is treating. One should recognize in the term, though, what Agamben, drawing on Foucault and Melandri, has labelled a “signature.” By signature, Agamben means to provide a term for “something that in a sign or concept marks and exceeds such a sign or concept referring it back to a determinate interpretive field, without for this reason leaving the semiotic to constitute a new meaning or a new concept.”¹³⁶ He continues, explaining that, “signatures move and displace concepts and signs from one field to another...without redefining them semantically.” To unpack this, consider the relationship between the term “office” as it is used in the church and in the secular state; the two fields of meaning are different, but the term operates across both domains revealing a genealogical connection between the two spheres. So too it is with “*devotio*,” a term that operates across these two different domains (that to which Livy refers and the Ostrogothic ideology). The term does not have under Theoderic the precise denotation that it had for Romans under the Republic, but the “trace” of that meaning, to use Derrida’s term, continues to condition the term’s operation in this later field. In this way, the language of the *Edictum* subtly evokes, perhaps only at an unconscious level, the virtual power of the sovereign over his subjects.

¹³⁶ Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*: 4.

Finally, the divine sanction of Theoderic's sovereignty must be mentioned, since this is a crucial point of connection between him and the preceding emperors. It is beyond doubt that Theoderic's reign over the Romans was represented as having been brought to pass by "divine help" ("*divino auxilio*"), as the first, programmatic epistle to the Byzantine emperor Anastasius included in Cassiodorus' *Variae*, expresses it (Cassiod. *Var.* I.1.2).¹³⁷ Heather describes this claim to divinely arranged order as one of the fruits of Theoderic's appropriation of *Romanitas* for his kingdom; the Roman principate had since its origin relied upon myths of divine providence to establish itself.¹³⁸ Heather mentions the mosaics of St. Apollinare Nuovo, which "portrayed Theoderic enthroned in majesty, surrounded by his court," as evidence that Theoderic represented his rule as divinely ordained. For, "Christ the Pantocrator and the majesty of heaven" were shown across from the king and his entourage, so that "the greater authority...was shown directly sustaining the lesser."¹³⁹ There is also the *adventus* at Rome, described above, where the execution of Oduin, a colonel in the service of the king accused of treason, and the euergetism of the ruler highlight his proximity to divine powers. And again, there is knowledge of an important founding, "Theodoricopolis," although the location and

¹³⁷ "*nos maxime, qui divino auxilio in republica vestra didicimus, quemadmodum Romanis aequabiliter imperare possimus.*" "We, above all, who have learned in your republic through divine assistance, how we can command the Romans justly."

¹³⁸ Heather, *The Goths*: 223.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* According to at least one scholar, these mosaics represent what in Roman ritual practice is known as an *acclamatio*, an honor that had long been reserved for the Roman *princeps*. Moorhead, *Theoderic in Italy*: 41, fn. 32.

therefore with it the significance of the city have been lost to history.¹⁴⁰ Finally, one may observe this divine power as represented in the rhetoric of Ennodius,¹⁴¹ whose *Panegyric Delivered to the Most Merciful King Theoderic* gives us some indication of what Boethius' own contribution to that genre must have been like.¹⁴² At the opening of that speech, Ennodius begins by addressing his “*venerabilis princeps*”—which shows that, even though Theoderic did not encourage this title's application to himself, he did not actively discourage others who employed it—and exclaims that it is necessary for those who have benefited by Theoderic's work to speak their praise of him. He continues:

Tuum est, inclyte, devotioni pretium dare, quam intellegis vires subditorum non posse transcendere. Erit dispensationis sacrae de famulis aestimare quid exigas, in quibus agnoscis totum tibi militare quod praevalet. Propriis maiestas tua oblationem litterariam dignetur altaribus, quia ne senescat claritudo operum, advocanda sunt linguarum exercitia. Quid egeris, ne vetustas sibi vindicet, obliget catena referentum: disciplinarum enim quietum vos tribuitis, per quas vobis continget aeternitas. Nihil amplius caelestis dispensator arcani ab humanis poscit ingeniis, nisi ut intellegant, quo veniat auctore quod sapiunt; inter deo proximos agnovisse qui praestitit reddidisse est beneficium. Quod descendit a superis, sola hymnorum licet mercede taxari. Fabricator mundi ad potiora munera modulatis invitatur eloquiis. Dicite, si non praemii loco opifici suo lingua blanditur. Iungitur, quod de sacrario mundi pectoris laudatio debet principalis effluere, nec solum linguae nitorem postulat commemoratio numinis tui bono adserenda conscientiae. In divinis obsequiis feriato ore peragit mens serena sacrificium:

¹⁴⁰ It is not clear why scholars have moved from employing the more ancient “Theoderic” rather than “Theodoric,” and yet retain the “-o-” spelling for this foundation. I have followed the practice of the most well respected scholars in this area. For more on this topic, see Moorhead, *Theoderic in Italy*: 43, fn. 46.

¹⁴¹ Magnus Felix Ennodius, *Panegirico del clementissimo re Teodorico : opusc. I*, Biblioteca di cultura romanobarbarica (Roma: Herder, 2002).

¹⁴² Boethius' *Consolation*, prose II.3.8: “*Si quis rerum mortalium fructus ullum beatitudinis pondus habet, poeritne illius memoria lucis quantalibet ingruentium malorum mole deleri, cum duos pariter consules liberos tuos domo provehi sub frequentia patrum, sub plebis alacritate vidisti, cum eisdem in curia curules insidentibus tu regiae laudis orator ingenii gloriam facundiaequae meruisti, cum in circo duorum medius consulum circumfusae multitudinis expectationem triumphali largitione satiasti?*”

actuum munitus caritate in aetherio cultu etiam mutus obsequitur. Ergo et me titulus, qui obstare putabatur, invitat. Utinam mundior professio habeat concordiam cum secretis nec dissentiat splendor cordis a corpore. Salve, nunc, regum maxime, in cuius dominio saporem suum ingenuitatis vigor agnovit, salve, status reipublicae: nam nefas est speciatim a te simul conlata narrare et unius bona temporis verborum divisione discernere. (I.2-2.5)

It is yours, glorious king, to give the reward to your devotee, since you understand that it is not possible that the fortitude of your subjects be greater than it is. To set value upon what you demand from your servants, who perform for you—you recognize—your whole armed service, will be yours by sacred dispensation. May your majesty deem worthy this literary oblation on your own altars, because the brilliance of your works may not fade, troops of eloquence are to be summoned. To what you have done let not the length of time lay claim for itself, let a chain of reporters bind your deeds: for you have granted the peace for our discipline, through which eternity may take hold of you. The generous dispensator of the celestial mystery requires nothing from human beings, except that they acknowledge from which source (*auctor*) that which they know comes to them; to have known that one who excels among those nearest to God is to have returned a blessing. What descends from the high heavens, that is allowed to be rewarded with the sole recompense of hymns. With eloquent melodies the Maker of the world is treated to more preeminent tributes. Speak, if my tongue, as a reward, is not pleasing to its own place of production. Your spirit's commemoration demands not only the splendor of speech but is united, because the principal praise ought to flow forth from the sacristy of a pure heart, to good conscience that is to be affirmed. In divine rites the serene mind accomplishes a sacrifice with a revering mouth: protected by the charity of your deeds that voice even when silent is made suitable to your heavenly cult. Therefore your title of honor, which title seemed to block my way, invites even me [into your heavenly cult]. Oh, that my upright declaration would strike concord with my inward thoughts and the brightness in my heart would not disagree with my body.

Hail! Now, greatest of kings, in whose dominion the vigor of its native temperament has perceived its own taste, hail! State of the Republic: for it is unspeakable to relate in parts what is brought to pass by you in one stroke, to pick out the blessings of one moment with a division of words.

I do not need to remark on the appearance of “*devotio*,” except to recall its use here in connection with the “*subditi*,” subjects, to whom Ennodius refers. Again “*devotio*” is expected of all subjects of the King. More important for my present purpose, illustrating

the semi-divine nature of Theoderic's power, is the language that begins from the second sentence above. The language grows gradually bolder through this passage, first introducing Theoderic's privilege of "*dispensationis sacrae*," of sacred dispensation.¹⁴³ This dispensation is conceived as external to Theoderic, but as providing for his position and so invested in him. Next, Ennodius speaks of his "*professio*" as a sacrifice on the altars of Theoderic; this is quite unabashedly the language of political theology: Theoderic is conceived unmistakably as a god among men. Following this, Ennodius situates his own position before the sovereign; as a speaker offering praises, he is likened to the troops that serve to accomplish Theoderic's military designs (anticipating that Theoderic's military victories will be the principal subject of praise through this oration). The victories of Theoderic provide Ennodius the peace in which he pursues the studies preliminary to his art. It is to the sovereign that he owes this craft, a point brought home when Ennodius offers Theoderic room to interrupt if the praises of the sovereign are not pleasing to him ("*Dicite, si non praemii loco opifici suo lingua blanditur*"), who is, after all, the very source of Ennodius' voice, at least according to the ideology. This speech offers itself then as acknowledgement of Theoderic's power to dispense favor, development, and blessings onto loyal subjects, by analogy to the recognition of which Ennodius says that the *dispensator* of the cosmos requires in return for his generosity. This power of dispensation is central to the political theology by which Theoderic

¹⁴³ On this term, see Chapter 3, section 3.2-3 below (and especially fn. 13).

positions himself as sovereign: he must be recognized as the source of one's qualities, as that which cultivates or disposes of life. Finally, in a trope that anticipates the medieval language of the king's two bodies, there is a virtual identification of the "*regum maxime*," "greatest of kings," with the "*status reipublicae*," "state of the Republic," and this not only at the level of the form—in one breath Ennodius addresses Theoderic with both these terms, shouting "*salve*" to him each time—but also at the level of content.¹⁴⁴ As if to account for this gesture, Ennodius explains that words should not separate what is one and the same, and Theoderic's sovereignty and the welfare of the republic cannot be separated because they are one and the same.

So, in conclusion, it may be acknowledged that, although Theoderic's constitutional position was never recognized in his own ideology as that of the *princeps* or the *imperator*, nevertheless his authority depended upon those precedents and must be understood as a repetition of them. In fact, the indeterminacy of his constitutional position is the very proof that his power rests on a repetition of the sovereign power of the *princeps*, which is notorious for its indeterminacy and unintelligibility in terms of the traditional Roman constitution. This again shows the appropriateness of Agamben's theoretical model, which emphasizes more than any other theory of power how the sovereign persists as a displacement of constitutional order, as a kind of non-place that opens up within constitutional order, preserving the law as the exception to it. This

¹⁴⁴ Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957): 3-23.

explains how Theoderic might have added “edicts” to the law, the force of which must have been equal to that of the law, and how the Senate—which was to be protected from treasonous action by legislation against treason—might have come to be accused of treason. The virtual identity between the sovereign and the Republic, his position as the immediate embodiment of the Republic’s welfare, shows that betrayal of the divine man is directly a betrayal of the whole body politic. Theoderic as sovereign is figured in this discourse as the source of the stability of the political arrangement, as the god who makes it possible in the first place for law and order to be constituted at all.

1.6.3. State of Exception, Boethius, and Bare life

The execution of the military officer Oduin provides a clue to understanding the potentially disastrous consequences of the fallout between the king and Senate that led to Boethius’ demise. For Oduin’s execution in the Sessorian Basilica upon the king’s *adventus* at Rome in 500 CE shows how the king grounded his power in the spectacular display of a body subjected to the full force, directly embodied by the king, of a divine power over life and death.¹⁴⁵ This grounding of power is absolutely essential for the operation of ideology. As Santner explains it: “The space of representation has always been one in which the dimension of flesh”—by “flesh” Santner means something comparable to what Freud meant by the phallus, a surplus attached to the unified corpus,

¹⁴⁵ For more on the details of this execution, see Anon. Vales. 12.68 and Amory, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy, 489-554*: 69, fn. 130.

defining that body by way of its lack¹⁴⁶—“has been implicated. Indeed...the crucial thought at the heart of the King’s Two Bodies is that within the framework of the political theology of sovereignty, the signifiers that represent the subject for other signifiers are, so to speak, “backed” or “underwritten” by the sublime flesh, the sacral soma, of the monarch.”¹⁴⁷ In other words, the exceptional authority the sovereign holds provides a final word, so to speak, that closes the circulation of meaning in the symbolic order by way of a final, transcendental signifier. What Agamben adds to this is the crucial role “bare life” plays in this ideological operation—sovereign power establishes its sublime status by extracting a surplus from the life that it rules: if a surplus of symbolic investiture defines the power of the sovereign, so must there be an extreme lack elsewhere within the economy of the symbolic order. As Santner explains, “‘Bare life’ is, we might say, the uncanny remainder that is left over once such entitlements are stripped down to a zero-degree, the minimal entitlement *to enjoy life*.”¹⁴⁸ Agamben explains elsewhere,

It is as if male citizens had to pay for their participation in political life with an unconditional subjection to a power of death, as if life were able to enter the city only in the double exception of being capable of being killed and yet not sacrificed. Hence the situation of the *patria potestas* at the limit of the *domus* and

¹⁴⁶ The *locus classicus* for this idea is Jacques Lacan, "The Signification of the Phallus," in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2007). On the relationship between politics, tyranny, and castration, see also Jacques Lacan, Jacques-Alain Miller, and James Hulbert, "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in Hamlet," *Yale French Studies* 55/56 (1977): 49-52. Lacan's obscure writings almost uniformly require the assistance of an exegete, so finally see John P. Muller, "Psychosis and Mourning in Lacan's Hamlet," *New Literary History* 12, no. 1 (Autumn, 1980).

¹⁴⁷ Santner, *The Royal Remains : the People's Two Bodies and the Endgames of Sovereignty*: 5.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

the city: if classical politics is born through the separation of these two spheres, life that may be killed but not sacrificed is the hinge on which each sphere is articulated and the threshold at which the two spheres are joined in becoming indeterminate. Neither political *bios* nor natural *zoē*, sacred life is the zone of indistinction in which *zoē* and *bios* constitute each other in including and excluding each other.¹⁴⁹

The power of death that Agamben describes is the “final word,” so to speak, putting a halt to symbolic circulation, the point at which all of the institutions and offices of the social order are grounded in a brute fact. On the other side, the object to which this positive power of death applies itself is a remainder of living tissue, characterized by an equally sublime negativity or lack. The drama played out between Theoderic and Oduin exemplifies this perfectly well: a conspiracy against the king—real or fictive—is put to rest by a spectacular execution. But it is not as simple as the vanishing of Oduin and the investiture of Theoderic; the name Oduin is promoted to an equally sublime/abject status through his rivalry with Theoderic, so that even today he is remembered alongside Theoderic.¹⁵⁰

Returning to Boethius, his execution performs very much the same function, acting as a spectacular display of the same kind, whereby Theoderic may discharge the crisis that threatens his rule. Boethius’ execution was a kind of transference, in the psychoanalytic sense, whereby the Senate and the sovereign were able to set aside their

¹⁴⁹ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*: 90.

¹⁵⁰ The coincidence of the highest and the lowest in the sublime/abject “Thing” is treated by Lacan in Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960*, trans. Dennis Porter, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan* (New York: Norton, 1992): 101-14.

differences only by discharging their suspicion of one another onto Boethius, who, as *magister officiorum*, embodied the persistence of a link between the Senate and that sovereign that had been, in spite of Boethius, broken. If the crisis could have been displaced onto the link, or onto the figure who embodied that link improperly, then the Senate and the sovereign could seem to return to the relationship they had before the rupture. In these circumstances, the emergency is overcome only by reducing this official to the condition of bare life. I contend that we may rightly understand this diminished state in which Boethius the prisoner persists as an example of what Agamben has identified as “bare life.” However much a stretch it may seem to compare Boethius here, given that Agamben has more regularly turned to holocaust victims or “neo-morts” than to well known philosophers to illustrate the condition of bare life, it must be remembered that the paradigmatic case of bare life, for Agamben, is the Roman *homo sacer*. I do not mean that Boethius is *homo sacer*—there is quite simply no evidence to support this—but rather that his relationship with sovereign power is structured by the same double exception that structures *homo sacer* as, in Agamben’s account, the exemplary form of bare life. As has been shown, “Boethius” has all the distinguishing features of bare life: speechlessness, an unqualified, “bare” biological life that persists in spite of itself, and does so in a degenerate, debilitated state. This point may be buttressed by some of what one has learned from Boethius’ *apologia*, which I discussed above. There we learned from prose I.4 that Boethius had had his goods confiscated, had been driven into exile, and had been condemned to death by the time he began writing the *Consolation*. He was

also subjected to these punishments without any trial; in this sense, his punishments were administered outside of normal legal protections. This is precisely the sense in which Boethius' punishments must be explained by reference to the extra-legal, extra-constitutional position of the sovereign. As I have already shown, Theoderic's position is at once inside and outside the constitution; one may see in the handling of Boethius' charges a similar topology, whereby his charges are certainly comprehensible within the prevailing legal categories. He stands accused of *maiestas* and *sacrilegium*, and his punishment accords with what was appropriate for those guilty of this crime. And yet he did not receive any kind of normal trial to determine his guilt, but rather seems to have had the potential guilt of the Senate or Albinus displaced onto him as he was defending them. In other words, this was not precisely the death penalty to which Boethius was subjected, but rather an extra-legal punishment that is only comprehensible by reference to the crisis that divides the senate and the sovereign.

This long digression treating the political circumstances that condition Boethius' composition of the *Consolation* may be brought to its close. All that remains to be shown is that when Boethius speaks of his "*terror*" that his "*comites*" may follow the same "*iter*" down which he has been made to walk, he is referring to his fear that they too will be subject to the same extra-legal punishment to which he has been condemned. In several places through IV.1 Boethius mentions his fear, but here with more forthrightness than the expression of which he was capable at poem I.1. First, at I.4.11, he declares, "*Provincialium fortunas tum privatis rapinis tum publicis vectigalibus pessumdari non*

aliter quam qui patiebantur indolui,” “I was grieved”—*indolui* is the verb form of “*dolor*”—“that the fortunes of provincials were burdened as much by private seizures as by public taxes in no way otherwise than those who suffered these things were.” The Ostrogoths seem to have required a one-third tax on all Roman estates, either in the form of actual land or, more likely, in the form of a percentage of the yield.¹⁵¹ More important for my purpose are the “*privatae rapinae*” that Boethius suggests are more or less everyday business—at least on a par with taxation—for the Goths; it is in this sense that one must understand Benjamin’s observation that “the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the ‘state of emergency’ in which we live is not the exception but the rule.”¹⁵² It is this, originally, the lawlessness that at some level of society has, as much in spite of Theoderic as because of him, always characterized Roman-Gothic relations, that has caused Boethius’ *dolor*.

The true depths of that grief he did not reach until after his downfall. Having explained the history of his calamities, he says in the *peroratio* that concludes his forensic oration,

Videre autem videor nefarias sceleratorum officinas gaudio laetitiaque fluitantes, perditissimum quemque novis delationum fraudibus imminentem, iacere bonos nostri discriminis terrore prostratos, flagitiosum quemque ad audendam quidem facinus impunitate, ad efficiendum vero praemiis incitari, insontes autem non modo securitate verum ipsa etiam defensione privatos. (I.1.46)

¹⁵¹ On these “*tertiae*,” as they were called, see Moorhead, *Theoderic in Italy*: 33-34.

¹⁵² Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968).

I seem to see the wicked workshops of fiends rolling with joy and delight, whoever is most corrupted threatening with new deceits of denunciation, and the good lie prostrate because of their fear (*terror*) at my crisis. [I see] that whoever is disgraceful is encouraged to daring outrage by their impunity, to accomplishing it by their rewards, but the innocent are deprived not only of security but truly even of protection.

Here Boethius uses the word that appeared in line 5 of his opening elegy in order to depict the affect that cripples his friends, the “*bonos*” and the “*insontes*.” As he comes to the climax of his speech, he expresses his fear that his friends will be crippled with fear by his downfall. There is a way in which Boethius’ response to his downfall, by a contagion only suggested but nevertheless registered, has immediately transferred the same affect that he assails him to all those with whom he had contact. Furthermore, as the image of his “prostrate” friends shows, a comparable reduction is accomplished in every case by this terror; it spreads and disables bodies, rendering them incapacitated, separated from their potential to defend themselves from their oppressors.¹⁵³ In this way, there is a causal connection between terror and the condition of bare life, so that it is not just the immediate victim who as bare life is incapacitated, but also the witness who stands by

¹⁵³ I understand the movement of this *terror* within a threefold distinction between emotions, affects, and drives that I have borrowed from affect theory, an elaboration of the metaphysics of Spinoza, Bergson, and Deleuze. Emotion may be understood as the subjective experience of affect, whereas affects have neither subjectivity nor objectivity but move autonomously between bodies. Brian Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect," in *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002). See also Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, "An Inventory of Shimmers," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Gergory J. Seigworth, Melissa Gregg, and Sara Ahmed (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010). For an intelligent psychoanalytic critique or elaboration of affect theory that takes account of the drive, see Charles Shepherdson, "Emotion, Affect, Drive," in *Lacan and the Limits of Language* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

and watches the *discrimen*.¹⁵⁴ If *terror* is the affect that overcomes the life of the citizen, rendering him or her as bare life, the effect that Theoderic's actions were designed to achieve is a transference of that fear to all of the Romans who would potentially resist his power or the intimidation of his dependents. It is this resonance of *terror* throughout the political space that incapacitates Boethius, and his incapacitation in turn redoubles the effects of the *terror*, disseminating its effects.

One question remains: how, as bare life, does Boethius articulate his grievances against his oppressors? How is it possible that he comes to testify on behalf of his own impossibility of speaking?¹⁵⁵ For he says at I.4.28, "*Qua in re non ita sensus nostros maeror hebetavit ut impios scelerata contra virtutem querar molitos, sed quae speraverint effecisse vehementer ammiror,*" "I am not so afflicted at this matter that my senses have dulled, so that I would complain that the wicked strive at crimes against virtue, but I am greatly amazed that they have accomplished what they hoped to achieve." It has already been shown that Boethius, when one first hears him in I.1, has no voice of his own, that his "voice" is only a simulation, an *afflatus* operated by the dexterity of the Muses plucking Boethius' vocal chords. It is they, not he, who give voice to his "*terror*." Yet here Boethius may speak not only in his own voice but also with great Ciceronian eloquence of the crimes against his virtue. In the next two chapters, I account for this mysterious reversal, and treat the properly consolatory discourse included in this text.

¹⁵⁴ On the witness, and the modalities of his discourse, see Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*: 137-71.

¹⁵⁵ Agamben's account of subjectivity prioritizes this problem. See the epigraph for the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Boethius' *Consolation*, Books I-III

“...we give the name *testimony* to the system of relations between the inside and outside of *langue*, between the sayable and the unsayable in every language—that is, between a potentiality of speech and its existence, between a possibility and an impossibility of speech. To think a potentiality in act *as potentiality*, to think enunciation on the plane of *langue* is to inscribe a caesura in possibility, a caesura that divides it into a possibility and an impossibility, into a potentiality and an impotentiality; and it is to situate the subject in this very caesura. [The Foucauldian] archive's constitution presupposed the bracketing of the subject, who was reduced to a simple function or an empty position... In testimony, by contrast, the empty place of the subject becomes the decisive question. [...] it is a matter of situating the subject in the disjunction between a possibility and an impossibility of speech, asking, “How can a possibility of speech realize itself as such?” Precisely because testimony is the relation between a possibility of speech and its taking place, it can exist only through a relation to an impossibility of speech—that is, only as *contingency*, as a capacity not to be. This contingency, this occurrence of language in a subject, is different from actual discourse's utterance or non-utterance, its speaking or not speaking, its production or non-production as a statement. It concerns the subject's capacity to have or not to have language. The subject is thus the possibility that language does not exist, does not take place—or, better, that it takes place only through its possibility of not being there, its contingency. The human being is the speaking being, the living being who has language, because the human being is capable of *not having* language...”¹

2.1. Introduction

At this point, it has been shown that the *Consolation* was written in the aftermath of a major political crisis that separated the Ostrogothic royal *domus* at Ravenna and the Senate at Rome, and that the author was accused so that the crisis could be disavowed, unloaded onto the official intermediary between the two divided groups. This context is necessary in order to understand why the Ostrogothic king has put Boethius in the

¹ Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*: 145-6.

radically diminished condition that Agamben has identified as bare life, a life nakedly exposed to the violence of divine, sovereign power. The question has arisen how Boethius, upon his reduction to bare life, can undertake such powerful expression of his miseries. For, as we saw in the first poem, the Muses could only bring him to craft lyric that approached the cause of his miseries tangentially, lamenting his own pathetic condition. From I.1 through poem I.3, Boethius could not speak either, his voice captured by the “*stupor*” that disappoints Philosophia. How, given the impossibility of Boethius’ speaking on behalf of himself and indeed of utterance *simpliciter*, is he able to become the witness who testifies against the injustice done to him?

In this chapter, I treat the text of the *Consolation* more closely and at length, attending to how Philosophia’s consolation featured in the text brings about Boethius’ increase in powers of expression and philosophical self-relation through the end of Book III. I claimed in the introduction to Chapter I that the *Consolation* sets forth a tension between the two participants in this consolatory exchange. On the one side, there is Philosophia’s direction of the dialogue towards the resolution of a certain interminable grieving by way of a discovery of power and increasing potential for rational self-affection; on the other side, there is a certain resistance to this movement in the *consolandus*, a hesitance to commit to the philosopher’s claims that provokes a certain impatience and even hostility in Philosophia.

In the two chapters that follow, I show that Boethius’ *Consolation* becomes a self-consolation insofar as Philosophia is an imaginary projection of Boethius’ mind, which,

though it has no powers of reason or intuition in this diminished state, still possesses a faculty of imagination. Through the course of the *Consolation*, Philosophia's status becomes more clear to the reader, in this case, Boethius himself, whose increased powers of cognition lead him to greater insight into the ontological status of the main speaker in this text. In other words, approaching the *Consolation* through the metaphysical schema that Philosophia provides at prose V.4, a philosophical reading reframes the dialogue between Boethius and Philosophia as a dialogue between the imagination and the body. Boethius' fantasy shows itself as a fantasy and he can see Philosophia for the imaginary presence that she is. Should Boethius successfully arrive at the higher-order rationality and intuition that show his own body to be negligible and his imaginary conversation partner to be simply imaginary, he would, in the end, also arrive at self-consolation.

However, since the *Consolation* is ultimately a Menippean satire, just as much a poetic text as a philosophical one, another reading is possible, in which Philosophia's metaphysical scheme that would divide the world into objects of intuition, reason, imagination, and sensation appears as *her* scheme, as a discursive mode proper to philosophy. Reading the text poetically as literature, one can see that the entire philosophical project of self-consolation must fail, insofar as Boethius remains dependent upon the political and social reality that conditions his philosophical project. If a voice, a body, and a life however finite are conditions that must exist for any act of lamentation or consolation and if Philosophia's account cannot establish the immortality of the human soul, then the philosophical argument upon which Philosophia finally depends cannot

offer a consolation that will answer to all of the aspects of Boethius' "illness" as defined in I.6. Philosophia's wisdom would then lead not to immortal life and the insight of divine knowledge, but rather to death and the loss of all powers of cognition. The self-consolation and its impossible conclusion then unfold in this text in the space between these two readings. The text thus ends in ambiguity, having led Boethius neither to immortal glory nor simply abandoned him to utter destitution.

2.2. Bare Life, Melancholia, and Fantasy

One must look then to Boethius' destitution, with which the text begins, in order to understand how Philosophia appears to bring him beyond this condition. Above I indicated that Philosophia misdiagnosed Boethius, that his condition actually fits the symptoms of melancholia somewhat better than they fit lethargy. But in truth neither of these afflictions is very suitable to bare life, the affective condition of which state is something like the zero-degree of affect, the point at which nothing is felt at all. If Boethius is bare life, this scrap of human flesh reduced to utter passivity, then his *stupor* is the affective condition that best fits him insofar as he is bare life. What then affects him in such a way that he is moved to melancholia? The answer to this question lies, in accordance with the cyclical structure that Boethius built into the *Consolation*, in Book V. At prose V.4.27-39 Philosophia presents the Neoplatonic theory of the mind, which

she introduces in order to make her case for God's providence.² For my purposes, it may serve as a tool to explicate Boethius' psychology as he makes his exit from the diminished state to which sovereign power has reduced him. For, as Agamben has emphasized, passivity even at its most radical, in some cases, has powers at its disposal that are just as important as those that the dynamically active seem to possess.

The mind, on Philosophia's presentation, is divided into four levels of knowledge: there are objects known through the senses (*sensus*), the imagination (*imaginatio*), reason (*ratio*), and intellect (*intelligentia*, V.4.24-39). Definitions are offered at V.4.28-30:

Sensus enim figuram in subiecta materia constitutam, imaginatio vero solam sine materia iudicat figuram; ratio vero hanc quoque transcendit speciemque ipsam, quae singularibus inest, universali consideratione perpendit. Intelligentiae vero celsior oculus existit; supergressa namque universitatis ambitum, ipsam illam simplicem formam pura mentis acie contuetur.

Sense apprehends the figure constituted in a material subject, imagination rather grasps the figure alone without matter; reason goes beyond this figure and examines the species itself, which inheres in singularities, with universal consideration. But the eye of intelligence exists at a higher level, passing beyond the circuit of universality, and conceives that simple form itself by the pure vision of the mind.

The most important of these, for my immediate purpose, is *imaginatio*. The faculty indulges in the free play of bodiless figures, but it is also the first indication that the mind is active, not merely a passive recipient of external effects. On this Neoplatonic view, the mind possesses an internal power that allows it to make determinations toward alteration

² See section 3.5 below.

of the material state that conditions one's exposure to external forces. In poem V.4 Boethius emphasizes this, having Philosophia sing of the power of the mind, its ability to actively intervene in the world.³

20	<i>Quae divisa recolligit alternumque legens iter nunc summis caput inserit, nunc decedit in infima, tum sese referens sibi</i>	25	<i>veris falsa redarguit? Haec est efficiens magis longe causa potentior quam quae materiae modo impressas patitur notas.</i>	What gathers together again that which is divided and choosing (<i>legens</i>) the alternate path (<i>iter</i>) at one time raises its head to the highest summits, at another falls down to the lowest depths, and then, carrying itself back to itself, refutes false conceptions with true ones? This is an efficient cause by far More powerful (<i>potentior</i>) than What only from matter Suffers (<i>patitur</i>) impressed marks.
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According to the conception presented in this poem, the mind possesses an internal faculty *potentior*, “more powerful,” than the passive bodies that receive a “*nota impressa*,” a “mark pressed upon it.” The mind is capable of bringing forth from within itself, as the last two lines of this poem have it, “forms stored within that it mixes with images” (“*introrsumque reconditis / formis miscet imagines*” V.4.39-40). What this poem emphasizes, then, against the Stoics (“*Porticus*,” V.4.1), is the active intellect, the capacity of the mind to make even of its passivity an active power.⁴ At its most passive, the mind internalizes external *notae* from material sensations, but then employs an

³ O’Daly concludes that the *imaginatio* on this presentation does not miss the mark but offers only true representations of how things really are. Against his view, see my comments on V.6.12 below, in Chapter 3, section 3.5. Gerard O’Daly, “Sense-Perception and Imagination in Boethius, *Philosophiae Consolatio* 5 m. 4,” in *Philanthropia kai eusebeia : Festschrift für Albrecht Dihle*, ed. Glenn W. Most (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993).

⁴ Scheible, *Die Gedichte in der Consolatio Philosophiae des Boethius*: 168.

internal active force to deploy these toward its own movements (“*inserit...decedit*,” 23-24).

It is important that this theorization takes the form that it most often took in antiquity, relying on the relationship between the writing instrument and the writing tablet to demonstrate this conception:

1	<i>Quondam Porticus attulit obscuros nimium senes qui sensus et imagines e corporibus extimis</i>	Once the Porch brought forth some rather obscure old men who sensibiles and images from external bodies
5	<i>credant mentibus imprimi, ut quondam celeri stilo mos est aequore paginae, quae nullas habeat notas, pressas figere litteras.</i>	believed to be impressed on minds, as at some time with the swift stylus it's typical on the surface of a page, which has no marks upon it, to form impressed letters.

From lines 6-9, the mind is analogized to a writing tablet, ready to receive markings. This analogy may be taken as something more than simply an analogy, as a key that Boethius planted in Philosophia's mouth in order to decode both her presence in the text and the progress of her consolatory discourse. If all the entities that exist in the world, according to her scheme, are material, imaginary, rational, or intellectual, then everything that appears in Boethius' text should be intelligible as one of these four things. In order to demonstrate this, one must examine the precise moment when Boethius begins writing (prose I.1.1): “*Haec dum mecum tacitus ipse reputarem querimoniamque lacrimabilem stili officio signarem adstitisse mihi supra verticem visa est mulier reverendi admodum vultus...*” “While I myself, silent, was thinking these things over with myself and I was marking down this tearful complaint with my dutiful pen, there appeared to stand over

my head a woman of awe-inspiring aspect [...]” This sentence immediately follows after the first poem that Boethius was writing at the behest of the Muses. The phrase “*mecum tacitus ipse reputarem*,” is unusually emphatic of the subject.⁵ “*Reputo*” here indicates that Boethius is thinking, and “*tacitus*” situated between “*mecum*” and “*ipse*” indicates that this thinking is silent and internal, having to do with Boethius’ self-relation, his subjectivity.⁶ Immediately following this, Boethius begins writing: “*haec... stilio officio signarem...*” (I.1.1). Writing and subjectivity are thus the prelude to the major advent of Philosophia in the very next clause. The connection made between silently withdrawn thinking and writing allows the question to be asked, what then are these Muses (and for that matter what is Philosophia),⁷ such that they can miraculously appear in Boethius’ cell?

For now, I only investigate the question of the Muses. If Boethius as bare life has no affective condition to speak of, but lives at the zero-degree of affect, this does not mean that his cognitive powers have simply vanished. Though they have been suppressed, it seems that he is still capable of rousing himself or of being roused by the Muses to a certain play of his cognitive faculties. One should expect, according to the Neoplatonic scheme Philosophia sets forth at V.4, only Boethius’ lower-level cognitive faculties to operate, and this is how the text represents him. The Muses engage his

⁵ While Latin prose employs reflexivity across the verb more often than English, it does not usually require a subject, let alone an intensive in the nominative case reinforced in this way by the prepositional phrase and reflexive pronoun.

⁶ Lerer, *Boethius and Dialogue*: 96-110.

⁷ I will return to the question of Philosophia’s ontological status in Chapter 3, section 3.6.

imaginatio, but they do so in a way that is non-rational. Above, I showed that Boethius' affective state, as it is described in the first poem, indicates that he is suffering from melancholia. One of the distinguishing features that I said may be considered a cause of Boethius' degeneration in light of the language used at lines 19-20 was his experience of having lost a love-object: Fortuna. She was depicted as his elegiac *puella*, who scorned his love and deceived him with her "*fallax vultus*." At this point, it is possible to distinguish between Boethius affective condition upon his downfall—he is bare life—and upon his first attempt at returning himself to comprehend his plight. His poetry rouses in him an experience of *terror* that causes his melancholic condition, and then the operation that precipitated his fall is concealed by a kind of screen-memory,⁸ so that Boethius believes not that he has been undermined by political intrigue and conspiracy, but rather that his lover has left him. Fortuna is then a product of Boethius' own imaginative faculty run out of control, as the presence of the Muses indicates. They are the imaginary shape that his mind produces in order to account for this unconscious self-affection.

2.3. Philosophia's Therapy of Desire

It is to this fantasy of lost love, this imagination gone wild, that Philosophia will offer herself as an alternative from prose I.1. No, better, she will insist violently that she

⁸ The screen-memory is something like a straw-man narrative that is constructed to conceal the traumatic potential of a more fundamental truth. One may think of the caricature of Plato as nothing more than the thinker who came up with the idea of "ideas," who hated the body, poets, and trendy music. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1981): 54-63.

is the only real option for her nursling. Philosophia appears to Boethius and offers herself against the Muses as his only true healer, and thus the consolatory discourse proper begins. What is at stake in the image of philosophy as an art of medicine, of Philosophia as Boethius' healer?⁹ I suggest that the conceit that poses philosophy as a medical art¹⁰ may be understood here as a therapeutic regimen through which philosophical discourse treats and strengthens life persisting under the imminent threat of sovereign power, so that this life is brought back to its own powers. In other words, the power of Philosophia, in a way comparable to that of the worldly sovereign Theoderic, provides a kind of training that restores Boethius to certain powers and abilities that he has, thanks to her therapy, just as Theoderic's sovereign authority makes possible Ennodius' *otium* and the powers he cultivates thanks to and on behalf of the sovereign. Philosophia applies a therapy of the self and of desire, guiding Boethius' desire toward his forgotten true self. By transforming Boethius' fantasy and the affects experienced in conjunction with the fantasy, Philosophia's power can lead Boethius to new desires and powers of his own.¹¹ Philosophia's treatment of Boethius is introduced from the first prose passage of Book I, and culminates in the vision of eternal life in Book V. I will return to this question of life,

⁹ On this question, see Philips, "Lady Philosophy's Therapeutic Method: The 'Gentler' and the 'Stronger' Remedies in Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae*."

¹⁰ William A. Johnson, *Readers and Reading Culture in the High Roman Empire: A Study of Elite Communities* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010): 74-97; Susan Mattern, *Galen and the Rhetoric of Healing* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

¹¹ Lerer has given the most attention to this progress. He does not emphasize the political dimension of Philosophia's pedagogy, though. Lerer, *Boethius and Dialogue*: 94-236.

closely connected to health for obvious reasons, below.¹² Her goal is ultimately to show Boethius, by applying a treatment of arguments, that he has an essential relationship with eternal life, and because of this he belongs not to any worldly kingdom, but rather to a philosophical monarchy ruled by God, and that he suffers not from his loss of position and fortune in the real world but rather because he has forgotten his relationship to the eternal ruler of this philosophical kingdom. In order to reach this destination, though, Philosophia first must displace the erotic energy Boethius invests in Fortuna.

2.3.1. Philosophia's Analysis of the Symptoms

Philosophia's therapy is introduced right away, upon her arrival. As soon as she dismisses the Muses, she exclaims that only her healing art may "liberate" (*"liberant"*) Boethius from his suffering—the Muses will only intensify the misery of his suffering. She asks who allowed the Muses to visit this "sick man" (*"hunc aegrum"*), since they are equipped with "no remedies" (*"nullis remediis"*), save their "sweet poison" (*"dulcibus...venenis"*; prose I.1.8). She ends her dismissal of the Muses from the company of her man, "nursed on Academic and Eleatic studies" (*"Eleaticis atque Academicis studiis innutritum"*) with the demand, "*Sed abite potius, Sirenes usque in exitium dulces, meisque eum Musis curandum sanandumque relinquite!*"—"But away with you, Sirens sweet to the point of ruin, and leave him to be treated and healed by my

¹² See section 3.5.

Muses!” (prose I.1.11). So the therapy and Philosophia’s “nursing” of Boethius are connected from her very arrival.

The question, then, is what form her healing art will take: exactly what practice of healing is required? Philosophia must diagnose Boethius’ condition in order to treat him. To this she turns at prose I.2.1, bringing her own poem of lament at I.2 to a close by declaring that “*medicinae...tempus est quam querelae*,” “it’s time for medicine rather than complaining.” After once again emphasizing her role in nursing Boethius (“*lacte nutritus, nostris educatus alimentis in virilis animi*”, I.2.2), she questions him specifically concerning his silence—“*quid taces? pudore an stupore siluisti?*”—“Why are you silent? Are you silenced by shame or by a stupor?” (I.2.4). She concludes that a “stupor” indeed oppresses Boethius, but that it is no real “danger” (“*nihil...periculi est*”) because of the specific nature of his affliction. She declares, “*lethargum patitur, communem inlusarum mentium morbum*,” “he suffers from lethargy, a common illness of deluded minds” (I.2.5). Now there is a precise diagnosis. As I emphasized above, the word “lethargy” is not native to Latin; one must remember that Boethius was a translator of Aristotle’s difficult Greek, and certainly could have recognized that the signifiers in the field of “*lēth-*” suggest “forgetfulness” also, insofar as they are related to “*lēthē*.”¹³ Given Boethius’ Neoplatonism and the emphasis on remembering and recovery of self in this

¹³ See the reference to Caelius Aurelianus’ *On Acute Diseases* 2.1.1 in Philips, “Lady Philosophy’s Therapeutic Method: The ‘Gentler’ and the ‘Stronger’ Remedies in Boethius’s *De Consolatione Philosophiae*,” 11.

text, it is essential to see this diagnosis as a certain philosophical self-forgetting, a favorite *topos* of Plato.¹⁴ And Philosophia's next breath confirms this: "*Sui paulisper oblitus est. Recordabitur facile, si quidem nos ante cognoverit,*" "He has only forgotten himself to some small extent; he will remember with ease, if indeed he recognized us before" (I.2.5-6).

This diagnosis, I have stressed following Schmid, is not without ambiguity; Boethius could just as easily be called a melancholic. Since his symptoms in fact fit melancholia somewhat better than they fit lethargy, one must ask what this diagnosis allows Philosophia to do? The answer has two parts. First, by side-stepping melancholia, Philosophia may also set aside Boethius' *terror* before the dangers that threaten his *comites* in the political space. It is absolutely essential to see that Philosophia never directly engages this problem; *terror* is quite simply a topic that she has no interest to discuss. Rather, she focuses her arguments only on the imaginary symptom that proceeds from this condition: Boethius' delusion of love for Fortuna. Second, her diagnosis renders Boethius' illness as something to which philosophical discourse is perfectly suited to addressing itself. No illness is more appropriately treated by Platonic dialectics than "self-forgetting," since the dialectic is above all an art of remembering all the forgotten things that one still already knows somewhere in the soul. So in these two ways, Philosophia's purposes are served by the diagnosis of lethargy that she introduces.

¹⁴ Pl. *Meno* 85d; *Phd.* 75b-77d; *Symp.* 207e-208a.

But this initial diagnosis only opens the way to the rest of her investigation of Boethius' condition, and the results of this complete assessment are more important for the substance of Philosophia's consolation. Having arrived at what Philosophia considers a proper recognition of Boethius' illness, she turns at I.6 to deciphering the causes of that illness. One may think of this as a secondary assessment, by which Philosophia is able to identify specific misconceptions that have turned Boethius away from proper philosophical understanding, and away from the self-knowledge to which she would restore him. Boethius' answers to the questions that Philosophia poses in this section determine the direction of the rest of the conversation between Boethius and Philosophia in this text. These answers are decisive, since the entire course of Philosophia's treatment is determined by the conclusions reached in this section. She asks him four questions, the first of which concerns whether there is any "*regimen...rationis*" in the world, or is it simply led by "stray and chance occurrences," "*temerariis...fortuitisque casibus*" (I.6.3). Boethius' reply is that "*deus*," the "*conditor*" of the universe, "presides over his work," that "never a day will come when I [that is, Boethius] would be driven away from the truth of this statement." ("*verum operi suo conditorem praesidere deum scio nec unquam fuerit dies qui me ab hac sententiae veritate depellat.*" I.6.4). He thus rejects the possibility that chance governs the unfolding of events in the cosmos. It is his remainder of trust in the order of things, that a God stands as ruler over all, which Philosophia will exploit in order to lead Boethius back to a comprehensive conception of divine order, one in which humanity also benefits from God's providence. Their shared assumption

forecloses the possibility that the Epicureans are correct, that the world truly is given over to the free reign of chance events; that the possibility of a world ruled by chance is never up for discussion means Epicureanism need not be entertained. Philosophia will only direct her therapy towards issues that she deems relevant to Boethius' condition; she overlooks the *terror* that he mentions in the first poem, and ignores his litany on the politics that led to his downfall (I.4).¹⁵ Her presumption from the start is that Boethius only must be convinced of providential design, the order in the world that he cannot recognize in his frenzied state at poem I.5.25-48.

Philosophia, proceeding with the shared assumption that the universe is ruled by God, still has further questions for Boethius. First, she asks an ambiguous question: "*Sed dic mihi, quoniam deo mundum regi non ambigis, quibus etiam gubernaculis regatur advertis? Vix, inquam, rogationis tuae sententiam nosco, nedum ad inquisita respondere queam.*" "But, since you do not doubt that the world is ruled by God, tell me by what turning rudders is it ruled?" (I.6.7). Boethius responds by saying he does not know at all what she is asking, let alone how to answer. The author is exploiting an ambiguity inherent in the language of governance, which overlaps with the language of navigation. Boethius' failure to grasp the meaning of this term, his inability to distinguish a philosophical from an ordinary sense of the word *gubernaculum*, indicates the degree to

¹⁵ This gives a slightly different interpretation to Barfield's observation, that "Like any good physician or diagnostician, she will deliver the proper medicines in the proper order based on the condition of the singular patient before her." Specifically, I see her avoidance of these topics as strategic, even motivated omissions. Barfield, "Boethius, Dionysius, and the Forms," 89.

which his subjectivity has been undermined by his downfall. Philosophia observes this by saying that sickness has broken into his mind, as if “through a gaping breach in a wall” (“*hiante valli robore*,” I.6.9), because he does not have the security of the specialized knowledge that would allow him to discern her meaning straightaway. She rephrases her question, asking whether he knows what is the “*rerum finis*,” the final cause toward which all things tend by nature. Boethius replies that he had once heard, but “*memoriam maeror hebetavit*,” “mourning has checked my memory” of it (I.6.10). One must note that it is not *terror* that has obstructed Boethius’ memory, but “*maeror*,” “mourning,” the affect one must connect to his loss of Fortuna, since one mourns losses but experiences terror before that which has not yet happened. Philosophia is confused by Boethius’ reply, since he can recall that God is the source of all things, but does not take this origin to indicate that God is also the end of all things. She will have to address both of these topics, the final cause and the immanent order that proceeds from that final cause, before her discourse concludes.

But her suspicion is that there is something deeper blocking his knowledge of this immanent order culminating in god’s finality. She presses him further, asking what a *homo* is (I.6.15), whether Boethius can offer a definition of that nature. He replies with a question that he answers himself, “*Hocine interrogas, an esse me sciam rationale animal atque mortale? scio, et id me esse confiteor.*” “Are you asking me this, whether I know that I am a mortal and rational animal?” The way in which Boethius has rephrased her question reveals that he came to these terms all by himself—she has not planted her

answer by asking, for example, “Do you know that human nature consists of being rational, animal, and immortal?”¹⁶ This much is clear though: to that question, the one I have posed but Boethius did not, she would have liked to hear his assent. For she pushes him to say whether he is “*nihil.. aliud*,” “nothing else” more than this; still, he replies with one hopeless word, carefully chosen by our author, “*nihil*.” (I.6.15-16). Philosophia continues, saying that she now understands the “other and most dire cause of your illness:” “what you yourself are you have ceased to know” (“*morbi tui aliam vel maximam causam; quid ipse sis nosse desisti*,” I.6.17). Thus we have her complete diagnosis, which culminates in Boethius’ nihilism, or as she understands it his ignorance of self. And so by this point, everything is in place. Boethius is sick with lethargy because he has forgotten his true nature, his immortality; because of this he cannot grasp how his downfall may be reconciled with god’s position as the source from which and the goal towards which all things are moved. In this way, Philosophia has directed her consolation of Boethius away from his political downfall, the source of his grief, and towards the philosophical life that she wants him to adopt. At this moment in the text, the magnitude of Boethius’ grief shows itself, since he is unable to control the direction of his self-consolation. If Boethius’ self-consolation will be a success, it will have to be in philosophical terms.

¹⁶ Gruber, *Kommentar zu Boethius « De consolatione philosophiae »*: 161, with references at n. 15.

2.3.2. Philosophia's Treatment

It will be necessary to review the arguments that Philosophia makes, in order to show how she dodges Boethius' political downfall. Philosophia makes a strategic move: treating Boethius' illness as if it is strictly psychological and not also the result of his political failure, which his *terror* at the possibility of others suffering the same abuse shows. She is able in this way to guide the conversation away from the politics, which Boethius recounts at length (as we have seen at I.4),¹⁷ towards a therapy of desire and the self, attempting to prove that his imaginary desires proceed from a forgetfulness of philosophical wisdom concerning his innate immortality. In this section, I review the therapy that she applies, in order to show how it displaces Boethius' desire for lost Fortuna, redirecting that affect toward the Platonic conception of the Good in itself.

Before discovering the more serious causes of Boethius' illness, Philosophia's treatment has already begun. She provides her first therapy at the end of I.2: "So that it should be possible [for him to remember easily], let's clear his eyes a little, since they're clouded with mortal concerns," Philosophia proceeds to "dry [his] eyes full with tears" by wiping them "with her garment drawn up into a fold." ("*quod ut possit, paulisper lumina eius mortalium rerum nube caligantia tergamus. Haec dixit oculosque meos fletibus undantes contracta in rugam veste siccavit.*" prose I.2.6-7). The poem following this passage mostly consists of an analogy to natural phenomena that artfully makes the point

¹⁷ See section 1.6 above.

that Boethius has recovered his sight to such an extent that by prose I.3.1 Boethius can recognize the “face of [his] healer” (“*medicantis faciem...*”), the “nurse at whose Lares [he] had spent his youth, Philosophia” (“*...nutricem meam, cuius ab adolescentia laribus obversatus fueram, Philosophiam.*” I.3.2). This is the first time she is identified by name, and the first time that Boethius, by recalling his youth spent in the domestic space of his “nurse,” has recalled himself enough to recognize her. This is Philosophia’s first treatment of the prisoner, who is gradually being drawn out from his diminished state. In order to interpret this gesture, one must consider in a little more depth Philosophia’s garment. It is necessary to look again to prose I.1, where Philosophia first appears to Boethius. Philosophia’s garment is first mentioned, and Boethius describes her garments in these terms:

Vestes erant tenuissimis filis subtili artificio indissolubili materia perfectae, quas, uti post eadem prodente cognovi, suis manibus ipsa texuerat; quarum speciem, veluti fumosas imagines solet, caligo quaedam neglectae vetustatis obduxerat. Harum in extrema margine Π Graecum, in supremo vero Θ, legebatur intextum atque inter utrasque litteras in scalarum modum gradus quidam insigniti videbantur, quibus ab inferiore ad superius elementum esset ascensus. Eandem tamen vestem violentorum quorundam sciderant manus et particulas quas quisque potuit abstulerant. (I.1.3-4)

Her garments had been perfected with the finest threads by a subtle craftsmanship, and with an inseparable material (*materia*) which, as I discovered after she informed me, she had woven herself with her own hands. Of which garments the appearance (*speciem*), as is usual for smoky funeral masks (*imagines*), the darkness of a certain neglected longevity had overshadowed. And on the lower border (*margine*) of these garments there was inscribed an inwoven Greek Pi, and on the higher border rather a Theta. But between these letters there appeared marked down a certain progression in the manner of steps, by which there was an ascent from the lower to the higher element. The same garment,

though, the hands of certain violent men had torn in pieces and had snatched off what little bits (*particulas*) each had been able [to grab].

First I want to emphasize the material degradation that follows Philosophia's rape, mentioned here and again at prose 1.3, and already discussed in Chapter 1.¹⁸ Philosophia reports that Stoics and Epicureans — significantly, the two materialist schools in antiquity — carried her off kicking and screaming (*reclamantem renitentemque*," literally, "struggling and shouting") as "booty" (*praedae*"), ripping her garment and taking from it "little shredded rags" (*panniculis*") as if they had the whole garment (*totam*" I.3.7). She explains finally, "*In quibus quoniam quaedam nostri habitus vestigia videbantur, meos esse familiares inprudencia rata, nonnullos eorum profanae multitudinis errore pervertit*" (I.3.8), "Because certain remains of my dress appeared upon them, it is wrongly conceived with heedless thinking by an error of the vulgar multitude that not a few of those were my associates." In both of these places, the Stoics and the Epicureans (plainly the "*violenti*" who mistreat Philosophia in I.1 as well) are conceived to have received a partial truth from philosophy, but to have mistaken this for the whole: their materialism betrays an inadequacy in their philosophy. In each place, this inadequacy with respect to philosophy entire is figured as a rape of Philosophia, in which the reprobates depart having despoiled Philosophia of fragments of her garment.¹⁹ Thus

¹⁸ Gruber, *Kommentar zu Boethius « De consolatione philosophiae »*: 110.

¹⁹ On the topic of rape in classical antiquity, see the essays in this volume reviewed in Edward M. Harris, "Review Article: Susan Deacy and Karen Pierce, eds. *Rape in Antiquity: Sexual Violence in the Greek and Roman Worlds*," *Diotima* XL, no. 16 (1997).

there is already at this point a certain relationship established between illicit sexual desire, philosophical truth, and the garments of Philosophia. In order to understand this relationship, consider that three words occur together at I.1 that will not occur anywhere else in Book I, even individually, and they will not appear together again until Book V, prose 4, where they describe the objects of sense, imagination, and reason. Here at I.1 “*materia*,” “*speciem*,” and “*imagines*” do not have a philosophical sense, but rather what may be called their ordinary, referential sense. “*Materia*” refers to the fabric from which the garment is woven; “*species*” refers to the general appearance of Philosophia’s garments, how they look to Boethius as he observes them; “*imagines*” refers to the masks of ancestors that appear in the atria of aristocratic houses,²⁰ analogized here to Philosophia’s garments which are just as dark and obscured through smoke stains. As I explained above, each of these terms may also refer to the objects of different parts of the mind, so that “*materia*” is matter, “*imago*” is the imaginary object of fantasy, and “*species*” is the object of rational reflection.²¹ The Stoics and Epicureans, then, are especially concerned to appropriate violently the material aspect of Philosophia for themselves; that is, by ripping her garment into shreds their illicit desire has separated the “inseparable material” (“*indissolubili materia*”) from itself and so has severed

²⁰ Gruber, *Kommentar zu Boethius « De consolatione philosophiae »*: 68; Harriet I. Flower, *Ancestor Masks and Aristocratic Power in Roman Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

²¹ See section 2.2.

philosophical truth from itself. Philosophia's deficient material state directly corresponds to the deficient materialism that her assailants take to exhaust her resources.

At least one thing may be gathered from this passage: when Philosophia wipes clear Boethius' eyes in prose I.2, she performs the one and only treatment of his condition that will be purely material. It is as if her treatment will be divided into three parts, a material, imaginary, and rational treatment, and here she has opened the way for treatments that will involve higher levels of her being.²² If this is so, then one should expect an imaginary treatment as well. As the text proceeds, the language of medical treatment continues to appear. At prose I.5, Philosophia suggests that because Boethius is under assault by a "*tumultus*" of different affections, she will have to divide her treatment into two parts. She distinguishes "lighter" and "stronger remedies;" the former will "soften up...what has swollen into a tumor" so that the latter may be applied.²³ The lighter remedies will correspond to the argument of Book II, and the stronger ones to Book III. Philosophia explains at prose II.3.3-4 that her treatment of Boethius in prose II.2 is not yet a "*morbi tui remedia*," "a remedy of his illness," but a "*contumacis adversum curatio doloris*," a "cure opposed" specifically to "his stubborn grief." She will apply more penetrating treatments ("*quae in profundum sese penetrent*") "when the right

²² Elaine Scarry provides a similar analysis in *Resisting Representation*, but her reading overstates the success of Philosophia's treatment of Boethius' grief. In the end, I will show that it is not clear that Boethius has successfully made the ascent with Philosophia to arrive at true knowledge of the whole. Elaine Scarry, *Resisting Representation* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994): 155-67.

²³ "...*nondum te validiora remedia contingunt. Itaque lenioribus paulisper utemur, ut quae in tumorem perturbationibus influentibus induruerunt ad acrioris vim medicaminis recipendam tactu blandiore mollescant.*" I.5.11-12.

time comes” (“*cum tempestivum fuerit*”). Again, at prose II.5.1 the treatments are described as “*paulo validioribus*,” “a little stronger.” Finally, at prose III.1, Philosophia confirms what Boethius suggests: that he is ready for stronger remedies. She declares: “*talia sunt quippe quae restant, ut degustata quidem mordeant, interius autem recepta dulcescant.*” (prose III.1.3), “the remedies as those which remain are of such a kind that sting upon having been tasted, but once received within they sweeten.” So Book II is destructive of Boethius’ imaginary attachment to Fortuna in a way that makes it possible for him to receive the edifying treatment from Book III onward. Furthermore, it is at this point that Philosophia explains that she will be leading Boethius to a vision of “*veram..felicitatem*” (prose III.1.4-7), or “true felicity.”

Sed quod tu te audiendi cupidum dicis, quanto ardore flagreres si quonam te ducere aggrediamur agnosceres! — Quonam? inquam. — Ad veram, inquit, felicitatem, quam tuus quoque somniat animus, sed occupato ad imagines visu ipsam illam non potest intueri. — Tum ego: Fac, obsecro, et quae illa vera sit sine cunctatione demonstra. — Faciam, inquit illa, tui causa libenter; sed quae tibi [causa] notior est, eam prius designare verbis atque informare conabor, ut ea perspecta cum in contrariam partem flexeris oculos, verae speciem beatitudinis possis agnoscere.

But what you say you have a desire for hearing, by how great a burning would you be enflamed if you knew where I am beginning to lead you!” — “To where?” I said — “to true felicity,” she said, “for which also your soul dreams, but it is not able to see that felicity itself since your sight is occupied with images (*imagines*).” Then I said: “Do this, I beg of you, and show what the true felicity is without delay.” — “I will do this,” she said, “freely for your sake; but what account is more known to you, that I will try first to delineate in words and to describe, so that, with that seen clearly, you may be able to recognize the form (*speciem*) of true happiness when you will have turned your eyes toward the opposite part.

First of all, this passage introduces a distinction between “*felicitas*” and “*beatitudo*” that will be developed over the course of Book III, culminating in the Timaeian hymn and its introduction of the Platonic idea of the good. But for my present concern, it is more important to observe that the distinction between “*imago*” and “*species*” is labored here again. Boethius’ sight, one reads, is still occupied with “*imagines*” so that he is unable to see the “*species*” of true happiness. In this light, it is clear that Philosophia’s argument from II.1-II.8, the “weaker remedies,” corresponds to what may be conceived as her “imaginary” treatment, and the argument from III.1-III.8, the “stronger remedies,” corresponds to what may be conceived as her “rational” treatment.

What is the substance of this imaginary treatment or cure that Philosophia offers in Book II? Initially, I may characterize this treatment as the denunciation of Fortuna, the reappraisal of her goods. As I showed above, Boethius’ imaginary is conditioned by his illness, so that he fantasizes that Fortuna, his lover, has abandoned him. This came out in the first poem, but I may add that it even appears in his *apologia* at I.4.44, where Boethius complains that “opposing Fortuna” (“*adversae fortunae*”) has finally burdened him, on top of everything else, with making it seem to everyone that Boethius has received what he deserved from his oppressors. Finally, he complains again in the poem immediately following his *apologia* that, although the “*conditor*,” the “founder” of the cosmos has organized everything under his guidance “by law” (“*lege*”), still

*hominum solos respuis actus
merito rector cohibere modo.*

you refuse only the actions of men
to restrain, you deservedly their only leader.

*Nam cur tantas lubrica versat
Fortuna vices?*

For why else does slippery Fortuna
Make so many turns? (I.V.26-29)

In other words, Boethius has reached the insight that the state of exception in which men live, the legal order in force without significance,²⁴ is precisely what he finds so unbearable. He conjures up a sovereign authority, a “founder” of the cosmos, to intervene and pacify this worldly region in rebellion. It is as if Boethius, upon having been temporarily restored to clear sight by Philosophia, found the intellectual clarity to express his grievances with eloquence and grace, but as he reaches the *peroratio* with which his *apologia* ends he is so emotionally affected that he can no longer maintain the clarity with which he began. Thus he proceeds from the *peroratio* to the verse that follows, which possesses an even higher degree of affectation, and expresses in both places his political failure and its consequences with respect to the cosmic order in terms of his erotic disappointment with faithless Fortuna.²⁵

It is this delusion from which Philosophia begins her treatment of Boethius’ imaginary at II.1, the second part of her treatment. She says, “If I have understood the character and the causes of your inner sickness, you are wasting away because of your desire and inclination for your former fortune...I know the various colors of that monster, and above all that too enticing intimacy with those whom she labors to deceive, until with

²⁴ Agamben, *State of Exception*: 32-40.

²⁵ For another reading of this poem, emphasizing its Stoic sources for the imagery of natural order, see O’Daly, *The Poetry of Boethius*: 125-32.

unbearable grief she destroys those whom she leaves when it is least expected.”²⁶

Philosophia’s treatment of Boethius, at this imaginary level, will not attempt to dismiss his fantasy as if it has no meaning; instead, Philosophia proceeds as if there truly is a woman named Fortuna who has left Boethius the weepy elegiac poet and taken all his things upon leaving. Her strategy is, then, to attempt a displacement of that fantasy within the conditioned reality of the fantasy, working to undermine it from within or perhaps even to exploit it, turning it to her own ends. Her goal is not to show that Boethius has lost nothing by having lost Fortuna, but instead she argues that he has lost nothing that would be worth having in the first place. The exact procedure she employs though is noteworthy, as it demonstrates the purely imaginary character of Fortuna: Philosophia adopts the pose of Fortuna to address Boethius by prosopopoeia in what she calls Fortuna’s own words. Two things deserve special mention.²⁷ First, this “rhetoric” and “music” with which Philosophia gives body to the voice of Fortuna subtly evokes Fortuna’s being without a body—that is, her imaginary status; as prose V.4.28-30 emphasized, imaginary objects are those figures that have no singular material body to which they correspond. Philosophia can employ Fortuna’s voice because it floats freely as an imaginary object, possessed by no other specific body—small wonder then that by the time one reaches Book V the impressive and dangerous Fortuna is reduced by

²⁶ “*Si penitus aegritudinis tuae causas habitumque cognovi, fortunae prioris affectu desiderioque tabescis;...Intellego multiformes illius prodigii fucos et eo usque cum his quos eludere nititur blandissimam familiaritatem, dum intolerabili dolore confundat quos insperata reliquerit.*” II.1.2-3.

²⁷ For scholarship on this passage, see Gruber, *Kommentar zu Boethius « De consolatione philosophiae »*: 177-83.

Philosophia to “the fortuitous,” that which happens coincidentally and without necessity. Second, and more importantly for the movement of the text, Philosophia, by occupying the position of Fortuna with respect to Boethius, must necessarily also occupy a position with respect to his object-cause of desire. That is, the two women become virtually interchangeable so that they are somewhat confused, and Philosophia may in this way partake of the sexual charge towards Fortuna in Boethius’ fantasy. Philosophia offers herself as the place-holder of Boethius’ desire, the stand-in that makes up for his loss. This is why she cannot reduce Fortuna right away: she needs her in order to capture Boethius’ desire.

But the unhappy Boethius remains unconvinced by Philosophia’s art. His complaint, and her response to it, read as follows:

Speciosa quidem ista sunt, inquam, oblitaque rhetoricae ac musicae melle dulcedinis tum tantum cum audiuntur oblectant, sed miseris malorum altior sensus est; itaque cum haec auribus insonare desierint insitus animum maeror praegravat. -- Et illa: Ita est, inquit; haec enim nondum morbi tui remedia, sed adhuc contumacis adversum curationem doloris fomenta quaedam sunt. Nam quae in profundum sese penetrent cum tempestivum fuerit ammovebo. (II.3.2-4)

‘But those things are showy,’ I said, ‘and dolled up in the sweetness of rhetoric and music they delight only for so long as they are heard, but to the miserable the feeling of evils is deeper; and so when they cease to sound in the ears the inner mourning depresses the soul.’ And she said, ‘So it is; for this is not yet a remedy of your sickness, but these are certain palliatives for obstinate grief, as yet resistant to any treatment. To those remedies that penetrate into the depths I will move when it will be timely.’

Two things are important to understand. First, Philosophia has been able to anticipate with what response Boethius will meet her treatment even before she offers it. There is a

comprehensive strategy from the start, so that one may understand even those digressions that Boethius introduces into her argument as responses that she will have been able to anticipate prior to his interrupting her. Furthermore, the imaginary treatment, which corresponds to the “weaker remedies” and the “somewhat stronger remedies,” is only a bridge to the “stronger remedies” of Book III. She knows that this second treatment will not be adequate to Boethius’ affections, and so her remedies here, from her point of view, must be understood as so much preparation for Book III; these two parts of her regimen are connected as in a system.

Through the remainder of Book II.3 Philosophia recounts Fortuna’s goods, those of which Boethius has enjoyed the use, and II.4 is dedicated to the goods remaining for Boethius despite of his downfall, such as the well being of Symmachus and his wife’s devotion to him. These are typical consolatory moves, and Philosophia avails herself of them in order to round out her application of the “palliatives” (*fomenta*) designed to soften Boethius up for the more destructive arguments that follow. From II.5-7 Philosophia sets aside these *fomenta* and begins an assault on the goods of Fortuna under the heading of “somewhat stronger remedies” (“*remediis paulo validioribus*,” prose II.5.1). The arguments reject wealth, power, and glory as so many *mendacia bona*, deceitful goods (prose II.8.4), that possess only the “*species felicitatis*,” “the appearance of felicity” (prose II.8.3).²⁸ These one may regard as so many possessions of Fortuna that

²⁸ They are summarized and checked for validity in Marenbon, *Boethius*: 102-06.

cause Boethius' desire for her. The result of these arguments is that Boethius does not really want Fortuna but rather what she has to offer, and not just what she has to offer but rather something *in* those things that she has to offer, but which those things cannot really provide. In order to explain what I mean, I must turn to the "rational" part of Philosophia's treatment in Book III, where she presents the true goal of all desire, as she conceives it, *beatitudo* or happiness. III.1 acts as an introduction the book, and at III.2 Philosophia executes the first major transition in her argument. Here she will pit true "*beatitudo*" against so many "*falsi boni*" or false goods: *opes* (wealth), *honores* (esteem), *potentia* (power), *gloria* (glory), and *voluptates* (pleasure). She begins, "*Omnis mortalium cura, quam multiplicium studiorum labor exercet,*" "mortals' whole concern which the labor of a vast multiplicity of enterprises works for" progresses "*ad unum tamen beatitudinis finem,*" "toward the one goal of happiness" (prose III.2.1).

Philosophia's conception implies the existence of a highest good, a final cause for which "wealth, esteem, power, glory, and pleasure" can only act as inadequate substitutes, or "certain detours" from the path to true happiness ("*devia quaedam,*" prose III.8.1). That is, these "false goods" fail to deliver the true goods "that men believe will be brought to them by these things: sufficiency, respect, potency, fame, and joy" ("*divitias, dignitates, regna, gloriam, voluptatesque... quod per haec sibi sufficientiam, reverentiam, potentiam, celebritatem, laetitiam credunt esse venturam.*" III.2.19). Each of these "false goods," which men aim for as replacements for the latter true goods, are dismissed by arguments treating them individually from III.3-7, and then they are recapitulated in brief at III.8.

The entire movement of Philosophia's argument—indeed, the whole text of the *Consolation*—turns in another direction at III.9. Up to now, Philosophia has been arguing against those things to which, to greater and lesser degrees, Boethius remained attached as lost objects of love (object-cause of his desire for *Fortuna*). In prose III.9, Philosophia will attempt a reduction of the true goods, the “*vera bona*” with which poem III.8 left off at line 22, to one and the same “substance” (“*Atqui illud quoque per eadem necessarium est, sufficientiae, potentiae, claritudinis, reverentiae, iucunditatis nomina quidem esse diversa, nullo modo vero discrepare substantiam.*” III.9.15). She argues that it is the baseness of human desire that divides the object of desire into so many different elements, thereby aiming for parts of what cannot be divided, that there is nothing among mortal and impermanent things that may, as the true aim of desire, offer perfect happiness and the true good (III.9.3). The precise technical, metaphysical terms in which Philosophia expresses this in prose III.3 is worthy of consideration. She observes that humans, stressing by direct address their status as “*terrena animalia*,” earthly creatures, are held by an “*imago*,” a fantasy, of the “*verum... beatitudinis finem*,” the true goal of happiness, even though this true goal is obscured by the very same *imago* that offers a certain impression of that goal. It is in human nature both to apprehend in an unclear way the *finis* that Philosophia describes and to misapprehend it by fantasmatic distortion of that *finis*, to desire this final cause by a natural inclination but also to miss the mark by a natural limitation. In this way, the whole of Book II, with its focus on the role of the

imaginary and the desire for imaginary goods, is repositioned as an obscure apprehension of the true goal of happiness.

So Philosophia's rational or "stronger remedies" from III.3-7 move between these two positions: on the one side, she asserts that "happiness" is that towards which all desire takes its aim, and establishes in this way that all desires want more than what the objects for which they aim may provide; on the other, she establishes a sovereign good that consists of the unity of sufficiency, potency, distinction, reverence, and joy in one being, so that there may be one, and only one, object of desire commensurable with the demand for happiness. The stronger remedies have brought Philosophia and Boethius to the point where all of Boethius' desires linked to the figure of Fortuna may be seen as so many fantasies, mere delusions that cannot offer what Boethius truly hoped to gain from them. The form of the argument conceals the possibility that Boethius may not have been looking for supreme and ever-lasting satisfaction, for example, from his children—these dismissed at prose III.7.5 under the heading of *voluptas* as mere "*tortores*" or torturers (a grim analogy given what Boethius, the author himself, must have been anticipating). The reference to Euripides suggests that if one ever has to worry about his children at all, and he certainly will, then having had children can only be regarded as a kind of misfortune (prose III.7.5-6).²⁹ Still, the persona Boethius' agreement with Philosophia's assessment of the human condition signals that Philosophia may proceed toward the next level of her

²⁹ For literary comparanda, see Gruber, *Kommentar zu Boethius « De consolatione philosophiae »*: 264-65.

argument, since she has convinced her target audience. Her healing regimen depends on the real existence of this substantial unity of the five goods toward which she has redirected Boethius' desire for Fortuna. If there is no object to which this desire corresponds, then all she will have done is prove that happiness for Boethius and all like-minded humans is impossible and human life is inherently miserable.

She suggests that, facing new difficulties, they should offer a prayer for "*divinum praesidium*," divine assistance, as they "seek to discover the seat of that highest good" (*illius summi boni sedem reperire*" III.9.32). What follows is the famous hymn in dactylic hexameters, modelled on Plato's *Timaeus*. This hymn addresses "the father of all things" ("*rerum omnium patrem*," prose III.9.33), as "*qui perpetua mundum ratione gubernas*" or "you who govern the world by perpetual reason" (poem III.9.1). With this line, a divine, philosophical monarchy has been introduced. Philosophia's hymn especially focuses on the function of this "*pater*" that causes all things to move in circular motion fixed by law ("*lege benigna*," poem III.9.20), so that lower souls are made to return to higher forms and then roll back to lower levels again. One recognizes in this hymn, then, a description of the way in which God's rule in the world operates—this was just what Boethius failed to understand at prose I.6.7: "But tell me, since you do not doubt that the world is ruled by God, by what turning rudders is it ruled?' 'I can hardly understand...'" There Boethius also failed to identify "*quis sit rerum finis quove totius naturae tendat intentio*"—"who is the end of all things, or in other words toward what the whole purpose of nature tends" (I.6.10). It may be recalled that Boethius had ended his *apologia* with a

complaint that the human world seemed not to be bound by laws comparable to those that governed the whole order of nature (poem I.4). These questions were posed by Philosophia to search out just what aspect of the cosmos' natural order Boethius' failed to comprehend. His misunderstandings, it has been shown, were two: incomprehension of the final cause of the cosmos and non-knowledge of the soul's immortality. In the hymn, she has begun to offer answers specifically to the first of these points of incomprehension. This hymn marks the turning of the argument from the fantasy that Philosophia considered a symptom of Boethius' lethargy to deal directly with what she saw as the causes of this condition. At this point, the language of healing and medicine recedes from the text, so that it does not direct Philosophia's discourse to its conclusion. In the remainder, Philosophia will continue her dialogue, guided by a different purpose: a concern to define and understand the relationship between this divine father and life as such, healthy or otherwise.

2.3.3. Conclusions from this Section

By Book III, Philosophia has taken what she needs from Fortuna, Boethius' desire for her false goods, and so the *consolator* has adequately broken down the fantasy through which he had linked his desire to Fortuna. Philosophia has persuaded Boethius that the complaints about his fortune, his loss of honor, high office, his home, and his country, were essentially without substance, and moves to the metaphysical causes for his grief, offering god the father as the final cause and source of order that he has forgotten.

It remains for her to link Boethius' desire to this father figure—a task she has already begun to perform by embodying Fortuna and virtually becoming her, so that Boethius' desire transfers to Philosophia herself—but this will require that his misfortune, his political downfall and his oppressors' triumph, be reconciled with god's providence. To that I will return below,³⁰ but for now I conclude this section with a few observations.

First, Boethius' gains through the first half of his conversation with Philosophia have been considerable. If he may be properly characterized as in himself bare life or else, following the intervention of the Muses, a mere melancholic in I.1-3, his condition must be rendered remarkably more complicated by Philosophia's attendance. I will not go so far as to say he is healed, since that remains to be seen, but certainly he is much more powerful than he was upon Philosophia's arrival. Her first, material treatment immediately restored many of his powers, so that not only could he recognize Philosophia coming to him in his prison, but he could also describe his downfall with impressive Ciceronian eloquence.³¹ Lerer has shown how the argument of the *Consolation* advances not only through different modes of cognition, as I have demonstrated, but also through modes of discourse: from silence to speech, and then from less to more intellectual modes of speech (e.g., from elegy and lament, to rhetoric and invective). On his view, the *Consolation* ends with the achievement of a philosophical

³⁰ See sections 3.3 and 3.4 below.

³¹ I need not labor this point, since it is the major theme of Seth Lerer's fine study of the *Consolation*. What Lerer has overlooked, however, is how this expansion of discourses can be directly mapped onto the Neoplatonic theory of the faculties of cognition, as I have shown in this chapter. Lerer, *Boethius and Dialogue*: 94-123.

understanding of discourse, where dialectical argument is replaced by discursive philosophical prose engaged with the tradition of philosophical literature and the problems that it treats.³² Above all, he stresses how the persona Boethius advances through these stages in his ability to express his thoughts, to articulate difficulties with Philosophia's arguments, and above all to reason according to philosophical discipline.³³ In this way, Philosophia liberates Boethius from his lethargy or melancholia, however it may be, and restores him to his natural powers. Philosophia draws these powers out from him, so that abilities that lie within his spirit are animated through her provocations.

This return of Boethius to his capacities that Lerer has emphasized intersects with Boethius' treatment of *potestas* and *potentia*, as Dane demonstrates in an important article.³⁴ He has argued that the author's "treatment of the two words *potestas* and *potentia* in the *Consolatio* is based on a hierarchical model, a model which finds both political and philosophical expression."³⁵ The result of this modeling, as Dane shows, is that the text employs the two terms in such a way that in both political and philosophical contexts there is a "subordination" of *potentia* to *potestas*. The ultimate result of this "subordination" is the redefinition of *potestas* and *potentia*, so that they no longer refer to the power exercised through office (as they do at Book II.6). Rather, the *summa potentia*,

³² The tradition with which Lerer sees Boethius entering into dialogue is described in Lerer's Chapter I, and culminates in Boethius' own commentaries on Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* that the two conversation partners discuss in Book V. Ibid., 31-93.

³³ Ibid., 203-36.

³⁴ J. A. Dane, "Potestas / Potentia: Note on Boethius' De Consolatione Philosophiae," *Vivarium* XVII, no. 2 (1979).

³⁵ Ibid., 82.

introduced at prose III.9 as composing a substantial unity with *claritas*, *reverentia*, *voluptas*, and *sufficiencia*, evokes the *summa bonitas*, and *potestas* means something much closer to power understood in a metaphysical sense, as “man’s power to define” — and pursue — “the proper objects of his actions.”³⁶ In other words, the metaphysical conception of the unified good itself captures the notion of worldly power vested in an office, so that it displaces the meaning of that power towards a conception of the ability or capacity to follow through on a goal and incorporate that into the more expansive totality that Philosophia has described. Her task, in training Boethius’ desire, is to link his will to this totality, so that he has the capacity to understand and therefore desire and act according to the scheme she is elaborating. In order to get him there, she must rouse both his ability to agree and disagree, to argue and deliberate, to reason, think, and see the long view. Philosophia’s therapy restores Boethius to so many lost abilities that he may still possess as long as there is life in his breast.

This return to his powers, it must be stressed, goes forward with a certain inequality between the parties involved, though. Philosophia is fully in possession of her cognitive powers when she discovers Boethius, so that she may plan for the long view of their dialogue. Boethius, however, possesses no such sense of where their discussion will move and only acquires cognitive powers as Philosophia rouses those powers in him. The result is that often Philosophia will be in a position to anticipate where Boethius will try

³⁶ Citing prose IV.2.12-14: "*Duo sunt quibus omnis humanorum actuum constat effectus, voluntas scilicet ac potestas, quorum si alterutrum desit, nihil est quod explicari queat.*" *ibid.*, 88.

to steer the conversation, so that she can move ahead of him and deter him from a path that she would avoid. The danger is that Boethius may move too far from the course, a danger to which Philosophia gives voice in prose V.1, when Boethius' cognitive powers have so far advanced that he feels comfortable interrupting Philosophia to pursue his own philosophical interests.³⁷ This is the risk that Philosophia must take if she will have the philosopher that she needs by Book V.

Secondly, Boethius gains in power have not been without their cost. If Boethius has more power and ability than he had in Book I, they have been purchased by considerable losses in terms of invested affect. I have already suggested this above, when I mentioned Philosophia's handling of Boethius' children in Book III. There she argues that his children ought to be a source of *iucunditas*, but in reality they are just *tortores*, a source of further worry and discomfort. All of Boethius' worldly attachments are dismissed as so many *imagines*, as much distortions as indicators (by their inadequacies) of his true desire. Her mostly negative handling of these attachments is mitigated in several places, where Philosophia must make concessions to Boethius' interest in the Roman world with which he identified and has lost. One of these in particular deserves to be highlighted, since it is significant for my theme. At II.8, Philosophia backs off from her "war" on Fortuna ("*ne me inexorable contra fortunam gerere bellum putes*," "lest

³⁷ Against Relihan, Philosophia anticipates Boethius' introduction of new topics at IV.6, so that she is possibly not misdirected by Boethius' questions, but rather may only *feign* that she has been misdirected. Relihan and Heise, *The Prisoner's Philosophy*: 88-89.

you think that I wage war against Fortuna relentlessly,” prose II.8.1), in order to articulate precisely how she understands Fortuna to be helpful. Her position is that the best fortune is bad fortune, because bad fortune reveals the more fundamental truth that everyone loses eventually. This argument culminates in the observation that bad luck allows one to discover “*quod pretiosissimum divitiarum genus est*,” “what is the most valuable kind of riches,” one’s “*amici*” or “friends” (II.8.7). This last sentence of the prose in Book II draws quite close to the cause of Boethius’ *terror*, his fear that his *comites* may suffer the same persecution he has suffered from the Ostrogoths. This is a place in Philosophia’s discourse that approaches the Real, nearly making contact with the cause itself.³⁸ That Philosophia has so little to say about this concern that touches a topic of perpetual priority for ancient philosophers generally is significant. Her elliptical remarks here, and again at prose III.2.9 where she observes that friendship, which does not depend upon fortune but rather upon *virtus* and so belongs among the true goods, is the “*sanctissimum...genus*” or “most sacred kind” of good, indicate that there are points of contact between her discourse and the traumatic reality that her discourse disavows. The *terror* that conditions Boethius’ subjectivity, his fear that his friends may lose their

³⁸ The cause, either of political antagonism or of psychological neurosis, in Lacanian psychoanalysis is conceived in terms of a repetition automatism resulting from a bad, “chance” encounter. Significantly for this text, Lacan treats this encounter under the sign of *Tuchē*, or (in Latin) *Fortuna*. Lacan speaks of an encounter with the Real, and by this he means with a traumatic presence that appears to the subject again and again, always presenting itself as chance and accident. The analyst’s task is to understand how the encounter is not only not a chance encounter, but a necessary one, and not only a necessary one, but one that presents itself as chance and accident. See Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*: 53-64.

anchoring in the world much in the same way that he has, may not be justifiable within the framework of Philosophia's theological machinery, but his concern for them most certainly is justified.

That Philosophia has nothing to say to this concern must be recognized as a shortcoming of her therapy. It is as if her discourse, operating according to the psychoanalytic logic of the return of the repressed, positions the *comites* for whom Boethius feels such *terror* as the true *amici* that he must be grateful to have finally recognized. The psychoanalytic theory I am referencing holds that any subjectivity or discursive formation constituted as a unity so constitutes itself by repressing some alien content, some remainder unassimilable to the operation of the totality, and that remainder, since it then becomes the foundation external to that totality, then returns through repetitions to haunt that subjectivity or discourse as a traumatic excess.³⁹ In this way, it is possible to understand why Philosophia, who has misdiagnosed Boethius' illness as a paralyzing lethargy so that she might return him to the unified subjectivity he possessed as a philosopher before his crisis, and so missed the significance of his *terror* over the potential fate of his *comites*, now speaks of his *amici*, one among the few goods left to him on her view, and says nothing of the *terror* he has felt for them. It is also possible to understand why the political sphere, which, as I argued above, has been repressed by the discursive strategy according to which Philosophia proceeds, has now

³⁹ See p. 52, fn. 97 above.

returned in the form of a divine, philosophical monarch and his kingdom. In fact, Philosophia has been preparing this reversal all along, and the displacement of one political space by another is essential to the operation of her argument as a whole. Before proceeding to the analysis of Philosophia's last treatments addressing the causes of Boethius' illness, it is necessary to understand this return of politics under another name and order.

2.4. Constructing the Palace: Security and Philosophical Monarchy

Philosophia has understood Boethius' lethargy to be a result of self-forgetting rather than a traumatic encounter, a problem of subjective self-relation rather than relation to others. Her diagnosis and treatment minimize the importance of contemporary political conflicts, these outbursts of the antagonism between Romans and Goths, that condition the reality of Boethius' destitution.⁴⁰ It is important, though, to recognize that her attempt to foreclose this antagonism with a therapy for Boethius' soul only results in the return of politics elsewhere in her discourse. Philosophia's own political theology determines the whole course of her therapy, which is designed to situate within her own political space the bare life, that surplus or remainder, that Theoderic will exploit in order to ground his regime and displace the antagonism between his *domus* and the Senate.⁴¹ If we may understand Theoderic's regime as founded upon the defunct imperial power of

⁴⁰ Cf. section 1.6 above.

⁴¹ Cf. section 3.3 below.

the Roman princeps that has been reactivated to new ends, then Philosophia's political discourse must be understood as a kind of counter-empire. Philosophia's argument, then, provides an alternative discursive elaboration of Boethius' downfall, a paradigm of intelligibility for his actions and their consequences, so that he is not only the defeated enemy of Theoderic or, somewhat more sympathetically, the scapegoat of his machinations; rather, his imminent death may be understood as a kind of transport by which he realizes his destiny—so Philosophia would have it.

It has not been widely appreciated just how pervasive Philosophia's involvement with political power is in this text.⁴² From the very start, Philosophia appears not just as a healing nurse for her Boethius and not just as a vicious critic of the Muses; she is also vested with a sovereign power granted by divine right. For, as soon as she arrives and Boethius gets his first glimpse of Philosophia, although she carries "*libelli*," "little books," in her right hand, in her left she carries the "*sceptrum*" (prose I.1.6).⁴³ There is no further indication at this point what it may mean that Philosophia carries this the most enduring emblem of sovereign power. However, this is consistent with nearly every other aspect of Philosophia's appearance. Only through the course of the text's unfolding do the symbols linked to her appearance become transparent. In order to decipher the

⁴² See, for instance, Courcelle's very short discussion. Pierre Courcelle, "Le personnage de Philosophie dans la tradition latine," *Journal des savants* 4 (1970): 235. An exception is Donato's study, which understands Boethius' persona as the exemplar of the *vita activa*. Donato, *Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy as a Product of Late Antiquity*.

⁴³ On other divinities that carry scepters, see Gruber, *Kommentar zu Boethius « De consolatione philosophiae »*: 70-71.

meaning of this emblem, it is essential to track the presentation of political power further through Book I of the *Consolation*.

By prose I.3, Boethius' treatment by Philosophia has already begun, and he has recovered a voice that is as timid as it is significant. Here I want to emphasize how Boethius addresses Philosophia, once he recognizes her. When asking her why she has bothered to join him in "*has exilii solitudines*," the solitude of exile, the precise form of address he uses is "*magistra virtutum*," "mistress of the virtues." The answer to this question, as I have already explained above, Boethius anticipates by observing that she may be visiting him because she too has been falsely accused of crimes ("*an ut tu quoque mecum rea falsis criminationibus agiteris?*" prose I.3.3). The address, however, indicates that Boethius recognizes Philosophia both as his teacher and as a "mistress," understood in its older sense not as a lover but as a woman who has authority. This has already been anticipated when Boethius, although he could not recognize Philosophia, called her a "woman of such commanding authority" ("*mulier tam imperiosae auctoritatis*" prose I.1.13) because she had been able to expel the Muses. Philosophia's authority may be limited to a kind of mastery in her area, merely the kind of *auctoritas* that belongs to a very learned encyclopedist, such as Varro, or an expert logician, as Boethius himself is. However, there is strong reason to admit that her *auctoritas* has a resonance far more political than that of the logician or music theorist; more than these, her *auctoritas* may resemble that of Augustus or Theoderic. Consider what follows the long list of

philosophical sages who have suffered persecution for their association with Philosophia, and the language in which she expresses that lesson:

Itaque nihil est quod ammirere si in hoc uitae salo circumflantibus agitemur procellis, quibus hoc maxime propositum est, pessimis displicere. Quorum quidem tametsi est numerosus exercitus, spernendus tamen est, quoniam nullo duce regitur sed errore tantum temere ac passim lymphante raptatur. Qui si quando contra nos aciem struens valentior incubuerit, nostra quidem dux copias suas in arcem contrahit, illi vero circa diripiendas inutiles sarcinulas occupantur. At nos desuper irridemus vilissima rerum quaeque rapientes, securi totius furiosi tumultus eoque uallo muniti quo grassanti stultitiae aspirare fas non sit. (I.3.11-14)

And so it is no wonder if on this sea of life we should be tossed by tempests blowing around us, by which this has been shown most plainly: our displeasing the worst among us. However, even though their forces are numerous still they are to be scorned, because they are ruled by no leader, but they are seized only by error driving them at random now here and now there. And if at some time those forces will arrange a quite strong battle-array and will press against us, our leader then draws her own ranks into the citadel, and those enemies are busied with destroying useless little trifles. But from high above we who are protected by that wall, to the scaling of which it is not permissible for the foolish to aspire, we, who are safe from so great a raging upheaval, ridicule those who seize the most worthless of things.

Philosophia first recognizes that philosophers have enemies and that these enemies may attempt to attack philosophers because they are displeasing to these “the worst types of people” (“*pessimis displicere*”). The conceit by which she expresses this is important for my purpose: she compares the enemies’ aggression toward her and her companions to a city under siege. Philosophy’s enemies are a leaderless mass (“*nullo duce regitur*”) with no organization and no sense of direction (“*errore tantum temere ac passim lymphante raptatur*”). The attack on philosophy is fruitless, so she argues, because philosophy’s forces are led by an especially clever “leader” (“*nostra dux*”) who knows that her ranks

(“*copias*”) may withdraw into a secure citadel (“*arcem*”), from which high place they may laugh at the enemy forces (“*irridemus*”), who are left to destroy “*inutiles sarcinulas*,” “useless bundles,” and to snatch up “*vilissima rerum*,” “the very cheapest stuff.” In this citadel, Philosophia and Boethius may imagine themselves secure from the upheaval (“*securi...tumultus*”) and cut off from it by a high wall (“*vallo*”).

This sounds promising, and one may imagine that Boethius upon hearing this would feel encouraged. The poem immediately following this passage continues the military metaphor, mixing it with upheaval of a more natural sort (violent seas, volcanic eruptions, lightning strikes; I.4.5-10). Philosophia asks rhetorically (I.4.11-12), “Why are poor men so very astonished by fierce tyrants raging without any strength?” The nature imagery here serves to reinforce the political point—that every regime, even a tyrannical one, exists within the order of nature and is therefore subject to the same reversals as any other element in the natural order of things. But she immediately responds to her question with these lines that continue the military analogy (I.4.13-18):

<i>nec speres aliquid nec extimescas:</i>	let yourself neither hope for something nor fear anything,
<i>exarmaveris impotentis iram;</i>	and you will have disarmed the anger of the impotent;
15 <i>at quisquis trepidus pavet vel optat,</i>	but whoever is anxious and trembles or wishes for escape,
<i>quod non sit stabilis sui que iuris,</i>	because he is not stable in his own right,
<i>abiecit clipeum loco que motus</i>	tosses aside his shield and, removed from his position,
<i>necitit qua valeat trahi catenam.</i>	locks the chain with which he is able to be dragged away.

These lines refer the reader back to the skirmish Philosophia staged between her enemies and her citadel. Here, though, the security is much less certain. The military metaphor this time is a little more clearly a metaphor, and so too the exact nature of the citadel, that security from upheaval that philosophy offers. Self-mastery of the passions seems to be what is at stake, as the jussive subjunctives in line thirteen show ("*speres...extimescas*" 13). The disarming in line 14, likewise, is not a disarming of weapons, but rather of "*ira*," anger. And finally the characterization of that one who "trembles" or "wishes," and shows himself not "stable in his own right" ("*pavet...optat...stabilis sui que iuris*" 15-16), equally appears to be vulnerable insofar as he does not have mastery with respect to his passions. But the result of this weakness of character is cloaked again in military metaphor: that one tosses aside his shield, loses his ground, and binds himself in the chains of the slavery to which the defeated are destined (17-18).⁴⁴

Now, most would agree that being a slave to your passions and being quite simply a slave are two things of quite a different order, but this is typical of Philosophia's strategy throughout the *Consolation*. Her rhetoric always begins from the circumstances in which Boethius finds himself and then by a strategic substitution analogizes them to a spiritual or psychological double, in order to explain how Boethius has misunderstood his condition; the psycho-spiritual doubles are then understood to be the real threat, and a

⁴⁴ Cf. Prose I.2.3, where Philosophia censures Boethius for having despoiled himself of the arms with which she provided him: "*Atqui talia contuleramus arma quae, nisi prior abiecisses, invicta te firmitate tuerentur.*"

metaphor made literal dissolves those external circumstances into mere appearances or analogues. It is worth asking what is the precise value of this move within the progress of this text; for, it is not so often the case that the metaphors employed strike so closely to the reality that the analogies would treat. How effective this strategy is when it comes to convincing Boethius remains to be decided. Also, it is still uncertain how Philosophia's *auctoritas* stands with respect to this *dux* whom she has introduced (and, for that matter, who that *dux* is).

After Boethius' long *apologia* at prose I.4 and its concluding poem at I.5, Philosophia confirms what I have anticipated was her strategy at I.3. In these passages, he expressed what Philosophia decides must be the true cause of his despair (poem I.5.25-48), that the whole world, seeming to be ordered by divine control, abandons human affairs to a state of exception, anarchy, and the brief reigns of tyrants. Philosophia capitalizes on this vacillation in Boethius to return to her strategic analogy. Summarizing the conclusion of his speech, she explains that the Muse is still working through him when he decries the disorder of the world: "After this, your grief burned over your adverse fortune, and, complaining that your rewards do not amount to what you deserve, finally by the raving of the Muse, you placed your vote that peace, which rules the heavens, may also rule the earth" (prose I.5.10).⁴⁵ Her language carefully places the agency in the affect, not in Boethius himself. So she reminds him of this power of

⁴⁵ "*Postremus adversum fortunam dolor incanduit conquestusque non aequa meritis praemia pensari, in extremo Musae saevientis, uti quae caelum terras quoque pax regeret, vota posuisti.*"

transport characteristic of the Muses, and suggests that their “raving” (“*saevientis*”) has undermined his good health of mind. She explains that “an upheaval of affects” (“*affectuum tumultus*”) attacks him, that “grief” (“*dolor*”), “anger” (“*ira*”), and “sorrow” (“*maeror*”) “drag him in different directions” (“*diversumque te...distrahunt*” I.5). Now one may see what Philosophia meant at prose I.3.14 by the word *tumultus*. It must be recalled that this word had a literal, military sense from which Philosophia derives this figural sense: a *tumultus* is a specific type of rebellion, where wars fought on the borders of the city excite unrest, even insurrection, within the city’s walls.⁴⁶ Philosophia, however, does not refer to Boethius’ political enemies, identified in his *apologia* as Conigastus, Trigguilla, Basilius, Opilio, Gaudentius, so many “*barbari*” (as he calls them at I.4.10) in the service of the king. Rather, they are the violent passions that may undermine the stability of the soldier (as we saw in poem I.4). Philosophia has taken away the actual city in which Boethius’ troubles arose and substituted an ideal, even imaginary city in which the philosopher is only threatened by his emotional insecurity. It is the ungovernability of these emotions that Philosophia seems to be warning against: that they may allow external circumstances to undermine the internal order of Boethius’ subjectivity. This is the sense in which, at prose I.6.9, Philosophia may rightly refer to Boethius’ seeming ignorance of god’s governance of the world as “*aliquid abesse*,” “something missing,” “*hiante valli robore*,” “a breaking of the strength of a wall,” “*per*

⁴⁶ Agamben, *State of Exception*: 41-51, especially p. 42.

quod...in animum tuum perturbationum morbus inreperit,” “through which the plague of disorders crept into [Boethius’] mind.”⁴⁷ The integrity of Boethius’ soul is thus analogized to a walled city that Philosophia must restore.

She sets to work on this task as soon as she speaks in Prose I.5. She responds to the *apologia* that Boethius has just finished by reminding him that his exile is self-imposed:

Cum te, inquit, maestum lacrimantemque vidissem ilico miserum exsulemque cognovi; sed quam id longinquum esset exsilium, nisi tua prodidisset oratio, nesciebam. Sed tu quam procul a patria non quidem pulsus es sed aberrasti! ac, si te pulsum existimari mavis, te potius ipse pepulisti: nam id quidem de te numquam cuiquam fas fuisset. Si enim cuius oriundo sis patriae reminiscare, non uti Atheniensium quondam multitudinis imperio regitur, sed

εἷς κοίρανός ἐστιν, εἷς βασιλεύς

qui frequentia civium non depulsione laetetur, cuius agi frenis atque obtemperare iustitiae libertas est. An ignoras illam tuae civitatis antiquissimam legem, qua sanctum est ei ius exsulare non esse quisquis in ea sedem fundare maluerit? Nam qui vallo eius ac munimine continetur, nullus metus est ne exsul esse mereatur; at quisquis inhabitare eam velle desierit pariter desinit etiam mereri. Itaque non tam me loci huius quam tua facies movet nec bibliothecae potius comptos ebore ac vitro parietes quam tuae mentis sedem requiro, in qua non libros sed id quod libris pretium facit, librorum quondam meorum sententias collocavi. (I.5.2-6)

“When I saw you,” she said, “weeping and sorrowful immediately I understood that you were a wretched exile; but just how remote an exile this was I could not know, except that your oration related this. Still, you have truly not been driven all this distance away from your paternal land but you have wandered off and, if you prefer that you be judged driven, rather you yourself have driven yourself. For truly in your case to do this would never be allowed to anyone else. If you recall into which paternal land you were born, it is ruled not as one at Athens by the command of a multitude, but

⁴⁷ Cf. Prose III.9.3: “*Tenui quidem veluti rimula mihi videor intueri, sed ex te apertius cognoscere malim.*”

There is one ruler, one king.

This ruler does not delight in the regular expulsion of citizens, and [under] this ruler liberty just is to be led by his bridles and to submit to his justice. Or are you unaware of that most ancient law of your city by which it is ordained that it is not right to exile whoever has preferred to establish the seat of his home in that place? Truly for that one who is protected by its wall and its rampart, there is no fear that he may suffer that he is an exile; but whoever has left off desiring to inhabit that city, equally leaves off even desiring to live there. And so not so much the appearance of this place moves me as your appearance, nor do I seek after your library's walls furnished with ivory and glass as much as I seek the seat of your mind, in which place I once collected not books but that which makes the value of a book, the propositions of my books.

This lengthy passage accomplishes a great deal. First, Philosophia, who has picked up a number of terms from Boethius' "*oratio*" at I.4, turns those terms toward a sense more advantageous to her goals. For example, above I discussed the distance from his library to which Boethius refers; here Philosophia exploits his reference to this in order to make the point that she does not require much in the way of material conditions, only the "*tuae mentis sedem*" or the seat in his mind on which her "*sententiae*" may be recorded (picking up Boethius' use at I.4.1 of this word "*sedem*" to refer to his seat for Philosophia in his library). But before coming to this, she develops her comparison of the affects moving Boethius' mind to a city under siege. One also learns here something of the internal order of the divine city. Philosophia picks up the mention of exile that was a theme of Boethius' *apologia* and was first introduced at prose I.3.3. At I.5 Philosophia has redefined that exile though. Boethius has not been "driven off" by another, but has either "wandered away" from his "*patria*" or he has "driven himself" from that place.

Both exile and *patria* have been redefined now with reference to this second city that Philosophia has introduced. Boethius' *patria* is not the Rome for which he tried to preserve *libertas* (I.4.26-27), and *libertas* comes not from the authority of the senate (I.4.31-36), but rather he is a citizen of this imaginary city, and *libertas* is only found in obedience to god.⁴⁸

Furthermore, one discovers that in this city there is a "most ancient law" that forbids anyone who has chosen to live there from ever being forced into exile. This is a remarkable contrast, which invites us to consider the similarities and differences between this philosophical city and Theoderic's Italy. Significantly, then, the rule of this philosophical city is not structured by a positive relation to exile; in fact, it is determined precisely by this ban on exile, since the "most ancient" of the city's laws founds its rule upon the exception of exile itself. It is not possible under any circumstances for anyone to be exiled from this city, lest the city undermine itself. If Theoderic's sovereign power is structured by a privileged right to expose life to death, and essential to that right there is a privilege to exile his subjects,⁴⁹ then the rule of this philosophical city must be founded itself upon a directly opposite relation between sovereign power and subjective right. It is unclear at this point what preserves the civic order of this philosophical city, but it is at

⁴⁸ The only study that has rightly allowed *libertas* the kind of importance that it has in the text is John Magee, "Boethius' "Consolatio" and the Theme of Roman Liberty," *Phoenix* 59, no. 3-4 (2005). His reading, since it does not take into account the significance of Menippean irony, is somewhat different from mine though, presenting an otherworldly Boethius as fully supportive of Philosophia's pedagogical therapy and its conclusions.

⁴⁹ Agamben links the sovereign exception of bare life to exile through his analysis of the ban, which conditions the relationship of *homo sacer* to the city. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*: 104-11.

least clear, from what Philosophia says, that belonging to that city is entirely voluntary; anyone may dwell there (I.5.4). Desiring to live elsewhere is also to depart from the city, or to impose alienation on oneself. How exactly Boethius may have left the city and yet maintained himself in relation to that city, as an exile from it, is plain enough, since his emotional condition is such that (as Philosophia sees it) he has forgotten this home. According to Philosophia's logic, Boethius could return to this philosophical city and his seat there if he only desired to do so. Again, this is apparently not the case with his worldly city, where Boethius desires that his fortune be otherwise but despite that faces death and severe punishment.

There is a point of contact, though, between the structure of power that establishes Theoderic as sovereign and that which structures the rule of the philosophical city. Both powers are monarchical. Philosophia explains (I.5.3) that no "*multitudo*" of the kind that held "*imperium*" at Athens rules in this philosophical city; instead, as she expresses with an altered quote from Homer's *Iliad* (II.204), "one king" rules that place.⁵⁰ Just as quickly as Philosophia clears a space for consideration of other regimes of power, making mention of the Athenian democracy, she forecloses alternatives by defining the philosophical city as a monarchy. Having no recourse to exile may tempt one to think that

⁵⁰ The long and distinguished lineage of this idea is traced in Gruber, *Kommentar zu Boethius « De consolatione philosophiae »*: 150-51. I thank Peter Burian for the observation that Philosophia has substituted an indicative form of the verb for what appears at *Iliad* 2.204 as an imperative (ἔστω). The shift moves this "one ruler" from a potential space to an actual one, as if there has always already been this "one ruler" and the performative operation by which it comes to pass—what I follow Agamben in regarding as an apparatus of power/knowledge—is concealed (See section 3.2 below).

the philosophical city maintains its monarchy without any relationship to bare life, but that is far from certain at this point. Going forward, this will be a question to hold in reserve.⁵¹ That Philosophia has intervened to claim Boethius in this state at least ought to raise doubts that this philosophical monarchy is entirely different from the sovereign exception at Ravenna.

Before presenting my response to this question, I want to follow through here on the link between Philosophia's therapy, which I introduced in the last section,⁵² and the desire that she is attempting with her therapy to kindle in Boethius for belonging to this philosophical kingdom. As I have already shown, in Book III Philosophia introduces a divine, paternal monarch, with whom the reader must identify the *dux* of this philosophical kingdom I have mentioned in this section. This connection is made by some of the language Philosophia uses to discuss this paternal god. Here, this god or "*deus*," who is described as the *princeps* over all things ("*rerum omnium principem*," prose III.10.7), is shown to exist by a "common conception of human minds" ("*communis humanorum conceptio...animorum*"): Philosophia asks rhetorically whether any being higher than god may be conceived. As Marenbon has observed, this anticipation of Anselm's famous argument is a weak theology, proving only that the god of the Neoplatonists exists and nothing more than that—there is a conception of the highest

⁵¹ I deal with this in section 3.3.

⁵² See section 2.3

good and philosophers tend to talk of that as god.⁵³ Philosophia explains in III.10 that this god is the good and happiness, since he desires and lacks nothing, having sufficiency, power, and in short every one of the qualities that the *falsi boni* could only provide partially. III.11 improves upon this conception by drawing more tightly these various descriptions of god into a conception of the “*bonum ipsum*” or the good itself. The argument here repeats the gesture of prose III.9, where the various true goods were shown to be one in substance, but now includes that good itself within this argument for a theological conception of the true good; god, the good itself, is to be understood as the one true object of all desires, or in other words, god, who is the good, is the one or unity:

“Nonne, inquit, monstravimus ea quae appetuntur pluribus idcirco vera perfectaque bona non esse quoniam a se invicem discrepant, cumque alteri abesset alterum plenum absolutumque bonum afferre non posse? Tum autem verum bonum fieri cum in unam veluti formam atque efficientiam colliguntur, ut, quae sufficientia est eadem sit potentia, reverentia, claritas atque iucunditas, nisi vero unum atque idem omnia sint, nihil habere quo inter expetenda numerentur? — Demonstratum, inquam, nec dubitari ullo modo potest. — Quae igitur cum discrepant minime bona sunt, cum vero unum esse coeperint bona fiunt, nonne haec ut bona sint unitatis fieri adeptione contingit? — Ita, inquam, videtur. — Sed omne quod bonum est boni participatione bonum esse concedis, an minime? — Ita est. — Oportet igitur idem esse unum atque bonum simili ratione concedas; eadem namque substantia est eorum quorum naturaliter non est diversus effectus. — Negare, inquam, nequeo. (Prose III.11.5-9)

“Have we not shown,” she said, “that those things which are sought by many are for that reason not true and perfect goods, because they disagree with themselves by turns, and as the one lacks the other it is not able to bring forth the absolute and full good? Then the true good comes to be when they are gathered into one form and efficient cause, so that what sufficiency is just is the same as potency, reverence, distinction, and joy. But if all these are not one and the same, they have

⁵³ Marenbon, *Boethius*: 108-12.

nothing by which they may be counted among those things to be sought?" "It is demonstrated," I said, "nor can it be doubted by any means." "What things therefore, when they disagree, are not at all goods, and, when they come to be one, become goods, does it not happen that these things are changed by the acquisition of unity so that they are goods?" "So it seems," I said. "But everything that is good, you concede, is good by participation in the good, or is it not so?" "So it is." "It is proper, then, that you should concede for the same reason that the good and the one are the same; for the substance is the same for those things for which the effect is not different according to nature." "I cannot deny it," I said.

Philosophia's argument has moved to a highly metaphysical and typically Platonic treatment of the good. Nothing is good except that which, "by participation" (*"participatione"*), imitates the highest good.⁵⁴ Philosophia has already yoked Boethius' desire to true happiness from III.2-9, so here it is simply a matter of proving that the good itself is the only thing that "is to be sought after" (*"expetenda"*).

So Philosophia's presentation of the philosophical kingdom now has its king: god, the father of all things, the one, who is also the good itself.⁵⁵ Now, as Philosophia establishes this figure conceptually through III.10-11, there is a curious digression to treat a topic of the highest significance for comprehending the goal of the dialogue underway. I am referring to the topic touched briefly at prose III.10.22-29: the sage. There, Philosophia speaks of a "corollary" or "*porismata*"⁵⁶ to her argument that God is the good and happiness. This corollary is a point that follows from what Philosophia has been

⁵⁴ Siobhan Nash-Marshall, *Participation and the Good: A Study in Boethian Metaphysics* (New York: Crossroad Pub., 2000): 285-90.

⁵⁵ The following present more in depth analyses of the metaphysics in question here. Marenbon, *Boethius*: 108-12; Nash-Marshall, *Participation and the Good*: 186-221; Susan Ford Wiltshire, "Boethius and the "summum bonum", " *The Classical Journal* 67, no. 3 (Feb. - Mar., 1972).

⁵⁶ The plural here must be somehow "poetic," since there is only one corollary mentioned. And, anyway, this is not a corollary in the rigidly mathematical sense, but rather a "kind of corollary."

arguing, but remains tangential to her principal train of argument. She claims that “because men become happy by the acquisition (“*adeptione*”) of happiness” and that “happiness in truth is itself divinity,” and she concludes from these claims that “it is manifest that those who are happy come to be so by the acquisition of divinity.” Thus, “it is necessarily the case for the same reason that those who acquire divinity become gods.” Or, in other words, as she accounts for this possibility in her next breath, “*Omnis igitur beatus deus. Sed natura quidem unus; participatione vero nihil prohibet esse quam plurimos.*” — “Everyone who is happy is god. But still he is one by nature; indeed, nothing prohibits that there be as many [of god] as possible by participation” (prose III.10.25). Philosophia is here arguing for a conception by which the divine nature is not so transcendent that it is impossible for humans ever to achieve an existence as complete as that of the divinity. The crucial concept is her presentation of the Platonic notion of “participation.” By this metaphysical concept, any “*sapiens*,” any sage, may attain his own divinity and the perfection, unity, happiness, and goodness this divinity implies without in any way altering the natural unity of the divine being (III.10.24). Divinity persists as a nature independent of any of the agents that participate in it, so that, even if no human agents were to participate in the divine nature, still that nature would persist independently of them. What Philosophia here puts before Boethius, then, is the possibility that he, if he should desire, may acquire the happiness that will make him divine, or more true to the circularity of her argument he may acquire the divine nature that will make him happy. Philosophia tries to attach Boethius’ desire to this sage-god, to

whom she would have him assimilate himself. She holds out to him, over and against the having of Fortuna, the being of god, the direct embodiment of the divine idea.

This has already been anticipated in two places before this passage. First, at prose I.4.38, Boethius quoted the counsel that he calls Pythagorean, claiming that in his political involvement he had always tried to “follow God” according to their precept (“ἔπου θεῶ”). Again, at II.5.26, while Philosophia is arguing against the human desire for wealth, she says that humans, “*deo mente consimiles*” or “comparable to God with respect to their minds,” still seek in vain to ornament their natural being with lesser things. It would seem that Philosophia is reaching out to Boethius at least in part because he once attempted to assimilate himself to God, according to this conception, and her own philosophical position in no way obstructs such attempts. What we have, then, is a conception of the divine man that is completely different from that which governs the political theology of Theoderic. In Theoderic’s case, his sovereignty was established, as we saw, by reference to its power over life and represents itself as a power of one sovereign to determine life for better or worse, to create and maintain conditions in which life flourishes and acquires attributes or else diminishes to the ultimate point of death. Philosophia’s divine being, by contrast, is goodness, oneness, and happiness, which consists of the coexistence of self-sufficiency, power, respect, fame, and pleasure in this one, good happiness. While the sovereignty that belongs to Theoderic belongs only to the one man who stands over and apart from his subjects as their superior in order to provide them with security and *otium*, Philosophia’s sovereignty may be shared among a

potentially infinite number of god-sages who by participation constitute themselves as one and the same in nature. The sage who strives to be one, good, and happy reaches a point of indifference from the divine ruler; he virtually is this divine ruler. Philosophia seems to hold out to Boethius the consolation of pursuing this life, returning to the path on which he followed her god in accord with Pythagorean and Platonic dictates. If he chooses to be a sage, to be one, good, and happy in god, then he may be finally consoled.

Chapter 3: Boethius' *Consolation*, Books IV-V

3.1. *Life, Death, and the Drive toward Unity*

Having examined in detail Philosophia's political theology, it is now possible to pursue her treatment of what she understands to be the causes of Boethius' lethargy. I have already shown that her therapy could be divided into three forms, a material, imaginary, and rational therapy directed at transforming Boethius' desire for Fortuna and her goods. Philosophia successfully transferred this desire to herself, first, through a prosopopoeia by which she was able to identify herself with Fortuna, whom Boethius had desired as the text began (an imaginary transference); and then, second, she transferred his desire from herself to happiness itself by way of dialogic exchange and dialectical persuasion (a rational transference). This happiness itself, through Book III of the *Consolation*, comes to be identified at this stage of Philosophia's argument with the being of god, who exists as the identity of the one and the good.

Philosophia has also held out to Boethius the possibility that he may become a sage, the direct embodiment of this god, but she has not elaborated an account by which she may persuade Boethius that this is after all his desire. She has pushed him towards happiness itself, so he is very nearly there already, according to her account. At prose III.11.11-13, having committed herself to the thesis that god is one and good and having introduced the *porismata* concerning the sage-god, she draws out the consequence that if all beings desire happiness, they must desire to be the one as well.

Ut in animalibus inquit: cum in unum coeunt ac permanent anima corpusque, id animal vocatur, cum vero haec unitas utriusque separatione dissolvitur, interire, nec iam esse animal liquet; ipsum quoque corpus cum in una forma membrorum coniuntione permanet, humana visitur species, at si distributae segregataeque partes corporis distraxerint unitatem, desinit esse quod fuerat. Eoque modo percurrenti cetera procul dubio patebit subsistere unumquodque, dum unum est, cum uero unum esse desinit, interire.

So it is for animals,” she said, “when they have come together into a unity and they persist as soul and body, this is called an ‘animal;’ when this unity of both is dissolved by separation, it is allowed that it perishes and is no longer an animal. Also the body itself, when it persists in one form by the connection of its members, is seen as a human type (*humana species*); but if the separated and divided parts tear asunder the unity of the body, it ceases to be that which it was. In this way it lies open past doubt to the one going over the rest of these things that each thing persists as long as it is one, but when it leaves off being one, it perishes.

Philosophia argues that at the level of their natural composition (“*de naturali intentione... tractamus*”) all beings desire that their being should be maintained as a unity. And moreover this is consistent throughout the whole course of existent things—not just animals but even trees, flames, and rocks strive in some way to persist as a unified whole, so she argues (III.11.14-29). From this, she derives the claim that all beings desire the one, and she concludes, therefore, that this one, good sovereign of the cosmos is the final cause of the cosmos. She provides, in this way, the cure for one of the apparent causes of Boethius’ lethargy, his ignorance of the final cause of all things:

...in hoc patuit tibi quod ignorare te paulo ante dicebas. — Quid? inquam. — Quis esset, inquit, rerum omnium finis. Is est enim profecto quod desideratur ab omnibus; quod, quia bonum esse collegimus, oportet rerum omnium finem bonum esse fateamur.” (III.11.40-41)

“...In this way what you were saying a little earlier you did not know is revealed to you.” “What?” I said. “Who the final cause of all things is,” she said. “For he is

in fact what is desired by all; and because we have established that he is good, it is right that we admit that the good is the final cause of all things.”

Philosophia has only two more treatments to offer at this point: one, Boethius’ confusion over the relation between this once forgotten, now remembered final cause and the immanent order of the world, or precisely how this one, good god maintains order through the whole cosmos, even governing human affairs; and, two, what Boethius’ true nature is, the immortality that he has not included in his definition of *homo* understood as a species. Book IV is devoted to the former, and while Book V should be concerned with immortality, it instead redirects the conversation to god’s eternal life.

Before coming to these remaining points of therapeutic argument, it is necessary to discuss one more issue left over from Book III, since it sets up the problems of Book IV and V. Prose III.11.11-13, quoted immediately above, establishes that there is a natural desire for unity inherent in all beings, a desire that constitutes those beings as determinate beings; the sovereign good has so ordered the world that any beings that do not have unity simply cease to exist (“*interire*”). Above I posed the question, whether there is a determinate relationship between life or bare life and this one, good ruler-god.¹ Having reviewed Philosophia’s kingdom and shown the place of the king and sage within it, and furthermore the relationship between desire, life, and the one, an answer to this question can now be discovered. At this point, it is clear that there is a relationship between this divine ruler of the cosmos and life, and that this is mediated by desire.

¹ See section 2.3 above.

Those *animalia* that desire to be one truly desire also to be *the one*, and they succeed in this to the extent that their nature may realize such a desire. This is the reason why Philosophia's therapy works precisely on Boethius' desire, which has been aimed by the Muses towards Fortuna. On Philosophia's account, Boethius' desire has been misdirected towards fantasies that necessarily culminate in death; only the desire to be one, to concentrate one's desires into a single stroke, preserves any animal in its being and spares it from extermination. With respect to the *Consolation*, there is something immediately compelling in her assessment, since by the Muses' own declaration (by way of Boethius' dispossessed voice), they have kindled in him a desire for *Mors*. Her claims against the desire for Fortuna seem to have been borne out by Boethius' condition at the beginning of the text. His desire for Fortuna, now that she has been lost, immediately translates itself into a desire for death.

However, it remains unclear in what sense Philosophia's treatment will lead Boethius away from death; how, by directing his desire towards the one, the good, god the father of all things, does Philosophia propose to lead Boethius away from death? It has been suggested that Philosophia may after all only be leading Boethius toward his demise.² Indeed, there are many indications in the text that suggest Philosophia also, and not the Muses only, may be leading Boethius towards his death, that her ultimate remedy

² Relihan and Heise, *The Prisoner's Philosophy*: 59-74; Relihan, "Old Comedy, Menippean Satire, and Philosophy's Tattered Robes in Boethius' *Consolation*," 192-94; Shanzer, "The Death of Boethius and the 'Consolation of Philosophy'," 364-66.

for his lethargy is the very hemlock that infamously silences the meddling philosopher. Henry Chadwick's often referenced work has shown that Philosophia's garment, into which she wove a *theta* and a *pi* separated by the grades of a ladder, bears a certain pernicious ambiguity.³ While the *theta* and *pi* most certainly emblemize theoretical and practical philosophy respectively, the *theta* has a second meaning, *thanatos*; for it was very likely that in Boethius' time the uniform of the prisoner sentenced to death featured a theta inwoven into its fabric, just as the one that Philosophia wears. There is also the testimony of Plato's *Phaedo*, where theoretical speculation and death are conceived in a kind of identity, so that passing from this life can only be an escape of the soul from all the bodily inconvenience that hinders its perpetual concentration on the pure forms (61c-69e). In the passage I am currently considering, prose III.11, Philosophia's language suggests at one place that there are some cases where the volition may recognize that death is preferable to life and set aside its natural impulse towards unity and life:

Nam ne in animalibus quidem manendi amor ex animae voluntatibus, verum ex naturae principiis venit. Nam saepe mortem cogentibus causis, quam natura reformidat, voluntas amplectitur, contraque illud, quo solo mortalium rerum durat diuturnitas, gignendi opus, quod natura semper appetit, interdum coercet voluntas. Adeo haec sui caritas non ex animali motione, sed ex naturali intentione procedit... (III.11.31-33)

The love of persisting in existence develops in animals not from the willing of the spirit, but rather from principles inherent in their nature. For often because of causes imposing death, what nature abhors, the will embraces (*amplectitur*), and against that by which alone the longevity of mortal things endures, the act of regenerating, which nature always seeks, all the same the will restrains. And so

³ Chadwick, "Theta on Philosophy's Dress in Boethius."

this preciousness of the self proceeds not from the a spiritual motion, but from a natural impulse...

Philosophia speaks of the drive towards life and its status as a natural impulse of the organism. It is important to see that Philosophia only mentions the possibility of a willful opposition to this natural principle in passing; her main point is to show that the desire for life is essential to all animals, regardless of their will, and the mention of these aberrations from the natural principle is only supposed to demonstrate this point about the nature of the animal organism. What appears here at the level of mere suggestion, only passing remarks, are first, sexuality—closely linked in psychoanalytic thought to the drive towards death⁴—and, second and perhaps more importantly, this intimation of coming death, as if Philosophia is preparing Boethius to “embrace” that which “nature abhors.” Boethius’ desire for death has already been established, though he longs for this in great misery. At this subterranean level of the text, the death drive seems to speak through Philosophia’s therapy, too; if it may be said that she channels Boethius’ desire, understood sexually as well as metaphysically, from Fortuna toward the good, then she is also moving his desire toward the recognition that, for him at least, death is good. It is as if we may read between the lines of her discourse the symptoms of an originally philosophical trauma, by which philosophers are driven to repeat the gesture of Socrates’ life and, if circumstances demand it, also his death. Philosophia, who persists as old but

⁴ See, for example, Jean Laplanche, "Why the Death Drive?," in *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press).

somehow also forever young, who reappears at so many philosophers' sides across so many centuries (prose I.3.6-10), whenever they have faltered in their attempt to realize the Platonic ideal of the "*beata res publica*" (prose I.4.5), herself bears the mark in her own desire—to lead Boethius to the knowledge that would "liberate" him from his concern for worldly affairs—of the same melancholia that conditions Boethius' desire for Fortuna.

If Philosophia is leading Boethius to death, if that is her final cure, by what means does she intend to bring him there? Philosophia has developed a complicated consolatory discourse by now, in which she has dismissed those desired things associated with Fortuna by showing that they evoke in those who pursue her and her goods a desire for the true goods, but Fortuna's goods cannot truly provide what they promise. She has shown that these true goods, to which she has redirected Boethius' desire, may be understood as interchangeable since they are substantially the same, so that they must be regarded as one thing. This being-one-thing of the goods has then been redefined as god, the father of all things, in such a way that the whole natural order, indeed life and death themselves, have been redefined and incorporated into this now far-reaching system. How, then, does Philosophia plan to transform into a desire for death Boethius' desire to become this divine being?

3.2. Divine Dispositio or the Providence-Fate Apparatus

I suggest that Philosophia's rhetorical and argumentative strategy may be helpfully treated through Agamben's work on the divine οἰκονομία, which translates into Latin as *dispositio*, and the ancient controversy around the trinitarian dogma.⁵ Agamben's own remarks on Boethius' *Consolation* are few, but what he does have to say is illuminating and important for where I intend to take the rest of my argument.⁶ Agamben speaks of an "apparatus" of "providence-fate" that Boethius' *Consolation* handed down to the Latin West. In his own treatment of the *Consolation*, he is working at an archaeological level that allows him to pursue his more far-ranging investigation of economic power within the Western philosophico-political tradition.⁷ I am more concerned to investigate a possibility Agamben's theoretical work raises but does not explore: the operation of this apparatus within Boethius' *Consolation* itself.

First it must be established what this term "apparatus" indicates, both for Agamben and within my own analysis. "Apparatus" is a translation of Foucault's term "*dispositif*," which Agamben has analyzed and defined according to three criteria. First, an apparatus is "a heterogeneous set" that brings together a number of independent elements, such as "discourses, institutions, buildings, laws, police measures, philosophical propositions" and other such things. Second, an apparatus always has "a

⁵ Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*.

⁶ Ibid., 126-29.

⁷ His project traces the secular, administrative apparatus that dominates the world today in the form of a global "economy" back to the trinitarian schismatics of late antiquity, and then from there further back to Aristotelian thought on domestic order and the theory of classical oratory. See especially *ibid.*, 261-87.

concrete strategic function...in a power relation.” Third, an apparatus always occurs at an intersection of power and knowledge.⁸ So much Agamben gathers from Foucault, but he also pursues a genealogy of this concept by tracing it back through Jean Hyppolite and Hegel to the Church Fathers and ancient Neoplatonism, where he is able to show the term’s ancient theological sense.⁹ Though the term *dispositio* does not have precisely the same use that *dispositif* has in Foucault's work, Agamben’s genealogy suggests that the cleavages and antagonisms that riddle the *dispositifs* studied by Foucault may also be detected in the ancient theology of divine economy.¹⁰ What the ancient Neoplatonists achieved by borrowing this concept from classical rhetorical theory is a reconciliation of the divinity’s transcendent being, his existence completely beyond the world, with its immanent praxis, governance of the world's movements.¹¹ Speaking of a *dispositio* immanent to the world articulates a separation between the simplicity of god's being and the complex “disposing” of his activity. In this way, his transcendent nature does not need to lower itself so far as to intervene in mundane affairs. The praxis or action of this government of the world then proceeds without any foundation internal to the world, since it refers to the transcendent deity in order to found itself. This is where Agamben introduces subject formation, subjectivation, or “subjectification” to use his word, as the last element of an apparatus; since its action has no foundation within the world, it must

⁸ Agamben, "What Is an Apparatus?," 2-3.

⁹ Ibid., 3-6.

¹⁰ Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*: 17-67.

¹¹ Ibid., 53-67.

produce a subject within the world in order to support itself, someone who can deploy and coordinate his body, will, and mind according to the arrangements of this praxis.¹²

For my analysis, Agamben's genealogical project provides the point of view from which to understand Philosophia's description of the divine *dispositio* at III.12. In other words, this *dispositio* in Boethius' text is just such a *dispositif* or apparatus as Agamben describes, characterized by its heterogeneity, its function within a power relation, its operation as power/knowledge, its lack of any foundation in actual existence, and finally its focalization on the subjectivity of Boethius. The positive foundation, the actual body, mind, and will upon which Philosophia may ground the actual existence of her *dispositif*, is what remains of Boethius' ruined subjectivity: that is, his trust, recovered at prose I.6.4 along with his ability to speak, in the existence of a "*conditor*" who arranges the world's "*ordo*." Having this background, it is possible to understand what Agamben means when he refers to the treatment of providence and fate in the *Consolation* as an "apparatus." Allowing with Agamben that there is a fundamental heterogeneity among the elements of this providence-fate apparatus, and that this heterogeneity, brought together by an

¹² Commenting on the translation of οἰκονομία, as it had been used in Clement of Alexandria (as a way to express providence's governance of the world), Agamben adds, "The Latin term *dispositio*, from which the French term *dispositif*, or apparatus, derives, comes therefore to take on the complex semantic sphere of the theological *oikonomia*. The "dispositifs" about which Foucault speaks are somehow linked to this theological legacy. They can be in some way traced back to the fracture that divides and, at the same time, articulates in God being and praxis, the nature or essence, on the one hand, and the operation through which He administers and governs the created world, on the other. The term "apparatus" designates that in which, and through which, one realizes a pure activity of governance devoid of any foundation in being. This is the reason why apparatuses must always imply a process of subjectification. That is to say, they must produce their subject." Agamben, "What Is an Apparatus?," 11.

operation of power/knowledge, necessarily implies a fracture between being and praxis such that the apparatus requires a process of subject formation, then it may be possible to show that the text of the *Consolation* itself exposes the heterogeneity of Philosophia's apparatus as it attempts to assimilate the subjectivity of Boethius to its machinery.

From this point of view, Boethius' remarks at prose III.12 take on a particular significance. Philosophia has been deriving from god's plenitude of power and his incapacity to accomplish anything evil the conclusion that evil is impossible (III.12.24-29). Boethius stops her at this point, finding this insufferable conclusion quite simply too far-fetched to be borne. He exclaims,

Ludisne, inquam, me inextricabilem labyrinthum rationibus texens, quae nunc quidem qua egrediaris introeas, nunc vero quo introieris egrediare, an mirabilem quendam divinae simplicitatis orbem complicas? Etenim paulo ante beatitudine incipiens eam summum bonum esse dicebas, quam in summo deo sitam loquebare. Ipsum quoque deum summum esse bonum plenamque beatitudinem disserebas, ex quo neminem beatum fore nisi qui pariter deus esset quasi munusculum dabas. Rursus ipsam boni formam dei ac beatitudinis loquebaris esse substantiam ipsumque unum id ipsum esse bonum docebas quod ab omni rerum natura peteretur. Deum quoque bonitatis gubernaculis universitatem regere disputabas volentiaque cuncta parere nec ullam mali esse naturam. Atque haec nullis extrinsecus sumptis, sed ex altero altero fidem trahente insitis domesticisque probationibus explicabas. (III.12.30-35)

“Are you playing with me,” I said, “weaving an inextricable labyrinth with your arguments, into which you enter at one time by which way you will exit, but at another time in which place you will enter you exit, or are you folding together a certain wondrous orb of divine simplicity? For even a little before, beginning from happiness you were saying that [happiness] is the highest good, which you were claiming, is located in the highest god. Also god himself is the highest and full good, and happiness too, so you advanced, from which you gave as a little gift that no one is happy except the one who, by assimilation [*pariter*], is god. And again you were claiming that the form itself of the good is the substance of god and happiness, and you were teaching that the one itself is that good itself which

is sought by the entire natural order. Also you were contending that god rules the universe by the directions of goodness, that all willing things obey [this goodness], nor is there any evil nature. And you were unfolding these things with none having been taken up from outside, but by internal and familiar [*domesticis*] proofs with one point drawing its reliability from the other.”

Boethius observes how she seems to be leading him in circles through a “labyrinth” of arguments. His complaint suggests that there may be a basic heterogeneity in the things that Philosophia’s discourse occludes, that her arguments are tying together so many loose ends in an inescapable web. The language in which Boethius expresses his concern is noteworthy: *inextricabilis*, *texo*, *complico*, *domesticus*, and *explico*, in sum, so many words evocative of weaving characterize Philosophia’s discourse developed through Book III. This conceit picks up the images associated with her garment from I.1 and I.3, which depict Philosophia as a weaver so skilled that she can design her own garment, and links her weaving the “*particulares*” of that garment to the construction of a providence-fate apparatus. She is weaving with arguments a kingdom in which god, the good, happiness, evil, and Boethius’ downfall may all appear as somehow mutually intelligible, although they appear disparate and on their own incapable of reconciliation. Boethius’ skepticism that her kingdom may just be the net effect of so many circular arguments, Philosophia meets with these words:

Tum illa: Minime, inquit, ludimus remque omnium maximam dei munere, quem dudum deprecabamur, exegimus. Ea est enim divinae formae substantiae, ut neque in externa dilabatur nec in se externum aliquid ipsa suscipiat, sed, sicut de ea Parmenides ait,

πάντοθεν εὐκύκλου σφαίρης ἐναλίγκιον ὄγκῳ

rerum orbem mobilem rotat dum se immobilem ipsa conservat. Quodsi rationes quoque non extra petitas sed intra rei quam tractabamus ambitum collocatas agitavimus, nihil est quod ammirere, cum Platone sanciente didiceris cognatos, de quibus loquuntur, rebus oportere esse sermones. (III.12.36-38)

Then that one: “No,” she said, “we are not playing, we have treated the greatest matter of all with the help of god, to whom we were praying a moment ago. For the form of divine substance is such that neither does it scatter toward external things, nor does it sustain something external inside itself, but, as Parmenides has said of it,

“Like the body of a sphere well-rounded on all sides,”¹³

It rotates a moving orb of all things while it preserves itself unmoved. But if also we have treated arguments sought not externally, but having been established within the circuit of the matter which we were treating, there is nothing at which to marvel, since you have learned with Plato sanctifying it that it is right for discourses to be related to those things of which one speaks.

Philosophia’s response is not that Boethius has failed to understand the movement of her discourse. Rather, invoking the authority of Plato instead of an argument, she insists that the nature of the thing itself, establishing itself as the presupposition of its own analysis, requires a circular discourse. The form of the Philosophia’s discourse is circular, because god’s nature is a spherical container closed upon itself: thus the wheel of fortune (poem II.1) has been transformed under the direction of Philosophia’s god. Philosophia can leave aside all things, including evil, that do not belong properly to the nature of god. His existence Boethius has already confirmed by accepting the argument at III.10 that god must exist because there must be a perfection, an absolute good, corresponding to all the imperfect goods which Philosophia has dismissed. She had rejected the latter with the

¹³ DK 8.43.

criticism that they do not offer the perfect sufficiency, or perfect joy, for example, which they promise. If no material good can serve as the bearer of perfect goodness, there must be an immaterial perfect goodness of which all these imperfections are simply imitators (III.10.6). That this perfect good could be simply a “*cogitationis imago*,” “a fantasy of cognition,” is rejected on the ground that the partial goodness of the imperfect goods could not be said to be either good or bad unless there were an absolute good to qualify them as such. But this mode of argument presupposes a perfect goodness as the foundation of critiquing the imperfect, and then the critique becomes the indication that there must be the good that was presupposed in the first place. Boethius could have argued that there may only be greater and lesser degrees of good and bad, that an absolute cannot positively exist, but he has already embraced the existence of god, even before this dialogue had begun (prose I.6.4). The possibility that Agamben encourages us to entertain, that Philosophia’s rhetoric rests upon a fundamental heterogeneity, brought into harmony by an operation of power/knowledge that must achieve a subject in order to ground itself positively, is suppressed by the conditions of the dialogue itself.

Boethius’ agreement with those arguments shows that he is already captured by this apparatus, that he too already belongs within the sphere of Philosophia’s good itself, as soon as she begins to question him. He has become, despite his downfall, the subject that this apparatus produces in order to ground itself in positive being. It is significant that just before this major expression of disagreement—his accusation against Philosophia’s discursive circularity—Boethius, and not Philosophia, reintroduces the

topic that leads Philosophia to the conclusion that evil does not exist. Moving from the cure that recalls to Boethius' mind what the final cause of all things is, Philosophia turns to the immanent order of the world, the second of those alleged causes of Boethius' illness. She reminds him that he did not remember by what mode of governance god ruled the world, but that still he did not doubt this god's existence (prose III.12.2-4). It is Boethius himself who replies that the great variety of natural beings could not be brought into any mutual concord unless there were "one" ("*unus*") who joined them together; if things were otherwise, the world would split apart and divide itself into chaotic ruin (III.12.4-5). But there is "one who holds fast what he has woven" ("*unus...qui quod nexuit contineret*"), he says, and

Non tam vero certus naturae ordo procederet nec tam dispositos motus locis, temporibus, efficientia, spatiis, qualitibus explicarent, nisi unus esset qui has mutationum uarietates manens ipse disponderet. Hoc, quicquid est, quo condita manent atque agitantur, usitato cunctis uocabulo deum nomino. (III.12.7-8)

An order of nature would not proceed so certain, nor would [natural things] unfold such well disposed movements in places and times, in effects, spaces, and qualities, unless there were one who disposes this variety of changes, remaining still himself. This one, whatever he is, by whom the established beings are stabilized and moved, according to the name used by all, is god.

The language used here connects the imagery of weaving, *nexo* and *explico*, to a very specific use of rhetorical terminology, *ordo* and *dispono*, precisely the language I have discussed above in relation to Agamben's work on the divine hierarchy and its

dispositio.¹⁴ The author thus verbally associates weaving with the divine *dispositio*, and he has Philosophia borrow from Boethius' language when she comes to describe her god's government of the world. The synthesis of these rhetorical terms and the weaving conceit has already happened in the words of a revived Boethius.

Now, as I have already mentioned, Agamben traces the theological appropriation of *dispositio*, essentially what Philosophia is developing here, to the rhetorical theory of the ancients. Boethius' persona, when he accuses Philosophia of advancing by way of circularity, uses the language of weaving in order to characterize Philosophia's rhetorically subtle argument. This apparatus will be further developed in reference to the question of fate, which, at prose IV.6.14, "is woven" ("*textur*") as the "moving network" ("*mobile nexus*") of an immobile, stable, and eternal divine providence. The *Consolation*'s author, trained in rhetoric, a translator of Aristotle's *Topics*, and also a commentator on Cicero's text on Aristotle's *Topics*, will not have been unaware of this link between theological and rhetorical terminology, even if his persona seems to have been. What the author is suggesting, at the level of verbal resonance, is that Philosophia's dialectical practice, her rhetorical *ordo* and *dispositio*, is at another level the divine *dispositio* that brings about the subject formation that her apparatus requires, so that there is a kind of virtual identity between her immediate task, persuading Boethius, and the operation of an apparatus of providence-fate over which she would stand in the position

¹⁴ See the beginning of section 3.2 above.

of *dux et deus*. Her presentation of the divine kingdom may be understood in terms of the practice of philosophical rhetoric, which, when successful, brings about in its audience an identification with the good itself, or at least self-relation, subjectivity, conditioned by this construction. Philosophia's divine kingdom, like her garment, like the scattered philosophical community her garment represents, lacks positive being in the world, so it therefore relies upon the weaving art in order to create the illusion of its positivity; nevertheless, it must find and achieve its subject in Boethius.

3.3. Boethius' Position before the Divine Dispositio

I have argued that Philosophia's apparatus can only bring together the heterogeneous elements she would try to connect by way of an interpellation, that is, by way of a capture of the subjectivity of Boethius. This is why she has undertaken her therapy of Boethius' desire, transferring through Book II his drives from Fortuna and the associated concern for worldly goods to transcendent and divine aims. I would like to develop this a little further, by stressing the homology between sovereign power that, as I have argued in the sections on politics above, Theoderic held over Boethius and the sovereign power treated here at the end of Book III.¹⁵ Theoderic's sovereign power was founded upon the exceptional power over life and death held by the sovereign who may

¹⁵ For the political context of Theoderic's regime, see Amory, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy*, 489-554; Moorhead, *Theoderic in Italy*: esp. 212-51; Heather, "Merely an Ideology? - Gothic Identity in Ostrogothic Italy," 31-60; Heather, *The Goths*: 216-58; John Moorhead, *The Roman Empire Divided: 400-700* (London: Pearson Education Ltd, 2001): for a brief introduction, see 43-49.

expose or cultivate life, destroying it by neglect or developing it towards certain goods, such as *otium*. What this passage on the circular nature of the divine being shows above all is how sovereign power in Philosophia's kingdom, although it does not rely upon forced exile and it shares its rule across a multitude potentially infinitely numerous, is essentially one in nature. It relies upon an inside/outside distinction of such a kind that it reproduces with respect to all beings that do not conform to its order the same structural exception as Theoderic's rule. The entire discussion of evil in Book IV can be understood in light of this inside/outside movement that governs Philosophia's argumentation, but for my purpose, one passage in particular deserves attention: the *dispensatio* provided for the body of a wise man. Since I have been arguing that Philosophia in fact seeks Boethius' death and her argument moves towards this, the passage is most illustrative of the point I would like to make as well as useful for where my argument is going.

The passage appears at IV.6, the lead-up to which section one finds in the previous section. At IV.5 Boethius raises a new complaint, his most profound argument against Philosophia yet. Citing the authority of popular opinion concerning fortune, he objects that anyone would prefer flourishing in their own city, with honor, power, riches, and good fortune to exile, poverty, and disgrace. That the good are forced to suffer punishments that belong properly to those who are evil, Boethius explains, seems to be irreconcilable with the just *dispositio* Philosophia has been presupposing in her account

of the divine government of the world.¹⁶ Boethius specifically complains that “*carcer, nex ceteraque legalium tormenta poenarum,*” that is, “prison, death, and other torments of legal penalties”—in other words, the very conditions that Boethius currently faces—fall to the just rather than the wicked (prose IV.5.3). This cuts against Philosophia’s argument in IV.4, that evil is penalized so that it may be reformed; for it can hardly be obvious how punishments fit for those to be reformed, according to Philosophia, can advantageously be applied to those who are just and deserve no punishment. Philosophia compares the task Boethius expects her to perform to Hercules’ laborious battle with the Hydra (IV.6.3), and then introduces the providence-fate apparatus proper, joining together here so many philosophical problems—the simplicity of providence, the “*series*” of fate, the suddenness of chance, knowledge and divine predestination, and free will—as one more “*medicinae...portio*” for Boethius (IV.6.5).¹⁷ Philosophia sets aside “music” for a while in order to “weave together arguments joined to themselves in order” (“*Quodsi te musici carminis oblectamenta delectant, hanc oportet paulisper differas voluptatem, dum nexus sibi ordine contexo rationes.*” IV.6.6). Her new program relates

¹⁶ For an alternate reading of the good in Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy*, see Nash-Marshall, *Participation and the Good*: 212-18.

¹⁷ She does not speak of “medicine” much in Books IV and V, so why is it reintroduced here? This is in fact the last mention of her therapy, and its placement here indicates that each of the topics Philosophia intends to treat between this point and the end of the *Consolation* qualifies as part of Philosophia’s consolation. Even though the language of medical therapy recedes in the text from Book III onward, the consolation will nevertheless carry all the way through to the problem of immortality and what Philosophia offers in place of an answer, the eternity of God’s life. The scholarship that rates the medical analogy developed by Philosophia through the *Consolation* as more than a traditional conceit includes Schmid, “Philosophisches und Medizinisches in der ‘Consolatio Philosophiae’ des Boethius,” 341-84; D. F. Duclow, “Perspective and Therapy in Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy*,” *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 4, no. 3 (1979): 334-43.

providence and fate by having the latter proceed from the former, so that *fatum* corresponds to the *dispositio* that Philosophia has been discussing since Book III, but *providentia* preserves the *divina mens* “*in suae simplicitatis arce composita*,” “situated in the citadel of its own simplicity” (IV.6.8). These two orders of power are first separated only to be related again to one another, with fate subjected to the higher providence (just as all things are subject to it). From IV.6.14-19 Philosophia deploys once again her paradigm of the divine order: the circle, this time that which rolls around the course of the stars in the heavens. What Philosophia describes is a cosmic order (“*ordo*”) in which the mobility of the stars and planets, as they traverse the circumference of this circle, is to be understood as the domain governed by fate, and the center, the fixed point in the middle of the circle, is to be understood as the “first mind” (“*prima mens*”) that “disposes” the order of fate (“*disponat*” IV.6.21). According to her conception here, what is farthest from the center is “tangled up in the greater nets of fate” (“*maioribus fati nexibus implicatur*”), and what draws to the center becomes more “free” (“*liberum*,” IV.6.15). At this point Philosophia reintroduces “eternity,” a topic which she had not mentioned since II.7, where she was concerned to show that one must not be hopeful to stretch the longevity of one’s name to worldly immortality in the form of glory, since even the infinite passing of time is nothing in comparison with eternity. Now she has returned to this topic, but offers a path by which one may reach to the eternal, or

alternatively the eternal may reach to the finite, and rescue one threatened by menacing fate by way of a certain *dispensatio*.¹⁸ Philosophia, relying upon the apparatus she has constructed, developing the kingdom she has already illustrated towards new purposes, redefines freedom and necessity as well, so that the latter appears as the work of fate and the former as the *dispensatio* that providence may offer to free one from the bonds of fate. The crucial passage is at prose IV.6.35-38:

Sed sit aliquis ita bene moratus ut de eo divinum iudicium pariter humanumque consentiat: sed est animi viribus infirmus, cui si quid eveniat adversi desinet colere forsitan innocentiam, per quam non potuit retinere fortunam: parcit itaque sapiens dispensatio ei quem deteriorem facere possit adversitas, ne cui non convenit laborare patiatur. Est alius cunctis virtutibus absolutus sanctusque ac deo proximus: hunc contingi quibuslibet adversis nefas providentia iudicat, adeo ut ne corporeis quidem morbis agitari sinat. Nam ut quidam me quoque excellentior:

ἀνδρὸς δὴ ἱεροῦ δέμας αἰθέρες ὠκοδόμησαν.¹⁹

¹⁸ “The meaning of exception acquired by the term *oikonomia* in the sixth or seventh century, especially in the field of the canon law of the Byzantine Church, is of particular interest for its semantic history. Here, the theological meaning of mysterious divine praxis undertaken for the salvation of humankind coalesces with the concepts of *aequitas* and *epieikeia* originating from Roman law, and comes to signify the dispensation [*dispensa*] that relieves one from a too rigid application of the canons. [...]

In this direction, just as an opposition between theology and economy had emerged in theology, so an opposition between “canon” and “economy” is produced in law, and the exception is defined as a decision that does not apply the law strictly, but “makes use of an economy” (*ou kanikos (...) all’ oikonomiai chresamenois*: Richter, p. 582). In this sense, in 692, the term enters the legislation of the Church and, with Leon VI (886-912), the imperial legislation.

The fact that a word designating the salvific activity of the government of the world acquires the meaning of “exception” shows how complex the relationships between *oikonomia* and law are. However, even in this case, the two senses of the term are, in spite of their apparent distance, perfectly consistent—exactly the same occurs in the Latin Church with the two meanings of the term *dispensatio*, which initially translates *oikonomia* and later progressively acquires the sense of “dispensation” [*dispensa*].” Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*: 49.

¹⁹ I have chosen to follow Tester’s Loeb here rather than Moreschini’s new critical edition. The latter has οἰκοδόμησαν, which represents some confusion of the aorist and the present indicative. Boethius, *Boethius: The Theological Tractates and the Consolation of Philosophy*: 366.

But let there be someone so well constituted that about this man divine judgment and human judgment equally agree with one another, but he is weak in the strength of his mind; if something adverse to him should come to pass he will perhaps cease to cultivate his blamelessness, through which he has not been able to preserve his good fortune. So a wise dispensation [*sapiens dispensatio*] spares him, whom adversity could make worse, in order that he, for whom it is not agreeable to suffer, may not undergo that [*patiatur*]. There is another, absolute and holy in all the virtues, nearest to god: providence judges it criminally unspeakable [*nefas*] that this man should be touched by certain adversities, so that it does not allow him to be bothered even by bodily illnesses. For, as a certain one, more distinguished than I, has said: “the body of a sacred man the ethereal spirits did fashion.”

Do these lines not perfectly describe Boethius in his predicament? He is this wise man, this philosopher about whom “divine and human judgment agree,” but who because of his loss of fortune has ceased to cultivate his “*innocentia*.” Moreover, Philosophia’s treatment from Books II-IV has been undertaken so that he will not suffer from the “*morbi*” that afflict those touched by adversity. Though the illnesses here seem to be bodily, rather than spiritual, still the medical conceit links this *dispensatio* to the medical regimen Philosophia has been directing for Boethius. For such wise men, fallen on hard times, a “wise dispensation” is made so that they will not be made worse by their circumstances. The exact results of this dispensation are left unstated, and thus it remains unclear how Philosophia’s providence will intervene in order to “spare” Boethius from the danger in which she sees him. But this much is certain: the dispensation of providence that Philosophia describes directly corresponds to the structure of the exception. There is an immanent order of the world due to fate’s operation in the nature of things; but providence, which is situated higher than fate, may override the operation of fate, since

providence has established fate in the first place anyway.²⁰ In this way, providence may make an exception for certain special cases. Boethius is, according to *Philosophia*, one of these special cases.²¹ The immutability of the law of fate is to be breached only by that higher providence and the god, who, as fate's author, saw fit to establish that law as immutable in the first place. As poem IV.6, which immediately follows this passage, expresses it at lines 34-39,

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Sedet interea conditor altus</i> <i>rerumque regens flectit habenas,</i> 35 <i>rex et dominus, fons et origo,</i> <i>lex et sapiens arbiter aequi,</i> <i>et quae motu concitat ire</i> <i>sistit retrahens ac uaga firmat[.]</i></p>	<p>Meanwhile the founder sits on high and, ruling over all things, pulls the reins king and master, fount and origin, law and wise judge of the just, which beings he urges to go in motion, he stills, drawing them back, and directs their wanderings[.]</p>
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Rex and *lex*, the enjambed rhymes couple together the very ideal of sovereign power that has been the major theme of Agamben's work: a sovereign power "ruling over all things" that directly embodies the law, and, as its source, its *fons*, it may intervene beyond the boundaries of that law, in order to preserve by its overreaching the very law that it establishes in its being but suspends in its activity.²²

²⁰ Chadwick, *Boethius: The Consolations of Music, Logic, Theology, and Philosophy*: 242-44.

²¹ See especially prose I.3.4.

²² For poetic and philosophical sources, see O'Daly, *The Poetry of Boethius*: 171-73; Scheible, *Die Gedichte in der Consolatio Philosophiae des Boethius*: 149-50.

3.4. *Exemplum, or the Singular Universal*

If Philosophia has been suggesting that a certain *dispensatio* is being made for Boethius, so that a sage so well assimilated to the divine king she has described may not suffer what is worst, a deviation from his divine nature, then what form does she imagine this *dispensatio* will take? Though there is no place at which this is described in plain language, the position of the sage with respect to god has already begun to lead the reader toward a comprehension of what this will be. As is so often the case in this text, one must look to the level of suggestion to understand exactly how Boethius will receive his *dispensatio*. It is the three mythological poems, as they are known, that show precisely this. Criticism has been attracted to these, recognizing them as exceptional not only for their aesthetic merits, but also for their thematic significance.²³ I argue in this section for importance of Philosophia's authorship of these poems, in which her moralizing interpretations have been too hastily attributed to the author of the *Consolation*, while he remains hidden behind his persona and Philosophia's dialogue. Her narrations and even more her verse commentary on the narration show that Philosophia's *dispensatio* confuses the definition of life and death, that she is leading Boethius at once to the sublime heights of eternal life and to an exemplary death, which supposedly makes the passage to eternal life possible. In her continuing dissociation of Boethius' personality,

²³ E.g., Eileen Sweeney, *Logic, Theology, and Poetry in Boethius, Abelard, and Alan of Lille: Words in the Absence of Things*, The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006): 47-49, 52-56; O'Daly, *The Poetry of Boethius*: 188-235.

she asks him to identify with an array of heroes, so that he may be well prepared to identify with the faceless eternal life of god himself by the end of Book V.

The first of three mythological poems, poem III.12, treats Orpheus' descent to the Underworld; the second, IV.3, retells Odysseus and his crew's trials on the island of Circe; and the third, IV.7, focuses on Hercules, who appears as a counterpoint to Agamemnon and Odysseus. At the most general level, even before one turns to the poems proper, it may be said that these three mythological figures, Orpheus, Odysseus, and Heracles, share in common one thing above all: each of them visited and returned from the Underworld. These are the mortals who escaped from death.²⁴ Beyond this, the poems foreshadow the direction of Philosophia's argument, sketching in mysterious colors what her prose will then establish through clearer, but not necessarily less misleading, dialectical argument. In other words, the clarity of Philosophia's arguments may be so convincing that those factors her arguments exclude from consideration may not occur to the attentive Boethius. The poems, then, flag where Philosophia's argument is going, and indicate more than she means to let on about what that journey will entail.²⁵

²⁴ Astell, *Job, Boethius, and Epic Truth*: 55.

²⁵ Cf. the use of myth in Plato: Kathryn A. Morgan, *Myth and Philosophy from the Presocratics to Plato* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 132-289; Luc Brisson, *Plato the Myth-Maker*, trans. Gerard Naddaf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Bruce Gottfried, "Pan, the Cicadas, and Plato's Use of Myth in the *Phaedrus*," in *Plato's Dialogues: New Studies and Interpretations*, ed. Gerald Alan Press (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1993): 179-98; J. E. Smith, "Plato's Use of Myth in the Education of Philosophic Man," *The Phoenix* 40, no. 1 (1986): 20-34.

3.4.1. Orpheus and Eurydice

Philosophia's Orpheus is situated in an "intertextual matrix," understood in the more restricted sense of referenced inter-texts, with Virgil's *Georgics*, Seneca's Herculean tragedies, and other passages from Boethius' *Consolation*.²⁶ As Astell has shown, the advantage of recognizing these intertextual references, especially the Virgilian association of Orpheus and elegiac verse, is that one may see the myth as employed here in order to reference the elegiac poetry with which this text began.²⁷ Astell does not appreciate though, that the persona Philosophia, and not just the author, recalls the elegiac poet and the "theatrical Muses" to Boethius, her direct audience.²⁸ This poem is the last step in the therapeutic process of separating Boethius' desire from Fortuna, his lost love object, or, alternatively, one further step toward securing the transference of that desire toward god. In this regard, the most important lines of this verse are the last ones, from 52-58. If one sets aside the first four lines and these last seven, the rest of the poem presents the narrative of Orpheus' descent to the Underworld. The last seven lines act as a kind of internal index for how the poem is to be understood, according to Philosophia.

These last lines read as follows:

<i>Vos haec fabula respicit</i>	This plot reflects upon you,
<i>quicumque in superum diem</i>	whoever seeks to lead

²⁶ Astell, *Job, Boethius, and Epic Truth*: 55. For a presentation of all of the texts that may be brought to bear upon this important poem, see also O'Daly, *The Poetry of Boethius*: 192, fn. 27; Lerer, *Boethius and Dialogue*: 160-64.

²⁷ Astell, *Job, Boethius, and Epic Truth*: 53. See also Jo-Marie Claassen, "Literary « Anamnesis » : Boethius Remembers Ovid," *Helios* 34, no. 1 (2007): 1-35.

²⁸ Astell, *Job, Boethius, and Epic Truth*: 55.

55	<i>mentem ducere quaeritis;</i> <i>nam qui Tartareum in specus</i> <i>victus lumina flexerit,</i> <i>quicquid praecipuum trahit</i> <i>perdit dum videt inferos.</i>	the mind up to the higher day. For he who conquered would turn back his eyes towards the Tartarean cave, whatever distinction he demonstrates he loses when he looks on those below.
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Philosophia's role as poetess must not be forgotten here.²⁹ In these lines, she teaches Boethius how he must understand the gesture of Orpheus' backward glance: the "*arbiter / Umbrarum*," Hades, decreed that Orpheus must not look back upon his wife Eurydice if she will return to the world of the living. At line 56, Philosophia directly quotes Hades' words from 46, "*lumina flectere*." Her words take sides with the decree of the divine sovereign of the Underworld over and against Orpheus and Eurydice, who obey *amor*, a "*maior lex...sibi*" or "a greater law unto itself" (III.12.48).³⁰ The moralizing interpretation she gives of this myth, that one should not look back on those "*inferi*," those "below" (58), also indicates that Boethius should put aside his love for those who remain below him. For this adjective *inferus* refers not only to those in the Underworld, but also to those lower than the "higher day" (53), as the poetry analogizes Boethius to Orpheus and the "Tartarean cave" to the attachments he has to the world now lost to him. Philosophia

²⁹ This is a point that all interpretations I have encountered overlook, so that they all take these poems to be much less calculated than I do, almost as commentary on the text that comes from outside the text rather than an element integral to the struggles of the dialogue. See, for example, O'Daly, *The Poetry of Boethius*; Lerer, *Boethius and Dialogue*: 185-202; Astell, *Job, Boethius, and Epic Truth*: 41-69.

³⁰ Astell and others have emphasized the relationship between love and the law in this poem, stressing that love is beyond the law here. In this way, it is "exceptional" in Agamben's sense. What has been overlooked though is the way in which the relationship between love and sovereign power—Hades and his law here—persist as themes through all three mythological poems. Orpheus and Eurydice's love here is dangerous and doomed precisely because it is unrestrained and not able to be restrained; it bears no relation to sovereign power. Astell, *Job, Boethius, and Epic Truth*: 53-60.

addresses Boethius and interprets the myth in such a way that Orpheus appears as an example to be recalled and rejected. Boethius should understand how Orpheus, bound by the greater law of love to his Eurydice in the same way that Boethius is bound to his Fortuna, lost all that made him special (“*praecipuum*,” 57). He should do what is necessary to purge from his desire all that obstructs his passage to the “higher day.” Philosophia is trying to control the interpretation of this myth, and this is why these last seven lines must be uttered. She needs Boethius to identify with the mourning Orpheus, but to do so at a distance, to understand the tug of *amor* that draws Orpheus to look back, but to transfer that desire elsewhere. That she must utter these last seven lines shows that there are other ways to understand the myth though, that Boethius could identify completely with Orpheus and recall the Muses whom Philosophia sent away in prose I.1. He could hold fast his desire for his attachments to the world, lost as they are, but Philosophia’s treatments lead him away from those attachments, away from those “*infern*,” so coded has Boethius’ appeal on behalf of his *comites* become, so concealed has that memory become, that they are now no more than the cursed souls of the Underworld, abandoned to such loathsome torments as Ixion’s wheel (34-35), Tantalus’ thirst (36-37), and Tityus’ vulture-eaten liver (38-39).

3.4.2. Odysseus and his crew on Circe’s Island

Odysseus and his crew’s poem at IV.3 shows the same structure, narrative followed by moral instruction that limits the range of interpretation Philosophia deems

appropriate in the case of Orpheus.³¹ In this poem, the peculiar conclusions she emphasizes only make her strategy that much more obvious. From lines 1-17 the poem treats the arrival of Odysseus and his crew at Circes' island. Odysseus is spared the fate that each member of his "crew" ("*remiges*," IV.3.21) suffers, because Hermes, by a kind of *dispensatio*, intervenes in order to protect him as "leader" ("*dux*") from the "the poison of his host" ("*peste...hospitis*" IV.3.20). The crew, however, are turned to various beasts (11-16), so that "nothing remains untouched for lost ones, neither voice nor body" ("*et nihil manet integrum / voce, corpore perditis.*" IV.3.25-26). The narrative portion of this poem concludes with a remark, immediately following the mention of the *vox* in line 26, that recalls the classic Aristotelian distinction between the speech of man and the voice or call of the beast, "*Sola mens stabilis super / monstra quae patitur gemit.*" "The mind alone, stable, groans over the monstrosities which it suffers." (IV.3.27-28). The verb *gemo* here belongs to a grunting, groaning beast, but the *mens* belongs exclusively to the human and super-human, so that Philosophia's expression highlights the contradiction inherent in the "groan" of the "mind." *Patitur* further emphasizes the passivity, as opposed to the active intellection appropriate to human understanding. But Philosophia's conclusion is rather surprising.³² The six lines following this twisted conjunction of beast and man read as follows: "*O levem nimium manum / nec potentia gramina, / membra quae valeant licet, / corda vertere non valent! / Intus est hominum vigor / arce conditus*

³¹ Ibid., 58-60; Scheible, *Die Gedichte in der Consolatio Philosophiae des Boethius*: 137-40.

³² Astell, *Job, Boethius, and Epic Truth*: 60-64.

abdita.” “O too weak hand, and powerless herbs, the members which it is allowed for them to control do not have the strength to turn the hearts of men. Within has the strength of men been established, in the remote citadel” (IV.3.29-34). Philosophia has just lamented the poor lot of Odysseus’ crew, for each of whom the mind “grunts” at its bestial bodily condition, and yet she celebrates immediately following this the power of the mind over the body, the insignificance of bodily conditions for mental aptitude. She presupposes an activity and self-determination of the citadel within that has no need for a body, dismissing in proud and triumphant tones the power Circe’s drug has over the *membra*, since it in no way “wounds the mind” (“*Mentis vulnere*,” IV.3.39).³³

Now, if one compares the Orpheus poem to the Odysseus poem, and Philosophia’s interpretations of each, one may see certain overlapping motifs. First, in the Orpheus poem there are the *inferi*, who bear comparison to the “*remiges*” or the crew of Odysseus. In each poem, Philosophia expects her audience to overlook the suffering of these groups, regarding their misery as secondary to the basic point she would like to make. Philosophia advises Boethius to look away from “those below,” so that he may focus his attention on the heavens. In the Orpheus poem her strategy was to detach Boethius’ desire from those things “below,” from all the worldly concern that obstructs his ability to recognize the divine kingdom to which he belongs. In the Odysseus poem her strategy is somewhat different. The crew now takes the central focus, since they

³³ Lerer, *Boethius and Dialogue*: 189-90.

preserve their cognitive power in spite of their transformed bodies and voices.³⁴ They are exemplary of human potential, which cannot be defeated, so she holds, by something as trivial as a total loss of the human body's material support for the human mind; much worse are those "more potent poisons," ("*venena potentius*" IV.3.35), that reach into the mind and "undermine" ("*detrahunt*," IV.3.36) its power over itself. These are quite clearly the poetic Muses' "*venena*" from prose I.1, which Philosophia disparages because they arouse affective turmoil that undermines the rational faculty's self-possession. Her point here is obscured, though, by what must be seen as the truly grievous situation of Odysseus' crew. For who would rather be one of Odysseus' crew than Odysseus himself, whom by a divine dispensation Hermes spared such a bestial transformation on account of his pity for the "evils of various kinds" suffered by the leader ("*variis malis*," IV.3.17)? The analogy to Philosophia's god and his *dispensatio* for Boethius is unmistakable. The wise Odysseus is spared, and the crew are transformed into beasts who nevertheless preserve their rationality in some unexplained way.

But the prose sections that immediately follow and precede this poem make the opposite point, that transformation into an animal amounts to becoming irrational. Prose IV.3.17-21 draws certain analogies between those who are affected by vices such as avarice, anger, fearfulness, and lust, to name a few, and animals that correspond to each fault, wolves, lions, deer, and pigs. Philosophia concludes this section with the

³⁴ Astell, *Job, Boethius, and Epic Truth*: 63.

declaration, “*Ita fit ut qui probitate deserta homo esse desierit, cum in divinam condicionem transire non possit, vertatur in beluam,*” “So it comes to pass that he who with uprightness abandoned leaves aside his humanity, since he is not able to transition to the divine condition, turns into a beast,” (prose IV.3.21). This passage and the poem at IV.3, then, seem to make opposing claims about the meaning of transformation. The poem indicates that for the sailors that made up Odysseus’ crew, no misfortune occurred when the sailors became beasts since they did not lose their rational self-possession. But then prose IV.3 presents bestialization as losing one’s rational stability.³⁵ While it may be the case that Philosophia is just employing the conceit of transformation in two different ways, she may also be contradicting herself on the topic of departure from a human form.

Another comparison between the two poems resolves this ambiguity. In the Orpheus poem, sovereign power was vested in Hades, who rules over the Underworld. In this second poem, Odysseus possesses the sovereign power, since he is the “*dux*” or “leader” among his men. The place of sovereign power has thus shifted away from the divine figure, Hades, who holds dominion over humans, to the human who holds sovereign power over other humans. The sovereign power of each figure is different though: where Hades prohibits by law and establishes the terms in which one may escape the clutches of his law through renouncing love at least within his domain, Odysseus’ sovereign power is what makes him different from other men, what makes him stand

³⁵ Ibid., 63-64.

alone as worthy of Hermes' dispensation. If Boethius was supposed to identify with Orpheus because of his role as an elegiac poet, enthralled by his love for lost Fortuna,³⁶ he is to identify now with Odysseus, who, as Orpheus should have been, is saved from a disastrous fate by a dispensation of a higher authority. These two figures, Orpheus and Odysseus, both descended into the Underworld, and Orpheus should have come back with Eurydice if he had not looked back, although he fails to because of his love's legal compulsion ("*maior lex*"); Boethius is asked to abandon or at least transform his love so that he may ascend where Orpheus did not. Now the image of what that transformation will look like has begun to become clear: Boethius must transform himself so that he turns himself toward the "divine condition," and resembles the saved leader, Odysseus. Odysseus' crew—and here one should see again Boethius' *comites* from poem I.1.6 covertly appearing—situated halfway between the human and the animal, may serve to illustrate a point for Philosophia, but no such divine destiny is being prepared for them.

3.4.3. From Odysseus and Agamemnon to Hercules

The last mythological poem (IV.7) concerns itself mostly with Hercules, but Odysseus is featured again, as well as Agamemnon, the leader of the Achaean expedition against Troy.³⁷ Now, the placement alone of this poem, immediately preceding Book V, where the dialogue between Philosophia and Boethius culminates in the resolution of the

³⁶ On this concept, see fn. 98 in Chapter 1 above.

³⁷ Astell, *Job, Boethius, and Epic Truth*: 63-64; Lerer, *Boethius and Dialogue*: 191-93.

difficult problem of reconciling free will and god's foreknowledge by arguing for god's eternal life, indicates just how important this poem is for the interpretation of what is to come. It is also the concluding comment for the three mythological poems that, taken together, span one book of the *Consolation*, from the end of Book III to the end of IV. Book V begins with a major digression from Philosophia's path, forced upon her by Boethius who has become curious about the essential being of chance. Her own plan was to move on to talk about something else (prose V.1.1),³⁸ the topic of which interrupted discourse one cannot be sure, but this poem, IV.7, may be read as a clue to what that topic would have been, had Philosophia been able to proceed uninterrupted.

Before I turn to the poem itself, though, I would like to observe an important point about the structure of the *Consolation*, and this crucial poem within that structure. Often in the *Consolation* a poem that appears in one place will evoke, metrically, a poem that occurs elsewhere in the text.³⁹ It so happens that IV.7 has the same metrical form (Sapphic Hendecasyllabic) as poem II.6; these are the only two poems set in this meter, so that the two may be said to be musically the same. It is difficult to know precisely

³⁸ Although this digression is forced upon her, she may very well be able to return to those topics she had intended to discuss, in the way that Leo Strauss has emphasized that the sage may turn the conversation in any direction that he likes. Philosophia does fulfill her plan to treat all of the problems analogized to a hydra at IV.6, but then again that plan was one forced upon her by Boethius as well.

³⁹ Gruber lays out all of the cyclical relationships between the various metra in a helpful graph located between pp. 20-21 of Gruber, *Kommentar zu Boethius « De consolatione philosophiae »*. Magee has offered an analysis similar with respect to its approach but different in its selection of parallels in John Magee, "Boethius' Anapestic Dimeters (Acatalectic), with regard to the Structure and Argument of the *Consolatio*," in *Boèce ou la chaîne des savoirs*, ed. Alain Galonnier (Louvain; Paris; Dudley, MA: Éditions Peeters, 2003).

what this relationship between the two means, since poem II.6 is about Nero and stresses the point argued in prose II.6, that *dignitates*, respectable social positions, and *potentia*, the power attached to those positions, are equally available to the wicked and the good alike, and so distinguish a man in no meaningful way, while IV.7 deals with mythological figures. A clue may be taken by looking to line 8 of poem II.6 though, where Nero, who has been described as a malicious destroyer of cities and a murderer of his own family from lines 1-7, nevertheless “*sceptro populos regebat*,” “ruled over peoples with his scepter.” It may be recalled from the previous section of this chapter that Philosophia carries a scepter when she appears in this text (prose I.1.6). So she and Nero share this emblem of power. Furthermore, Philosophia gives this emblem to the god, father of all things, whom she has depicted for Boethius in poem IV.1. There, Philosophia promises Boethius a Cynic *kataskopia*, and describes what he would see from this height.⁴⁰ The first eighteen lines record the trek to that high place. From line 19, we read:

20	<i>Hic regum sceptrum dominus tenet orbisque habenas temperat et volucrem currum stabilis regit rerum coruscus arbiter. Huc te si reducem referet via quam nunc requiris immemor,</i>	Here the master of kings holds the scepter And strains the reins of the world, And he, stable, guides its swift chariot, The gleaming judge of all things. If the way leads you back to here, What place you, once forgetful, seek now,
25	<i>‘haec,’ dices, ‘memini, patria est mihi, hinc ortus, hic sistam gradum.’ Quod si terrarum placeat tibi noctem relictam visere, quos miseri torvos populi timent</i>	“This,” you will say, “I remember, is my paternal Land, here I was born, here I put down my foot.” But if it should please you to see The left behind night of the world, Those fierce men the poor people fear,

⁴⁰ Relihan and Heise, *The Prisoner's Philosophy*: 58.

30 *cernes tyrannos exules.*

These tyrants you will see as exiles.

At this place beyond the ether, Boethius would meet the “master of kings” who holds “the scepter.” Philosophia’s presentation of this god’s rule is, as one would expect, unambiguously positive, so that the scepter of this king of kings may be regarded as just and good, entirely different from that of Nero, who holds sway over a vast empire with perfect injustice (poem II.6.9-13). Philosophia’s own scepter appears uncertain, then, situated at either one or the other of these two extremes, like Nero’s scepter or like that of this *dominus* over all things. For now it may be said that this scepter of Nero, and the evil his reign represents somehow bears upon the poem at IV.7. The ultimate example of corrupt sovereign power, of a king whose reign did not shy from “fierce poison” and the “ominous sword” (“*iniquus / additur saevo gladius veneno,*” II.6.16-17), lies behind the three myths that IV.7 takes for its subject.

Bearing this in mind, I return now to the poem itself. One may divide it into four parts: 1) lines 1-7 treat Agamemnon’s sacrifice of Iphigenia and the context of that crime; 2) lines 8-12 turn to Odysseus’ revenge against the Cyclops; 3) lines 13-31 are concerned with the labors of Hercules; and 4) in lines 32-35 Philosophia provides one last moralizing interpretation of the myth she has just been discussing, Hercules’ labors and their reward. The first two sections may be taken together; as has been observed, they are comparable in that they relate myths of revenge.⁴¹ They also relate in a way more

⁴¹ O’Daly, *The Poetry of Boethius*: 220-26.

significant for my purposes, because they treat the relationship between sovereign power and loss. “*Atrides*,” Agamemnon referred to by his patronymic, is characterized as the “*ultor*” of his brother’s “ruined marriage-bed” (“*amissos thalamos*,” 2-3), taking “revenge” upon the Trojans for the crime of Paris. Agamemnon’s impossible position is that he must aid his brother to avenge this crime against family, but in order to do so he must leave aside his obligations to another member of his family, his daughter.⁴² When the winds favorable for his expedition simply will not blow, Agamemnon “*exiit patrem miserumque tristis / foederat natae iugulum sacerdos*.” “He puts aside his fatherhood, and as the sorrowful priest binds the pact with the pitiful neck of his daughter.” (6-7). In other words, these verses show how Agamemnon achieved the role of supreme leader of the fleet: binding a pact that the chiefs would sail against Troy, only by sacrificing his daughter for favorable winds.⁴³

Odysseus appears here in a different guise than in poem IV.3.⁴⁴ Here he avenges his crew “lost” (“*amissos*” echoes Agamemnon’s myth) to the Cyclops’ appetite by blinding the Cyclops (IV.7.10-11), while in the former poem he was swept away by a merciful Hermes while his crew suffered the transformations Circe’s potion effected. So here the sovereign figure, the leader of this crew, takes vengeance for his crew. In Philosophia’s retelling of this myth, the action by which the vengeance is accomplished

⁴² Scheible, *Die Gedichte in der Consolatio Philosophiae des Boethius*: 152.

⁴³ Astell, *Job, Boethius, and Epic Truth*: 64.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 65.

does not involve the same structural double bind that it held for Agamemnon, who could only achieve his fraternal destiny as leader by destroying his paternal bond to his daughter (or for Orpheus in poem III.12 for that matter, whose love both facilitated and obstructed his ascendancy).⁴⁵ It is as if Philosophia gradually moves the pieces about in her mythmaking, so that she arrives at a culminating instance. From failed ascendancy and failed escape with Orpheus, a purely negative example, she moves to an accomplished salvation among general losses with the first Odysseus myth. From Agamemnon's dilemma, whereby he may only accomplish his destiny and become the great leader of his army by committing a crime, she moves to Odysseus' second myth, where his vengeance may fail to save his crew, but at least takes Odysseus himself, the commander of the lost crew, past his "weeping" and his "*maestae lacrimae*," "gloomy tears," to "*gaudium*," "joy" ("*Flevit amissos Ithacus sodales...sed tamen caeco furbundus ore / gaudium maestis lacrimis rependit.*" IV.7.8-12). These affects recall Boethius' own "*maesti modi*" from poem I.1.2, and the negative affects that have characterized his relationship to his lost Fortuna all along. It will be helpful to bear in mind the way in which so many of these mythological figures have been rendered comparable to Boethius by way of Philosophia's narration and analysis.

⁴⁵ In doing so, Philosophia conceals what the Homeric version of this myth relates, that the blinding of Polyphemus enrages Poseidon, who seeks revenge by depriving Odysseus of his crew. On her version, Odysseus arrives at *gaudium* even in spite of losing his crew, much as Boethius must leave behind those to whom he possesses human connections if he would become her godlike sage. Gruber, *Kommentar zu Boethius « De consolatione philosophiae »*: 364-68; Félix Buffière, *Les mythes d'Homère et la pensée grecque*, vol. 11 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1956).

Philosophia's last myth, the depiction of Hercules, is absolutely affirmative. Most of the narrative recounts his twelve labors, simply describing the deeds accomplished by the hero in a line or two of verse (IV.7.14-28). Aside from this, there is the introductory remark, which explains that "hard labor made Hercules' fame" ("*Herculem duri celebrant labores*," IV.7.13), and Philosophia's interpretive comment at the end of the poem (32-35). Astell has argued that Boethius had to amend the source upon which he drew, Seneca's *Agamemnon*, in order to bring together Agamemnon, Odysseus, and Hercules and yet also set Hercules apart as a positive example, since Seneca had presented Hercules in precisely the same line of avengers against Troy, to which Agamemnon and Odysseus also belong; however, it is Philosophia, again, and not Boethius the author, who, "in order to make Hercules a positive exemplum, must remove him from the ironic context in which he appears in Seneca's *Agamemnon*."⁴⁶ Boethius may be indicating something else entirely by having her conceal Hercules' connection to the Trojan affair (at lines 808-866 of Seneca's *Agamemnon*, he provided arrows to Philoctetes, according to the Argive chorus).⁴⁷ Still Astell's observation rings true, that, in poem IV.7, replacing this twelfth labor, which, as it appeared in Seneca, tied Hercules to the Trojan war and its cycle of revenge, changes the meaning of his narrative, so that Hercules becomes a purely positive example of just labor meeting its right reward.⁴⁸ If

⁴⁶ Astell, *Job, Boethius, and Epic Truth*: 66-67.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 66; Lerer, *Boethius and Dialogue*: 237-53.

⁴⁸ Astell, *Job, Boethius, and Epic Truth*: 66.

one would understand what the author indicates by having his Philosophia edit this sequence of labors in order to dislocate Hercules from the Trojan cycle, then it is necessary to consider what labors she does include in her Hercules narrative.⁴⁹

The first eleven labors listed in the Hercules narrative all share in common that they involve Hercules in taming beasts or defeating monsters (IV.7.14-28).⁵⁰ First, he tames the centaurs (14), then he “takes spoils” from the Nemean lion (15), he shoots the Stymphalian birds with arrows (16), seizes golden fruits from a dragon (17-18), and leads away Cerberus from the Underworld with a chain (19). This fifth labor, with its passage to and from the Underworld, opens the way for Hercules to pass from human to divine life. It appears here among the many labors he accomplishes, having been removed from its pride of place as the last and most important in the canonical list of twelve labors. This is surprising, since Odysseus and Orpheus share with Hercules this remarkable feat of having gone into the Underworld and still nevertheless having managed to escape. For some reason, Philosophia has not emphasized this, although she will be coming to describe Heracles’ divinization by the poem’s end. I said above, with respect to Orpheus,

⁴⁹ Ibid.; Timothy Gantz, *Early Greek Myth: A Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources*, vol. I (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993): 381-416; Gruber, *Kommentar zu Boethius « De consolatione philosophiae »*: 364-68. What became the canonical twelve labors of Hercules appear for the first time on the Classical Temple of Zeus at Olympia. Philosophia here has introduced some variation in the sequence of myths. For more information on the Temple of Zeus, see Frank Brommer, *Heracles: The Twelve Labors of the Hero in Ancient Art and Literature*, trans. Shirley J. Schwarz (New Rochelle: Aristide D. Caratzas, 1986); Beth Cohen, "From Bowman to Clubman: Herakles and Olympia," *The Art Bulletin* 76 (1994): 695-715; Bernard Ashmole and Nicholas Yalouris, *Olympia: The Sculptures of the Temple of Zeus* (London: Phaidon Press, 1967).

⁵⁰ Scheible, *Die Gedichte in der Consolatio Philosophiae des Boethius*: 153-54.

that, on the one hand, his passage into the Underworld figures poetically an example with which Boethius may identify himself. On the other hand, it also figures poetically the descent of Philosophia into Boethius' cell, just as Hermes' rescue of Odysseus from the fate of turning into a beast figures that descent as well. Could it be that this *catena* by which Hercules draws out Cerberus from the Underworld evokes the chain of necessary causes in which Philosophia is entangling Boethius? This is what the chain from poem I.4.18, by which the man defeated by his passions is dragged away as a soldier who tosses aside his defenses, has become by the time one gets to the end of Book IV. The chain of necessity, that binds one to death, is also, understood from another perspective, the chain that liberates one from death.

Picking up from there, the list of eleven labors continues, concentrating on Hercules' taming of beasts and monsters. The sixth labor has Hercules defeating Diomedes, feeding him to his own horses (20-21). Then he slays the Hydra (22), which labor Philosophia has already mentioned in the last major prose section preceding this poem, where Philosophia compares to this Herculean task the problem Boethius has set before her, requesting that she describe the causes that differentiate God's rule from the rule of chance, since both seem on the face of things to have the same results (prose IV.5). She says that the problem Boethius has just introduced actually involves a whole series of problems, including the simplicity of providence, the sequence of fate, the occurrence of chance events, divine predestination, and freedom of choice, so that the solution of one problem leads to another, "just with the Hydra's heads," "*una...succisa*

innumerabiles aliae velut hydrae capita succrescant,” “with one cut away innumerable others rise up” (prose IV.6.3). The topics she lists here fill out the rest of the text, through to the end of Book V, so that these too are “*quaedam medicinae tuae portio*,” “a certain portion of [Boethius’] medicine” (IV.6.5).⁵¹ This is the last time Philosophia mentions medicine in the *Consolation*. So the complexity of her last stretch of medicinal argument is figured by reference to this Herculean labor, the slaying of the Hydra. The conceit suggests that philosophical arguments may be understood as strictly analogous to Herculean labors, that battling down the confusion arising from an incomplete account of the nature of things is a properly heroic task. If Boethius is to identify with the heroic image of Hercules, he may do so, Philosophia seems to suggest, by way of living up to the challenge of philosophy.

The next three labors are the defeat of the river god Achelous, from whose head Hercules tore away the horns (23-24), the defeat of the giant Antaeus (25), and the defeat of Cacus (26). The last of these is important because it more than any other labor associates Hercules with the power of the Roman *princeps*. Scheible has observed that this labor appears in the list of twelve because of its suitability for a Latin speaking author and his audience.⁵² More than that, I suggest there is a direct link between Roman sovereign power and the mythological figure of Hercules that Philosophia is exploiting

⁵¹ Pace Relihan, these arguments Philosophia, as much as Boethius, considers appropriate to her presentation of fate and providence, and moreover she acknowledges them as part of his treatment. Relihan and Heise, *The Prisoner's Philosophy*: 75-83. See also Scheible, *Die Gedichte in der Consolatio Philosophiae des Boethius*: 153-54.

⁵² Scheible, *Die Gedichte in der Consolatio Philosophiae des Boethius*: 155.

here.⁵³ To explain what I mean it is necessary to go on to the last two labors, which are presented together from lines 27-31:

<i>quosque pressurus foret altus orbis</i>	which [shoulders] the high orb was to press
<i>saetiger spumis umeros notavit;</i>	those shoulders the bristly one splattered
	with foam;
<i>ultimus caelum labor inreflexo</i>	a last labor with unbent neck supported
30 <i>sustulit collo pretiumque rursus</i>	the heavens and the prize in return
<i>ultimi caelum meruit laboris.</i>	for the last labor he earned the heavens.

Mention of the eleventh labor is carefully delayed until after the twelfth member of her list has already been suggested but not explained in line 27. Only once Hercules' shoulders are evoked as supports for the "*altus orbis*" may they then be "splattered" by the boar's foam. Why has Philosophia blended these last two labors, so that the support of the heavens comes to include the defeat of the Erymanthian boar? This last dual labor is both different from and the same as those labors that came before. Boethius has had Philosophia merge these two deeds, so that, although the last labor brings Hercules the ultimate prize, godhood, the defeat of the boar may still be associated in a subtle way with Hercules' supporting of the heavens on his shoulder, the joint each labor involves. If all the first ten labors include the defeat of an animalistic beast, the last labor, supporting the heavens, is only associated with these beast-slayings by the way in which Philosophia intertwines this labor with the eleventh labor.

⁵³ For a thorough and exhaustive analysis of the relationship between Heracles and ideologies of sovereign power from Alexander through the Roman *principes*, see Andrew Runni Anderson, "Heracles and His Successors: A Study of a Heroic Ideal and the Recurrence of a Heroic Type," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 39 (1928).

In light of what we have seen in poem IV.3, which is characteristic of Philosophia's rhetoric throughout the *Consolation*, Hercules' taming of beasts may be considered analogous to the mind's dominion over the body and its desires; for the prose section of IV.3 emphasized the bestial character of base desires, finding animal analogies for these excesses, and the poem at IV.3 developed this point, not without some ambiguity, by presenting the minds of Odysseus' crew members as unaffected by their bodies' transformations, as if the mind can persist in its self-possession regardless of the form that its body takes. One may then understand all the ten labors as so many ways in which this hero represents conquest over the bestial, as well as the passions Philosophia links with animal life. But what of this last labor, which cannot be explained by this text's presentation of animal forms of life and their position with respect to human and divine forms of life? The last labor, which alone purchased immortality for Hercules, Astell finds a distorted double in Boethius' enchained neck, so that his imprisonment and the bonds in which he is captured may be taken as the very support for the entire cosmic order, the analogue for Hercules' "unbent neck" ("*...inreflexo / sustulit collo...*" 29-30).⁵⁴ Philosophia's apparatus finds its Hercules, so she hopes, in Boethius, whom she would have offer his bound neck as support for the elaborate edifice she has constructed. It is in this light that one must understand the moralizing declaration with which Book IV ends. "*Ite nunc, fortes, ubi celsa magni / ducit exempli via. Cur inertes / terga nudatis?*"

⁵⁴ Astell, *Job, Boethius, and Epic Truth*: 64-69.

superata tellus / sidera donat,” “Go now, brave ones, where the lofty path of this great example leads. Why do you helpless ones bare your backs? The earth overcome grants the stars.” This powerful rhetoric shows how Philosophia imagines the *dispensatio* to be made for Boethius. He is to become a god, after the fashion of the divine sage she has described to him. His “*iter*” on which she joined him in his misery has been translated into the “*via*” that leads to immortality; against the soldier who throws away his shield, exposing his resourcelessness to enemy forces (poem I.4.17), she holds up Hercules who battles down all that is bestial in himself, and transforms himself so that he arrives “at a divine status” (“*in divinam condicionem*,” prose IV.3.21). The idea expressed by the connection of the last two labors, the capture of the boar and the relief of Atlas, is that Hercules passes to this divine condition not only by way of his subduing of beasts, but also for his patient endurance under the mass of the world’s orb.⁵⁵ The former may be considered the preliminary task that opens the way for the latter, which alone ensures the immortality of Hercules. In just the same way, Boethius may subdue all that is bestial in himself, and, with this condition met, his humanization allows him to overcome the obstacles to immortality, but immortality itself is granted only on the condition that he come to understand his yoke as a labor to be suffered, as a task to be fulfilled.

This idea of Hercules’ passage to divinity brings together two discourses of power that touch each other from time to time in Roman history, but must ultimately be

⁵⁵ O’Daly, *The Poetry of Boethius*: 230-31.

regarded as distinct. On the one hand, as I have already mentioned, Hercules has a very close association with sovereign power and especially with the Roman principate, and, on the other hand, he also belongs to the sphere of Socratic, especially Cynic, discourse on the divinization of man. It is as if Philosophia, by bringing together this philosophical discourse on the divinization of man with the imperial discourse of Hercules' sovereign power, has discovered the perfect image by which she may at once suggest to Boethius a life governed to the very end by philosophical virtue and the sovereign power that necessarily flows forth from that virtue. Philosophia has employed Hercules, and indeed all these myths, as so many *exempli* by which Boethius may interpret his own position in the order of things. To Hercules she would have Boethius completely assimilate himself, as her moralistic interpretation shows; the others are examples either to be avoided or to be partially avoided and partially embraced. Nero, to whom this poem makes reference by way of its metrical structure, is to be absolutely avoided. Orpheus marks out an elegiac poet who could have been immortal, but his attachments held him back from his higher destiny. Odysseus may have escaped from the terrible fate of his crew, he may have even defeated the negative affects that tie him to his lost crew, but his attachment to revenge associates him with Agamemnon and obscures his claim to justice; neither therefore are able to ascend to anything like the heights that Hercules reaches. Hercules exemplifies the path to celestial destiny, to the good itself that also holds a scepter in poem IV.1, through his patient laboring and an ultimate power that his patient laboring directly embodies. His *exemplum* above all Philosophia endorses for Boethius' imitation.

This example rests upon a more pervasive network of allusions throughout the *Consolation*, through which Philosophia has been working towards this representative assimilation to the immortal god. At prose I.4.4, Boethius already spoke of examples that led him down this path in his past, declaring that, “*mores nostros totiusque vitae rationem ad caelestis ordinis exempla formares*”—“you [Philosophia] were forming my character and the order of my whole life on examples of celestial arrangement;” by this he means that the cosmic order itself, the harmonious arrangement of the stars that process musically through the heavens were a pattern to which Boethius assimilated himself to the extent that he could. It is this same *exemplum* that shows up in poem III.9, the great Timaeian hymn, where the god described there “leads all things by his example on high” (“*cuncta superno / ducis ab exemplo,*” 6-7). Philosophia’s presentation of Hercules presupposes that Boethius’ position in this cosmic order is such that he too may be an example, a Hercules who holds up the heavens with his yoked neck. She has been developing towards this image at least from prose IV.4.14, where she argues that the wicked cannot be considered more “*felix,*” felicitous, than the good, and she explains that often the wicked are brought back to good behavior “by retribution” (“*ultione*”) or “by fear of punishment” (“*suplicii terrore*”), not only so that they may be corrected but also so that they may appear as “*exempli*” to others. This figures the exemplary value of punishment. Later in the same book, she lays out the exemplary value of unjust punishment, redeeming even that through her providence-fate apparatus. At prose IV.6.42, just after she has spoken of the *dispensatio* by which the “body of a sacred man”

(“ἀνδρὸς δὴ ἱεροῦ δέμας...”) is protected through the divine ordering of providence, she explains, “*Nonnulli venerandum saeculis nomen gloriosae pretio mortis emerunt, quidam suppliciis inexpugnabiles exemplum ceteris praetulerunt invictam malis esse virtutem;*” “Not just a few have earned a name to be venerated through the ages at the price of a glorious death: certain ones who could not be conquered by persecutions have brought forth an example to others of virtue undefeated by evils.” This language brings to mind the death of Socrates, described by Philosophia as the “victory of an unjust death” (“*iniustae victoriam mortis*” prose I.3.6). For Boethius, this is the path toward *virtus*. To be the Hercules that Philosophia needs he must embrace his own unjust death, he must face it without any weeping or lamentation, and he must set forth an *exemplum* to all would be philosophers that tyrants can claim nothing against the good. Philosophia holds out Hercules as an example because his suffering, his patience as he supports the world on his neck, receives the award of immortality. She thus raises the expectation that Boethius too will receive such a reward.⁵⁶

In Agamben’s thought, which I have been following into these dark areas of Boethius’ text, the example and the exception are “symmetrical” to one another as “two modes by which a set tries to found and maintain its own coherence.” He discusses this among other places in *Homo Sacer*:

...the exception is situated in a symmetrical position with respect to the example, with which it forms a system. Exception and example constitute the two modes by

⁵⁶ For another view of the role of examples in Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy*, see *ibid.*

which a set tries to found and maintain its own coherence. But while the exception is...an *inclusive exclusion*...the example instead functions as an *exclusive inclusion*. [...] What the example shows is its belonging to a class, but for this very reason the example steps out of its class in the very moment in which it exhibits and delimits it...If one now asks if the rule applies to the example, the answer is not easy, since the rule applies to the example only as to a normal case and obviously not as to an example. The example is thus excluded from the normal case not because it does not belong to it but, on the contrary, because it exhibits its own belonging to it. The example is truly a paradigm in the etymological sense: it is what is “shown beside,” and a class can contain everything except its own paradigm.

The mechanism of the exception is different. While the example is excluded from the set insofar as it belongs to it, the exception is included in the normal case precisely because it does not belong to it...⁵⁷

Agamben distinguishes here the exception, upon which the theory of sovereignty he develops depends, from the example or paradigm. As Agamben understands it, the example can only operate as an example insofar as it occupies the same position as the exception, and that the example and the exception arrive at this position by opposite procedures.⁵⁸ Agamben shows how he conceives of paradigms by elaborating the Platonic text (*Statesman* 278b-c and *Republic* 6.511b2-c1), where “the specific operation” of a paradigm “consists in suspending and deactivating [a sensible’s] empirical givenness in order to exhibit only an intelligibility.” The value of paradigms or examples is, within the

⁵⁷ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*: 22.

⁵⁸ He develops this line of thought in an essay titled “What is a Paradigm?” There he concludes that 1) paradigms or examples are neither inductive nor deductive but analogical, moving “from singularity to singularity” rather than from particular to universal; 2) the result is that the logic of paradigms is bipolar rather than dichotomous; 3) paradigms suspend and at once expose their belonging to groups, and are in their exemplarity never separable from their singularity; 4) paradigmatic groupings are not presupposed by examples, but they are set forth in the immanence of the example to the group; 5) paradigms have no original instance or form, but each “phenomenon” or “image” of the example is equally archaic; and 6) paradigms have a characteristic historicity, so that they are neither synchronic nor diachronic, but situated at the crossing of these two orders. Giorgio Agamben, “What is a Paradigm?,” in *The Signature of All Things: On Method* (New York: Zone Books, 2009): 9-33.

procedures of dialectic, to move from the paradigm to the “unpresupposed itself,” “the first principle itself.”⁵⁹ In other words, it sets forth a truth that is in no way hypothetical, so that paradigms or examples ground apparatuses of power/knowledge through them.

If one considers Boethius’ *Consolation* together with Agamben’s thought, it can be said that Philosophia’s task through Book IV has been the reconciliation of her providence-fate apparatus with Boethius’ worldly suffering. By the end of Book IV, it seems she has attempted to reconcile these through assigning a crucial place to the *exemplum* that would justify even the suffering of the innocent. I argued above that one can understand Boethius’ position with respect to the sovereign power of Theoderic by way of Agamben’s analysis of the state of exception and the bare life that he understands as the product of this situation. Boethius then stands as the exception upon which the rule founds the coherence of its operation. Alternatively, Philosophia offers to Boethius the *exemplum* of Hercules, so that this paradigm may set forth the intelligibility of a potentially unlimited set of exemplary lives. That is to say, if one takes Agamben’s analysis of the paradigm into consideration, Boethius and Hercules, as well as Socrates, Seneca, or any other philosopher who has been subjected to the full force of sovereign power, may equally stand as the archaic “phenomenon” or “image” that gives this set its coherence. It is as if Philosophia holds out to Boethius the possibility that he may suspend his own empirical givenness, his sensible form, and by subduing his body in this

⁵⁹ Ibid., 31.

way he may become a paradigm to all those who would comprehend the intelligibility of this gesture. Such a passage to intelligibility would at once bind the coherence of the group she lists at prose I.3.6-10, the set of persecuted philosophers, and complete the philosophical kingdom she has been constructing. Her example, Hercules, if understood correctly, would lead Boethius to become an appropriately philosophical example to others, justifying the providence of God, who makes even of evil an opportunity for good (prose IV.6.50). Just as the trauma that separates philosophy from the city persists beyond any specific time and space, taking up Anaxagoras, Socrates, and Zeno, Cato, Seneca, Canus, and Soranus (prose IV.6.33; prose I.3.9), so that each of these fall victim to the sovereign exception, so too does the example cut across time and space, putting aside diachronic change and synchronic arrangement, so that each of these examples may operate as the intelligible paradigm by which Philosophia's philosophical kingdom operates. It is as if she changes the meaning of everything by leaving it precisely where she found it, letting every exception become an example without changing anything in the real conditions to which each logical structure refers. Everything depends on the success of this operation, then, by which Philosophia offers to Boethius the passage to his own intelligibility. All that remains is for her to recall him to his true nature, as she understands it, in order to complete her account. She must make his life itself, the constitutive element of biopolitical power, eternal, so that just as the paradigm he would become, just as the apparatus that example would set forth, and just as the trauma that cuts him off from the body of the sovereign, he may experience eternity for a moment

and thereby know eternal life. It is to this task that Philosophia turns in Book V, the conclusion of the *Consolation*.

3.5. The Eternal Life of the Divine Intelligence and Animal Life

The last cure that Philosophia must apply to Boethius, if the diagnostics of Book I are to meet one by one the causes of Boethius' illness with philosophical cures, should show him that he is not merely a rational animal, according to the Aristotelian definition which he provided at prose I.6, but that over and above that nature he has an immortal, rational soul that marks him as superior to any strictly animal existence. As Relihan has observed though, although the soul is taken to be rational and even in a way cognizant of divine understanding, no argument for the immortality of the soul is ever really made; rather, immortality only ever operates at the level of a presupposition, or else as a conclusion that is never stated openly.⁶⁰ What Book V offers instead of an argument for the soul's immortality is an argument for the eternity of the divine intelligence, for the complete separation of that divine intelligence from all the limitations of time and space. In this way, Philosophia's argument, instead of presenting a proof of the soul's immortality, offers to Boethius a *libertas* quite unlike that for which he had fought in Theoderic's court, one supported by the incommunicability of divine knowledge, of its nearly complete inaccessibility to all human subjects.

⁶⁰ Relihan and Heise, *The Prisoner's Philosophy*: 57-58.

It is at V.3 that Boethius makes his most complicated and involved objection to Philosophia's arguments that he is able to muster. Boethius has been so far removed from the debilitated condition in which Philosophia found him that not only can he recognize implications of the argument Philosophia has been developing, but he also anticipates contradictory consequences that she has not dealt with.⁶¹ This is his last major contribution to the dialogue he carries on with Philosophia. Briefly reviewing the argument from the end of Book IV up to that point where Boethius poses his final dilemma to Philosophia, Book V begins with a digression that treats the position of chance within the workings of fate and providence; it no longer has the importance it seemed to have in Book II, now standing as nothing more than an "unexpected outcome" of separate, yet intentional "causes coming together," so that "what was done for a reason" also produces another unintentional result ("*inopinatum ex confluentibus causis in his quae ob aliquid geruntur eventum.*" prose V.I.18). Philosophia declares that there is an "*ordo*," "proceeding by inevitable connection, descending from the source in providence" that "disposes all things in their times and places," that arranges causes so that they do not break sequence ("*inevitabili conexione procedens, qui de providentiae fonte descendens, cuncta suis locis temporibusque disponit*" V.I.19). The woven "order" of the world seems to rule out chance conceived as anything more than a disjunction

⁶¹ Lerer emphasizes, beyond this, that the argument begins to take on a fundamentally textual character, so that Boethius and Philosophia's roles as readers and writers come to the fore. Lerer, *Boethius and Dialogue*: 203-36.

between what certain limited agents expect and what they accomplish. In prose V.2.2, Boethius expresses his concern that this “*fatalis catena*,” “fatal chain,” may weave a garment so tight that “*in hac haerentium sibi serie causarum*,” “in this succession of causes adhering to themselves and each other” there is no room for “*nostris arbitrii libertas*,” “freedom of our judgment” or “decision.” Philosophia assures him that his rational nature is the surest sign that he is free. The freedom proper to rational nature is a “*volendi nolendique libertas*” or “freedom of willing or not willing” (prose V.2.6). Philosophia explains that rational natures, such as belong to divine and supernal substances, have a perfect freedom, since their uncorrupted wills do not disagree in the slightest with divine providence. Human souls, however, she explains, are freer when they devote themselves to the contemplation of the divine mind, less free when they are scattered towards bodies, and least free when they abandon their rational nature for the sake of vice (prose V.2.7-9). So far has the conversation come from Boethius’ worries over lost *libertas Romana* that this metaphysical conception of *libertas* has only a verbal resemblance to the notion of which Boethius had spoken so eloquently at I.4. And yet Philosophia has been preparing the way to this from prose I.5.4, where she explained that the “*summa libertas*” within the philosophical monarchy is “*agi frenis*” “to be led by the reins” of this city’s ruler.

But at prose V.3.1 Boethius objects to this presentation. He claims that he is confounded by a still more difficult ambiguity in her account than the reconciliation of determining causal chains and the freedom of judgment. There he objects that God’s

foreknowledge and freedom of judgment are truly what must be reconciled. He protests that he can see no way to reconcile God's certain knowledge of future events with the human capacity to decide with complete freedom upon virtue or vice; the consequence, he claims, is that there can be no "*commercium*" between God and men, that hope and prayer would be worthless for men who have no freedom to decide upon action for better or worse (V.3.34). He ends by asserting that in light of all this the "*humanum genus*" must be "*dissaeptum atque disiunctum suo fonte*," "cut off and separated from its source" (V.3.36), which Philosophia had just identified at V.2.

Philosophia's response is presented from V.4-V.6, taking the argument to the end of the *Consolation*. Citing not only Cicero's *De divinatione* but also Boethius' own works on the problem of future contingency, she claims that she may get beyond what they had achieved by "approaching the simplicity of divine foreknowledge" ("*ad divinae praescientiae simplicitatem... admoveri*" prose V.4.2). How does Philosophia imagine that *simplicitas* is an adequate response to the predicament Boethius sets forth? Marenbon, whose handling of these arguments at V.3-6 has become the most influential in recent years, holds that the predicament may be summarized as follows: 1) "If God sees all things and can in no way be mistaken, then there necessarily happens what he by providence will have foreseen will be" (V.3.4); and 2) "If things are capable of turning out differently from how they have been foreseen, then there will no longer be firm

foreknowledge of the future, but rather uncertain opinion” (V.3.6).⁶² One of these two positions, so Boethius thinks, must be true at the cost of the other. In what follows, I emphasize precisely how Philosophia escapes this predicament; for it is here that she introduces the notion of eternal life, in order to account for god’s foreknowledge.⁶³

Philosophia must maintain that contingent events in the future, as in the present, are known by God and yet nevertheless she must secure also their contingency; she does so by introducing a certain measured relativism, whereby a knower knows what is known according to a mode of knowing specific to that knower. In other words, she describes four different cognitive faculties that belong to different natural beings, and each of these is conceived as encompassing the lower levels of knowledge within itself, so that the highest level may be understood to be absolute knowledge, without disqualifying the lower levels (which are still knowledge but qualified as incomplete knowledge) (V.4.31).

I have already discussed these four faculties above, but again they are described at

V.4.28-30:

Sensus enim figuram in subiecta materia constitutam, imaginatio vero solam sine materia iudicat figuram; ratio vero hanc quoque transcendit speciemque ipsam, quae singularibus inest, universali consideratione perpendit. Intelligentiae vero celsior oculus existit; supergressa namque universitatis ambitum, ipsam illam simplicem formam pura mentis acie contuetur.

Sense apprehends the figure constituted in a material subject, imagination rather grasps the figure alone without matter; reason goes beyond this figure and examines the species itself, which inheres in singularities, with universal

⁶² Astell, *Job, Boethius, and Epic Truth*: 66-67.

⁶³ Marenbon, *Boethius*: 125-26.

consideration. But the eye of intelligence exists at a higher level, passing beyond the circuit of universality, and conceives that simple form itself by the pure vision of the mind.

The four modes of knowing are then hierarchically arranged, so that sense is the lowest and intelligence is the highest and sole complete mode of knowing. The “form itself” then encompasses all four levels “in one stroke of the mind” (“*uno icto mentis*” V.4.33), so that it knows in one thing itself the sensible matter, the imaginary figure, the rational species, and the form of these three together as the fourth thing. This fourth thing, the singular universal, belongs to the intellect alone to know and understand; sense, imagination, and reason cannot reach to that “*ambitum*” (and here one can hear a faint echo of the charge against Boethius, “*ambitus*”).⁶⁴

Having introduced this epistemological hierarchy, Philosophia then argues in V.5 that different beings possess different kinds of knowledge, depending on where they fall in a natural hierarchy that corresponds to this epistemological one. In fact, it is each mode of knowing that establishes each superior kind of being as superior in this natural order.

Hac itaque ratione multiplices cognitiones diversis ac differentibus cessere substantiis. Sensus enim cunctis aliis cognitionibus destitutus immobilibus animantibus cessit, quales sunt conchae maris quaeque alia saxis haerentia nutriuntur; imaginatio vero mobilibus beluis quibus iam inesse fugiendi appetendive aliquis videtur affectus; ratio vero humani tantum generis est sicut intelligentia sola divini: quo fit ut ea notitia ceteris praestet, quae suapte natura non modo proprium sed ceterarum quoque notitiarum subiecta cognoscit. (V.5.2-4)

⁶⁴ Cf. section 1.6 above.

So for this reason a multitude of cognitive functions belong to diverse and different substances. For sense alone void of the other cognitive faculties falls to immobile animate beings, such as conch shells in the sea and those creatures that are nourished by clinging to stones; but imagination belongs to mobile beasts, in whom there seems to be some affection toward fleeing or seeking; reason, however, is for human kind alone as intelligence is for the divine alone. From which it comes to pass that that knowledge precedes the others which by its own nature comprehends not only its own proper [subject] but also the subjects of the other knowledges.

Above I discussed the way in which the soul-body bipolarity is established by situating life before the divine sovereign whom Philosophia describes (prose III.11).⁶⁵ Knowledge belongs only to “animate” beings, as the participle “*animans*” used to describe the conch shell shows. Even the lowest knowledge, the pure, sensory knowledge belonging to such marine life, involves an “*anima*,” a soul, so that the body itself can only be completely inert, without knowledge and without life. The body is on this view the essence of passivity. On the other hand, that which is completely without a body, which suffers no affections from “*obiecta extrinsecus*” (V.5.1), “external objects,” the divine source Philosophia introduced at Book III—so Philosophia suggests—is completely impassive and entirely active. The senses, the imagination, and reason all fall between these two extremes so that the senses are more passive, the imagination somewhat passive and somewhat active, and reason more active. The construction of this apparatus of divine power has allowed Philosophia to suspend the entire sphere of known things between

⁶⁵ See pp. 203-204 above.

these two extremes, defining all life, and all the knowledge that belongs to it, by its dependence on this transcendent power.

Moreover, life itself has been removed from the now isolated body, so that it belongs only to the mind and most of all to this divine mind. For, as Marenbon has emphasized, Boethius' *Philosophia* presents the divine mind above all as a "living thing," as the source and goal of life, that is, eternal life.⁶⁶ The definition *Philosophia* provides for this eternity comes at prose V.6.4: "*Aeternitas igitur est interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta possessio*," "Eternity is the endless, at once perfect and complete, possession of life." *Philosophia* glosses this definition by explaining that for those beings that live "*in tempore*" or in time there is a sequence of times from the past to the present into the future. There is no being bound "*in tempore*" that possesses all of these moments equally, or may "live" at all of them at once, but one is either situated in the present at one moment or situated in the past at another. The world itself, *Philosophia* explains, does not even come to this kind of eternal existence, since it is perpetual, drawn through an infinite series of "moving" and "transitory" moments (V.6.5-7). Eternal life, however, "*interminabilis vitae plenitudinem totam pariter comprehendit ac possidet*" — "equally possesses and comprehends the complete fullness of interminable life," past, present, and future. The "mobile infinitude of time" ("*infinitatem mobilis temporis*," V.6.8) belongs in one stroke of intellection to this divine life:

⁶⁶ Marenbon, *Boethius*: 125-45.

Hunc enim vitae immobilis praesentarium statum infinitus ille temporalium rerum motus imitatur, cumque eum effingere atque aequare non possit, ex immobilitate deficit in motum, ex simplicitate praesentiae decrescit in infinitam futuri ac praeteriti quantitatem, et cum totam pariter uitae suae plenitudinem nequeat possidere, hoc ipso, quod aliquo modo numquam esse desinit, illud quod implere atque exprimere non potest aliquatenus videtur aemulari, alligans se ad qualemcumque praesentiam huius exigui uolucrisque momenti. Quae quoniam manentis illius praesentiae quandam gestat imaginem, quibuscumque contigerit id praestat ut esse videantur. (V.6.12)

For the infinite movement of temporal things imitates this immobile, present state of life; since it is not able to equal and represent this, from immobility it breaks into motion, from the simplicity of presence it decreases into an infinite quantity of future and past time and since it cannot possess the complete fullness of its own life equally, this itself, which it in some way never ceases to be, although to a certain degree it is not able to express and to fill up, it seems to emulate, binding itself to some presence of this brief and fleeting moment. That which carries a certain image (*imaginem*) of that enduring presence, and, the things upon which it should happen, [a moveable being] distinguishes them in such a way that they seem really to be.

The infinite sequence of temporality comes into being as the imitation of the simple, perfect unity of an atemporality that this divine life possesses in itself, or, perhaps better, of an other temporality that experiences past, present, and future as one presence. The language of this long sentence stresses that the fall into temporality generates for lesser beings a split of divine timelessness and immobility into past and future, a scattering into all the degrees of movement that living things lower in the hierarchy than god demonstrate. Philosophia also speaks though of the way in which, through a desire to “emulate” this divine presence, temporal forms of life “bind themselves” to an “*imago*,” an imaginary figure, that somehow stands in for the lost presence of eternal life. This loss has always already occurred though, since constitutionally animate beings that are not

god may not experience god's atemporal presence to self. The result is a kind of general mimesis ("*imitatur*") in which all beings only appear to be what they can never be, offering themselves as fragmentary copies of a transcendent reality that is ultimately unknowable. The entire range of phenomena is reduced to so many mere appearances, so many glimpses of an ultimate vitality that transcends their limitations.

On this presentation, the whole life of the world is yoked to Philosophia's apparatus, so that its life is given over to her god, who is then represented as the source from which these beings receive their life in greater or lesser degrees. This god's possession of life though is everlasting and bountiful, independent of the forms of life from which he derived his qualities, so that he even possesses a kind of speculative identity with the conch, from whom he borrows his immobility. Thus static bare life is resituated within Philosophia's apparatus as ecstatic eternal life.⁶⁷

The last poem of the *Consolation*, V.5, poses the same division of living things in somewhat different terms; in fact, it may be read in such a way that it directly contradicts what Philosophia claims in prose V.6.⁶⁸ This poem divides into three parts: the initial exclamation, establishing the topic, (that is, the "living things" in their manifold *figurae*); from 2-9, the presentation of various animals, all inferior to the *gens hominum* introduced

⁶⁷ I am trying to imagine a parallel to the way in which *devotio* supplements the body of the king in Agamben and Kantorowicz. Life taken out of play, sacrificed to the sovereign power of the cosmos is eternal life.

⁶⁸ I am taking a rather different perspective on this than that which Lerer and O'Daly have advanced. Again, the major difference is that both Lerer and O'Daly take up an anti-humanist point of view, and trust Philosophia's account that Boethius will certainly be better off as a bodiless immortal soul than an embodied human being. O'Daly, *The Poetry of Boethius*: 176-77; Lerer, *Boethius and Dialogue*: 227.

at line 10; and finally the presentation of human kind and the conclusion drawn from these topics at lines 14-15. In these fifteen lines Philosophia wishes once more to inspire in Boethius a desire to raise his *mens* higher than his *corpus*, since the former points toward the stars and links humanity to divinity while the lower binds him to animal existence. However, her poem betrays her purpose, since it also highlights the manner in which human life depends upon its bodily existence in order to reach toward the higher powers that properly belong to it alone among terrestrial beings. One may recognize this betrayal by following the progress of the poem. First, consider the second portion of this poem. From lines 2-9 there is a presentation of four varieties of the animal life declared to be Philosophia's topic in line 1. Philosophia has picked up from prose V.5.2-4 the theme of animal life, in all its "*variae figurae*." Then there follows a division into three types of animal life: those who draw themselves along the earth, like snakes or reptiles, those who fly through the air, like the birds, and those who dwell in pastures.⁶⁹ Of all these varied forms of life, Philosophia dismissively says the following: "*Quae variis videas licet omnia discrepare formis, / prona tamen facies hebetes valet ingravare sensus*," "Granted that you see that those creatures disagree in their various forms, still the downward-facing brow succeeds in weighing down their dull senses" (8-9). The very next line introduces the physical difference that marks human nature as "*unica*," unique. Those who belong to the "*gens hominum*" raises their "*celsum...cacumen*," "their lofty

⁶⁹ Lerer, *Boethius and Dialogue*: 227; Scheible, *Die Gedichte in der Consolatio Philosophiae des Boethius*: 170.

heads” “*altius*,” “higher,” so that they alone may “*levis recto stat corpore despicitque terras*,” “stand lightly with an upright body, and despise the earth” (11). There is an uncertainty here. On the one hand, one may take these descriptions as indicative of a unique physical capacity belonging to humankind, expressing its proximity to the divine. On the other, one may understand from Philosophia’s description that the human body is the strict condition for higher-order reason, that only by having this “*rectum corpus*” may humankind achieve a view by which its members “despise the earth.” The language of the poem does not clarify which reading one must take. All one gets at line 11 is the expression “*levis recto stat corpore*” in the dactylic tetrameter followed by the ithyphallic “*despicitque terras*,” so that the former and the latter have no expressed relation other than their “*-que*,” simple conjunction. Furthermore, the poem does not extricate the mind from the body, so that it need not be considered a separable existence independent of the body. The verse continues from 12-15 as follows:

<p><i>Haec, nisi terrenus male desipis, ammonet figura: qui recto caelum vultu petis exserisque frontem, in sublime feras animum quoque, ne gravata pessum inferior sidat mens corpore levius levato.</i></p>	<p>Unless you being earthly are wrongly foolish, this figure will advise you: You who seek the heavens with upright face and project your brow, May you bear also the mind (animum) toward the highest regions, lest Weighed down the mind (mens) sink lower than the body lifted higher.</p>
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The human “figure,” to which the demonstrative “*haec*” refers, becomes an indication (“*ammonet*”) of the point that Philosophia’s poem would make, that one must direct one’s soul toward the highest things (“*in sublime*”) in the same way that the human uniquely

may lift his face towards the starry night sky, which, in Philosophia's lament at poem I.2.6-23, had been the proper object of philosophical contemplation, and upon which furthermore Philosophia had modelled Boethius' character at prose I.4.4 (where Boethius also mentioned his "*vultus*" appearance in contrast to the image that Philosophia deploys here in poem V.5 at line 13). In the final line the strong juxtaposition of *mens* and *corpora* just before the diaeresis not only allows the poet to isolate the participial phrase "*levius levato*" that closes the poem with an alliterative ithyphallic, but also brings out how tightly intermixed the body and mind are, so that the one presupposed to be superior may be plunged "*inferior*" while the lower, the body ruled by the mind, "is lifted higher." Nowhere does Philosophia insist that the soul is separable from the body, or that the soul may persist in absence of the body. On the contrary, more than anything else, this poem shows how much the mind depends upon the body, even to the point that it may in fact be undermined by it.

Philosophia is able to escape the difficulties for freedom of judgment posed by god's omniscience by placing that omniscience beyond spatio-temporal limitation. The apparatus she constructs provides for the eternal life of the divinity, but in no way secures the immortality of human subjects. In fact, her argument serves to undermine precisely that which she offered to Boethius as the path on which he should proceed from his cell: divinization. Assimilation to this eternal life beyond temporal and spatial limitation is strictly impossible for Boethius, a singular persona bound within the confines of a body that, on Philosophia's account, in no way possesses the eternal life that belongs only to

the mind. This is of crucial importance for Boethius; for if as poem V.5 suggests there is no human life without the body and moreover having a singular body is indeed the condition for possessing a mind and its rationality, then for Boethius the loss of the body cannot be insignificant. What Boethius faces as he debates with Philosophia—and this is just as much true of Boethius the author—is the approach of actual death, the reality of an executioner attaching a cord to his skull and squeezing it until his eyeballs pop from their sockets.⁷⁰ Confronted with this imminent threat, Philosophia presents him with the consolation not that his soul is immortal, but that there is a god who possesses eternal life. As Marenbon has said, “for Boethius, God’s eternity is a way of *living*.”⁷¹

Philosophia has constructed through Books I-III an apparatus with which she may capture Boethius’ desire. I now extend that to include his life as well, his bodily existence. At the end of Book IV, Philosophia had held out to Boethius a depiction of Hercules as an *exemplum* whom he should strive to imitate, assimilating himself as far as he may to Hercules laboring for the sake of the good. For the prisoner, this assimilation can only mean embracing his death fearlessly, becoming by a divine dispensation an example of another type of labor and hardship. She does not offer him hope of

⁷⁰ Anon. Vales. 87. There is reason to doubt that this was the actual method of execution. See S. J. B. Barnish, "The "Anonymus Valesianus" II as a Source for the Last Years of Theoderic," *Latomus* 42, no. 3 (July-September 1983): 587.

⁷¹ He continues, explaining, “‘Life’ also gives the clue to where Boethius’s emphasis really lies. God’s life is not, of course, that of a physical thing or something that has sense perception: it is a purely intellectual life, a life of thinking. When he describes God’s eternity, Boethius is describing God’s way of thinking. God is an infinitely powerful mind, which instantaneously grasps all that there is to grasp. Such a way of living leaves no room for time. Time is the condition of the life of less powerful minds, which have to grasp one thing after another.” Marenbon, *Boethius*: 135-38.

immortality, but rather freedom, understood not as the ability to share in the rule of his native people but rather as the metaphysical freedom to will what her god has prepared for him, and that is an exemplary death. The *Consolation* culminates in this final irony: Philosophia guides her nursling to his *death* under the sign of his consent to the designs of an eternally *vital* being. What Philosophia needs is a subject for this apparatus, which, as Agamben argued, never has positive being in itself but brings itself into existence by forming its subject. This material subject is Boethius' body, and just as much the body of the world. Philosophia's strategy has been to entangle the entire field of natural beings in a circular web of arguments in order to supplement them with this divine figure, a fiction that derives its very life and being from the multitude of positive beings. What Boethius must do, if Philosophia's vision should realize itself, is exemplify the transcendent being of this apparatus. She asks that he devote his life to this vision, and offers no security that he will receive it back. And yet Philosophia still needs this corpse.

3.6. Conclusion: Philosophia and the Metaphysics of Writing

As I bring my argument to its conclusion, there are a few lingering questions. The concluding prose section of the *Consolation* brings forth the first of these: the place of Philosophia herself in this dialogue. It is here that the problematic issue of self-consolation also comes to ahead in Boethius' text. For, up to this point, the *Consolation* has featured self-consolation in the simple sense, Boethius the author consoles his own

persona, so to the extent that he identifies himself with this persona his own composition is supposed to feature a consolation addressed to himself. But at prose V.6, the author recasts the voices in the text in a significant and somewhat indeterminate way.⁷² That is to say, the text that has advanced thus far as a dialogue between Philosophia and her nursling Boethius, interspersed with poems sung by either persona, seems somehow to break down, so that there is no way to decide whose voice one hears at V.6. As at least one critic has noted, this is a crucial change, placed where textual problems and critical or philosophical questions intersect, so that one cannot simply ask which voice utters the final arguments concerning eternal life.⁷³ For there is simply no way to settle whether one hears the voice of Boethius' persona, Philosophia, or finally Boethius the author in these last passages on the eternal life of Philosophia's god.

The problem I have introduced may be presented by comparing prose V.5, for example, to prose V.6. Prior to poem V.5, the dialogic exchange between Philosophia and Boethius had always been evident in the text. There is no question of whether Philosophia or Boethius speaks. In V.6, this is precisely what cannot be certain any longer. A demonstrative example will suffice for my purpose. Here are sentences 19-20:

*Num enim quae praesentia cernis, aliquam eis necessitatem tuus addit intuitus?
Minime. Atqui si est divini humanique praesentis digna collatio, uti vos vestro hoc
temporario praesenti quaedam videtis, ita ille omnia suo cernit aeterno.*

⁷² Lerer, *Boethius and Dialogue*: 228-32.

⁷³ E.g., Relihan and Heise, *The Prisoner's Philosophy*: 83-92; Lerer, *Boethius and Dialogue*: 228-30.

For, what things you see as present, does your observation enjoin any necessity upon those things? Hardly. But if a comparison of the human and divine present is worthwhile, just as you see certain things in this your temporary present so does he spot all things in his eternal one.

The point Philosophia is making may be set aside. The form in which this point is made is what matters. A rhetorical question is posed, a brief answer is given, and an analogy is made, so that the desired conclusion may be reached. The brief response given to the question is the problem here. It is significant that from Book II through prose V.5 it is always perfectly clear whether Boethius or Philosophia is the one saying “*minime*,” wherever the word occurs.⁷⁴ Yet, in the passage I have quoted, this cannot be said with any measure of certainty. Editors and critics have variously assigned this response to Philosophia, answering her own rhetorical question, to Boethius who responds with this meager assent to Philosophia’s bold and intimidating assertions, or even to some varied assimilation of the two voices.⁷⁵

I contend that this problem may be taken as its own solution, that the very undecidability of voice inscribed in the text is just what one must accept as the right reading of the *Consolation*’s last and most challenging section. The selection of any one of the voices as the correct one results in a partial reading of the text, since the other

⁷⁴ This word “*minime*” is used forty times throughout the *Consolation*: it is not used at all in Book I, it is used once in Book II (prose II.5.32), sixteen times in Book III, fifteen times in Book IV, and eight times in Book V. In this way, the word acts as a kind of index of the dialogic character of this work, which is its least dialogic in Book I and its most dialogic in Book III. It was Lerer who first brought out the significance of these responses, if that is indeed what they are. See fn. 72 above.

⁷⁵ E.g. Tester, whose Loeb edition assigns the first “*minime*” to Boethius, and this one alone, with no obvious rationale for giving the other to Philosophia. Boethius, *Boethius: The Theological Tractates and the Consolation of Philosophy*: 422-35.

possible voices must necessarily be neglected for this selection. If this is correct, then the *Consolation* ends with the tension of several conflicting and irreconcilable views on the meaning of the conversation that has led up to this point.

However, even this conclusion is a partial one, since it neglects the reading that would demand a resolution of all perspectives, Boethius', Philosophia's, and the author's, into one comprehensive, god's-eye point of view. It is this comprehensive reading that reaches the completion of the project of self-consolation. To arrive at an understanding of how these points of view may be reconciled, one must address the question I left hanging above, concerned with Philosophia's status with respect to Boethius and his fantasy of Fortuna.⁷⁶ I suggest that Philosophia herself, like Fortuna, is an imaginary projection of Boethius' mind. If one were to claim that the author considers Philosophia to be an actual being, like Boethius himself, he is presented with the problem of accounting for her ability to outlive all of her contemporaries for nearly a millenium; if she were considered a real goddess who reveals herself to Boethius in his prison cell, this would present the problem of a semi-divine being that is not accounted for in a text that completely avoids demonology. Alternatively, one may recognize her to be an *imago*. A suggestion quite similar to this comes to us from none other than Peter Abelard, who refers in his *Expositio in Hexaemeron* to Boethius' *Consolation* as a dialogue of Boethius' soul with

⁷⁶ See section 2.3.2 above.

itself, where the soul “set up himself and his reason as if they were two.”⁷⁷ Relihan has supported this reading in his own way,⁷⁸ and a modern supporter of this view is Sue-Lo Twu, who describes the conclusion of the text as follows:

If we consider the speech as an internal disputation proposed by Augustine in his *Soliloquia*, it can be read as a dialogue in which the question/answer exchange is subsumed under one voice, without further need for an interlocutor in the soul’s conversation with God. By the end of prose 6, the speaker freely uses the future, more vivid, condition to hypothesize dialectic moves... In this final speech, the author can leave behind the fictions of speaker and interlocutor, performing a sort of self-atonement. The consolation resides in the re-establishment of the soul’s dialogue with God, such that once again it is possible for the prisoner—free now from his “animal atque mortale” perspective—to attain to the “divinae praescientiae simplicitatem”... and “humiles preces in excelsa porrigite”. As the prisoner atones with himself in the dialogue with Philosophy (an alienated part of himself), so is the soul made one with God and, hence, consoled.⁷⁹

On this conception, the *Consolation* becomes something much more like what Foucault has identified as the “self-writing” characteristic of high Imperial philosophical prose, and the dynamic of the text much more like a struggle between Boethius’ mind and body, an attempt to train himself for receiving the truth, as Philosophia has presented it to him.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ For Abelard, see *PL* 178, 760 C. I am indebted to Dronke’s erudition, which brought Abelard’s remark to my attention. Dronke, *Verse with Prose From Petronius to Dante: The Art and Scope of the Mixed Form*: 8-9, 40. See also Donato, “Boethius’ Consolation of Philosophy and the Greco-Roman Consolatory Tradition,” 13 n.43.

⁷⁸ His view is closest to mine, as elsewhere, since he associates this with Stoic exercises of self-discipline Relihan and Heise, *The Prisoner’s Philosophy*: 63-74.

⁷⁹ Krista Sue-Lo Twu, “This is Comforting? Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*, Rhetoric, Dialectic, and “unicum illud inter homines deumque commercium”,” in *New Directions in Boethian Studies*, ed. Noel Harold Kaylor, Jr. and Philip Edward Philips (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 2007): 46.

⁸⁰ Michel Foucault, “Self-Writing,” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997).

For, as I explained above with respect to Boethius' fantasy of the Muses,⁸¹ it is precisely when he begins to write that Philosophia appears to him, so that she may be understood to be a product of Boethius' encounter with his writing instruments. Furthermore, this reading agrees with the presentation of Boethius as a melancholic; as I have explained, melancholia is characterized by a cessation of the higher faculties of the mind, but it is at the same time especially given over to fantastic delusions. The *Consolation* then presents a fantasy, a purely imaginary encounter, whereby reason and the higher powers of the intellect are able to restore themselves to their proper operation with respect to God's providence. One may understand this as the optimistic reading of the ending.

But if the *Consolation* ends with a Boethius in silence rather than a Boethius who has learned to speak with the same voice as Philosophia—and this reading is certainly possible—then one must regard the movement of philosophical discourse as not restorative, but rather as equally dangerous to this melancholic as the political enemies who have defeated him. After all, this is a Menippean satire and not a theological tractate, so one may rightly expect an inconclusive ending, an incomplete absorption of Boethius' subjectivity into Philosophia's kingdom, and perhaps even a hero left in this earthly Underworld.⁸² Against the musical therapy that Philosophia represents herself to have

⁸¹ Cf. sections 1.4 and 2.2 above.

⁸² "For Menippus's self-presentation [in his *Necyia*] we are fortunate to have explicit evidence outside of the pages of Lucian in a very important testimonium in the *Suda* [s.v. φαίός], which says that he went about pretending to be an emissary from the underworld, an observer of human sins who will report them to the proper authorities below." Relihan, *Ancient Menippean Satire*: 45. See also, Relihan and Heise, *The Prisoner's Philosophy*: 78.

been delivering to her defeated nursling, there persists the silent body of Boethius that cannot resist the calculating dialectics of Philosophia's argument. Even if one grants that Boethius is the voice that utters this "*minime*" to Philosophia's questions, it is possible that this "*minime*" articulates the minimal difference that Boethius takes to Philosophia's argument. For he does not simply say, "Yes, that's obviously true." Instead, this voice says, "Hardly," or perhaps "Only a little;" though the latter reading is less likely, it is admissible. There may be this "only a little" *necessitas* in Philosophia's cosmos, a necessity that drags away to its death, with *catenae* around its neck, the singular body rapturously fixing its earthly gaze on the stars, all to the tunes of Philosophia's music.

There is one more important aspect of this ambiguity to consider. If the book and the stylus, the implements of writing Boethius employed, provoked his fantastic encounter with Philosophia, then the book itself may indeed be the apparatus of power/knowledge at stake in this text, and not only Philosophia's philosophical citadel. Indeed, the book, even when laid out for a reader today, seems to exemplify the musical structure of Philosophia's cosmos: for the cyclical composition of the *Consolation* imitates the cyclical movement of the stars, all of the prose and poems circulating around the hexameters of the great Timaeon hymn at III.9, fixed immobile at the center, like Philosophia's god. From this perspective it is the book transmitting the *Consolation's* text, and not simply the argument set forth by that text, that one must regard as an apparatus, in Agamben's sense. The codex, woven together in a way not unlike the stitchwork of Philosophia's fate and providence, goes out in the world beyond Boethius'

jail cell in search of its subject, a reader who can testify as witness on behalf of Philosophia's hero. This is perhaps why Philosophia holds not only a scepter in her left hand, but also "*libelli*" in her right hand (prose I.1.6).

And so the ambiguous ending of the *Consolation* results in these possibilities. If the views of each are resolved into the oneness of god's intellect, then self-consolation will have succeeded, so that Philosophia arrives in Boethius' cell in order to bring all of the actors into a kind of harmony with each other and with the divine mind, of which they are all projections. If, however, Boethius stands apart, because Philosophia never finds a way to offer eternal life to humans who merit salvation for their "*probitas*" (prose V.6.48), and the character's objecting silence is preserved against the divine providence that poses as security for the weak but actually only offers one death in place of another, then Boethius must be considered unconsolated and his self-consolation must be considered a failure. Finally, if Boethius' book is the providence-fate apparatus and the author stands behind this construction, then his relationship with his reader can only be settled by resolving the tension between the two possible readings above. But it is up to the reader, who, by following Boethius and Philosophia's labyrinthine argument, may acquire the equipment he or she needs for this task, to decide whether that exemplary death can mean something other than that in this world, since it is beyond Boethius' powers to act in any other way than he has.

Chapter Four: Senecan Self-Consolation in the *Ad Polybium*

4.1. Introduction: Truth-telling and the Private Sphere in Seneca's *Consolations*

The *De consolatione Philosophiae* ends in ambiguity, offering itself up to two readings: one reading, in which self-consolation succeeds, takes the side of sovereign power in the abandonment of bare life, so that Philosophia, Boethius, and the voice of God all speak together harmonically in the clear, objective prose of metaphysical, logical speculation, while Boethius' worldly body is left behind as a mere remainder; the other reading, in which self-consolation is frustrated, clings to a silent scrap of bare life over against sovereign power, insisting on a gap between discourse and silence, Philosophia and Boethius, sovereign power and bare life, that cannot be overcome. As I have argued, both of these readings are possible, and nothing in the text of the *Consolation* settles one or the other reading as finally capable of overtaking its opposite. However, by pushing the investigation back to a prior moment of consolatory discourse's history, it should be possible to understand why self-consolation took this form, that is, why the self-consolation of Boethius' *Consolation* ends in unresolved ambiguity. By returning to the discursive conditions that predetermine Boethius' *Consolation*, the conditions that preestablish the text's consolatory operation, it should also be possible to understand why the philosopher's discourse of self-consolation occurs within the exception that exposes bare life to sovereign power. For this reason, we turn now to the moment of the formation

of a so-called “Julio-Claudian” dynasty and to the writings of the Stoic philosopher Lucius Annaeus Seneca.

The three consolations of Seneca are his earliest surviving writings.¹ Most scholars agree that Seneca composed the *Ad Marciam* in 40/41 CE, during the brief reign of Gaius,² and that the *Ad Polybium* and the *Ad Helviam* both come from the reign of Claudius, and more precisely from a two-year interval at the beginning of Seneca’s exile (42-43 CE).³ These texts are often classified as essays, and they do indeed read like essays, but in truth they are long letters at the level of form,⁴ and they depend upon a range of sources, such as Stoic ethical thought, the *Consolatio* as it had been developed by Cicero, and the Roman apparatus of declamatory rhetoric for their content.⁵ Of course,

¹ They are also distinct from the consolatory epistles included among the *Epistulae*, which have been recently studied by Wilcox. Amanda Wilcox, "Consolation and Community," in *The Gift of Correspondence in Classical Rome: Friendship in Cicero's Ad Familiares and Seneca's Moral Epistles* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012).

² Paul A. Holloway, "Gender and Grief. Seneca's *Ad Marciam* and *Ad Helviam matrem*," in *Women and Gender in Ancient Religions: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Stephen P. Ahearne-Kroll, Paul A. Holloway, and James A. Kelhoffer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010): 308; Miriam T. Griffin, *Seneca: A Philosopher in Politics*, 2nd, enlarged ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992): 397; Karlhans Abel, *Bauformen in Senecas Dialogen* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1967): 159. Manning is more careful, suggesting that the work could have been written anytime between 40 and 48 CE, but not necessarily in any specific year from that time. His arguments for 48 are not convincing, and are unnecessarily cautious. C. E. Manning, *On Seneca's "Ad Marciam"*, *Mnemosyne* (Leiden: Brill, 1981): 1-4. Bellemore argues for a date between 34 and 37 CE in Jane Bellemore, "The Dating of Seneca's *Ad Marciam De Consolatione*," *Classical Quarterly* 42 (1992). See further bibliography at Manning, *Ad Marciam*: 1-2, fn. 3.

³ Griffin, *Seneca*.

⁴ Manning, *Ad Marciam*: 21-24.

⁵ On the importance of declamation for Seneca's writing, see C.J. Herington, "The Younger Seneca," in *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, ed. E.J. Kenney and W.V. Clausen. Vol. II: Latin Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982): 513-14. He emphasizes the declaimer's reliance upon commonplaces as a particular topic of interest to Seneca the Elder's immediate audience, his sons. In the preface (23), "fortune" is mentioned as one of these topics, and so suggests a source from which Seneca may have constructed his own presentation of this persona. On the more general topic of Roman

their very survival indicates that these are texts designed for public consumption, so they contrast in this way with Cicero and his correspondents' letters (for these were only gathered to be published after Cicero's death), and their highly rhetorical texture is comprehensible in this light. Their most immediate source is the only Latin *Consolatio* published prior to Seneca's own attempts: Cicero's *Consolatio*.⁶ However, their most important feature, just as with Boethius' text, is the degree to which they depend upon no sources, performing tasks entirely unique within the consolatory tradition.

In this chapter, I analyze Seneca's consolation from exile, the *Ad Polybium de consolatione*, establishing this text as a further example of self-consolation in Latin consolatory literature. I suggest, furthermore, that the *Ad Helviam matrem* could equally be recognized as a self-consolation, but, insofar as Seneca seems to have fully recovered

declamation and its importance for Roman literary culture, see S.F. Bonner, *Roman Declamation in the Late Republic and Early Empire* (Liverpool: University Press of Liverpool, 1949): 149-67; Erik Gunderson, *Declamation, Paternity, and Roman Identity: Authority and the Rhetorical Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 1-25; Neil W. Bernstein, *Ethics, Identity, and Community in Later Roman Declamation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): 3-14.

⁶ Vitelli's analyses of Cicero's *Consolatio* establish this with the greatest security. He observes of the *Ad Helviam matrem* that, at *Sen. Dial.* 12.1.2, Seneca observes that he is the first person who has written a consolation to "his relatives" ("*suos*"), when he himself ("*ipse*") is the cause of their grief. This bears comparison to Cicero's claim at *Att.* 12.14.3, where Cicero boasts that he will write the first self-consolation. Seneca's innovative approach, his claim to originality, would seem then to depend upon Cicero's innovative approach but also to challenge it. Vitelli is therefore correct that Seneca contends with Cicero. Claudius Vitelli, ed. *M. Tulli Ciceronis Consolationis Fragmenta* (Florence: Arnaldo Mondadori Editore, 1979): 34. Seneca does not imitate Cicero, but aims to go beyond him. See also Favez, *La Consolation Latine Chrétienne*: 48 n. 5; Peter Meinel, *Seneca über seine Verbannung: Trostschrift an die Mutter Helvia* (Bonn: Rudolf Habelt Verlag GmbH, 1972): 25-30.

his rationality, this later text is not obviously self-consolatory.⁷ Besides, the *Ad Polybium* is the text upon which Boethius' *Consolation* depends, so it belongs within the tradition that I am describing, where the *Ad Helviam matrem* falls adjacent to it. Though these consolations are addressed to a freedman of Claudius and to Seneca's own mother respectively, the elusive notion *oikeiōsis*, so important in recent studies of selfhood in Roman stoicism,⁸ allows Seneca to identify himself and his grief with the grieving self of each of these addressees. Each text therefore works across several levels of address, so that Seneca's consolation is just as much concerned with himself as it is with those with whom he identifies. In other words, Seneca's consolations feature a distinct use of authorial voice,⁹ in which Seneca may speak in his own proper voice, or he may identify

⁷ The case is actually much more easily made for the *Ad Helviam matrem*, since Seneca refers to it in the first paragraph as a consolation to one of his relatives. Stoics tend to regard the family as the natural sphere in which *oikeiōsis*, even without the command of reason, establishes identification between individuals. The parent's affection for children is the principle bond discussed. See the following footnote for relevant bibliography.

⁸ For the conception of the Stoic self on which I depend in this interpretation of Seneca's consolations, see the first chapter in Gretchen Reydams-Schils, *The Roman Stoics: Self, Responsibility, and Affection* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005): 15-52. The social and political stakes of the Stoic conception of *oikeiōsis* are further explored in Gretchen Reydams-Schils, "Human Bonding and *Oikeiōsis* in Roman Stoicism," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* XXII (Summer 2002). See also Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *The Stoic Theory of Oikeiosis* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1990): 64-100.

For a variety of perspectives on the self in Seneca, see the essays included in Shadi Bartsch and David Wray, eds., *Seneca and the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). On the broader theme of the self in Stoic thought more generally conceived, there is also the comprehensive treatment of this topic in Christopher Gill, *The Structured Self in Hellenistic and Roman Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁹ For this concept, I am dependent upon a range of Stoic concepts working in coordination. First of all, a precious paragraph in Diogenes Laertius (*DL* 7.55) illustrates the importance of the voice in Stoic logic. Diogenes explains that most of the Stoics developed their theory of dialectic by starting from the "*phōnē*." Citing works by Diogenes of Babylon, Archedemus, Antipater, and Chrysippus, Diogenes Laertius explains that the Stoics distinguish the animal's *phōnē* from that of humans by characterizing the former as "air struck through impulse [*hormē*]" and the latter as "articulated" air, "emitted with forethought" ("ἀήρ ὑπὸ ὀρμῆς πεπληγμένον...ἔναρθρον καὶ ἀπὸ διανοίας ἐκπεμπομένη").

with people and things external to himself in order to “appropriate” their voices, “domesticate” them, or otherwise “affiliate” himself with them, thereby claiming their capacity for speech as his own. In the analyses themselves, the exact nature of this process will become clear.¹⁰ By studying these uses of the voice in Seneca’s consolations, I show that the *Ad Polybium* shares with the *Ad Marciam* the same strategy of appropriation of others’ voices, but that only in the *Ad Polybium* does Seneca’s appropriation of the voice necessarily perform an act of self-consolation.¹¹

Long explains that the proximity of the human voice to the rational faculties, its great capacity for governability by reason, indicated for some Stoics at least that the voice, along with reproduction and the *hēgemonikon*, ought to be included among the senses together with the more traditional five senses. Reydam-Schils also observes that the Stoics thought that people tended to identify more with certain parts of the body than with others. A.A. Long, "Soul and Body in Stoicism," *Phronesis* 27, no. 1 (1982): 47-51. Taking these positions into consideration, it is possible to understand Seneca's attempts to include the voices of others such as Socrates, Cato, or Claudius (11.14-16) not simply as a literary device, but even more as a demonstration and performance of *oikeiōsis*, an appropriation of and identification with the voices of others.

The final point is to demonstrate that this may happen in writing, rather than only with live speech. Again, as Diogenes Laertius explains, the Stoic position on the voice vacillates in two directions, to that, though the natural voice certainly takes priority in their conception of discourse, there is also a Stoic concept of the “φωνὴ ἐγγράμματος,” the “written voice” (7.56). This concept is governed by a distinction between *lexis* and *logos*: the former, identified with writing, is any meaningful marks that make up a part of language, such as the word “day,” and the latter is a complete proposition, such as, “It is day.” It is clear, though, that this distinction does not rule out the possibility that writing can communicate *logos* in addition to *lexis*, but only serves to ensure that the incomplete elements of writing are not mistaken for the proper totality of communication, which necessarily includes the relay of an immaterial *lekton* from one speaker or author to another speaker or a reader. In any case, it is clear from this passage that the *phonē* can manifest in writing or as the voice proper.

¹⁰ For the analysis of the voice that I develop, I will be dependent not only upon scholarship that describes Stoic conceptions of the self, but also upon the theoretical work of Mladen Dolar, a Ljubljana school philosopher indebted for his own work on the voice to both Lacan and Agamben. Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006): 12-33, 104-25.

¹¹ Even more so than in the *Ad Helviam matrem*, where the consolation clearly applies directly to Helvia and at least potentially could console Seneca himself as well. But consider his remarks at 1.1-1.4, and

Just as with Boethius, it is apparent in Seneca's texts that the self-consolation involves a curious evasion of and return to politics, so that Seneca comments upon the contemporary political conditions even as he seems to concern himself only with the ethical problem of composure in circumstances of separation. I argue that all three of Seneca's consolations employ consolatory discourse in order to disguise political commentary, and that each attempts through its use or its appropriation of others' voices to establish and reinforce ties with one of the politically significant classes in Julio-Claudian Rome: the *Ad Marciam* with the senatorial elite, the *Ad Polybium* with the imperial *domus*, and the *Ad Helviam matrem* with the leading provincial families of equestrian rank. The conclusion that emerges from my analyses is that Seneca's consolations, a domestic mode of *parrhēsia* or truth-telling analogous to the more public practice of Socrates, the Cynics, or the so-called Stoic opposition, but more calculating and careful in its presentation, ultimately fail not only as a mode of consolatory discourse, but also as political discourse. Seneca's consolations in each case do not establish the affiliations at which his writings aimed, so that, in the *Ad Helviam matrem*, Seneca at last retreats into political romanticism, the celebration his own class, even his own family, as the last preserve of an otherwise lost Roman *virtus*.

especially at 1.2, where he presents himself as having waited until he had overcome his own depression before addressing his mother's grief. Self-consolation would therefore be superfluous.

4.2. Truth-Telling and the Private Sphere in Seneca's Consolation to Marcia

Before I come to Seneca's self-consolations, a few aspects of Seneca's consolatory practice must be established through commentary upon several passages from the *Ad Marciam de consolatione*. This text shows Seneca's connection to the Socratic beginnings of philosophical consolatory discourse, a connection not otherwise demonstrated as evidently as in Cicero or Boethius' self-consolations.¹² But beyond that, the *Ad Marciam* is programmatic for Seneca in that it establishes his practice of consolation as a publicized mode of private or domestic *parrhēsia* (truth-telling) by providing counsel to a respectable Roman matron almost certainly belonging to the senatorial class.¹³ Furthermore, Seneca also defines in this text his own exemplary precedents as the philosopher Arius Didymus,¹⁴ a Stoic philosopher committed to telling

¹² Manning, *Ad Marciam*: 128, 38. It is important that this confrontation with the Socratic origins of consolatory discourse appears in a text that comes before his attempted self-consolations. An allusion to Socrates appears at *Sen. Dial.* 6.22.3 and another to Plato's "concern for dying" from the *Phaedo* at *Sen. Dial.* 6.23.2: "...Platon clamat: sapientis animum totum in mortem prominere, hoc velle, hoc meditari, hac semper cupidine ferri in exteriora tendentem." If these allusions had only been included in the *Ad Helviam matrem*, it would not be possible to say securely that Seneca's entire consolatory project follows from upon a confrontation with the Platonic account of Socrates' death. This is a supporting point central to my conclusion.

¹³ Though Marcia's status cannot be established with certainty—too little is known about her family—several points emphasized by Rudich indicate that her family was probably of senatorial rank. First of all, the so-called "Stoic opposition" mostly belonged to the Senatorial class, who romanticized the death of Cato and took an interest in Stoicism at least in part in emulation of their martyr and hero. Cordus was perhaps the last historian to do so. Second, Marcia's friendship with Livia Augusta (4.1) indicates a special familiarity with the first family. Furthermore, her son's priesthood (24.2) would have been available only to those with high social standing. Rudich further emphasizes that her risky act, concealing the banished history written by her father, would only escape punishment if Marcia's political and social credentials were formidably high Vassily Rudich, *Dissidence and Literature under Nero: The price of rhetorization* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997): 23.

¹⁴ Manning, *Ad Marciam*: 44-45.

Livia the truth about her mourning, and the Roman historian Cremutius Cordus,¹⁵ a martyr of the Roman aristocracy, whose death in some ways repeats the gesture of Cato's resistance to Caesar. Seneca refers his consolatory practice to these two paradigms: Arius Didymus and Cremutius Cordus. Finally, the *Ad Marciam* demonstrates for the first time a distinctive procedure common to all of Seneca's consolatory texts: his *oikeiōsis* or "appropriation" of another's voice. Though these features of the *Ad Marciam* do not establish the text as a self-consolation, they do show Seneca's attempt to situate himself as the literary heir to Cordus' historiography and a careful ally of the senatorial elite, to whom he hoped to yoke his aspirations.¹⁶

The *Ad Marciam* features a curious internal fold, where the philosopher invents his own precedent, establishing by example the conditions that provide for the intelligibility of his act of consolation.¹⁷ While Cicero had consoled himself for the death

¹⁵ Ibid., 29-30.

¹⁶ Manning suggests that Seneca was trying to distance himself from Sejanus and his henchmen, to whom Seneca's political fortunes had been tied. A purge of Sejanus' allies under Gaius is entertained, but then Manning dismisses all of this, preferring to see Seneca's act as a sincere consolatory gesture. Ibid., 4-7. This leaves the political history featured in the text unexplained though. I agree with Manning that the evidence is too elusive to offer a clear picture, but this is in itself an important fact about the political circumstances in which Seneca was operating. Though one cannot glean Seneca's motives from this text, one can see that those motives have been concealed with layers of literary craft. For this feature of Seneca's text, there must have been *some* cause.

¹⁷ It is doubtful that Arius Didymus, whom one finds as Augustus' associate also in *Suet. Aug.* 89.1, ever did offer such a consolation to Livia, and even more doubtful that if he did Seneca would have been able to get at a true account of what he said. This whole scene must rather be taken as an enabling fiction, designed by Seneca for his own purposes.

Manning reviews the scholarship that had taken this passage as evidence for a *Consolatio Arei*, and concludes rightly that there must never have been such a composition. Ibid., 35 (commenting upon Favez's reading of this text), and esp. 45-46. Shelton, by contrast, stresses the significance of paradigms to Seneca's argument in Jo-Ann Shelton, "Persuasion and Paradigm in Seneca's *Consolatio ad Marciam* 1-6," *Classica*

of his own daughter, and thus parted from the Greek tradition of consolatory literature through his act of self-consolation, Seneca challenged the Roman discursive practice by sending an open letter of consolation to a woman. With keen awareness that his innovation may appear indecent¹⁸—addressing a woman so publicly about so private an affliction was certainly a questionable exercise of rhetorical prowess—Seneca takes great pains to establish the propriety of his action by referring himself and Marcia to a worthy paradigm. That “*exemplum*” was not the philosopher Arius, to whom Seneca analogizes his own discursive position, but Livia, or “*Iulia Augusta*” as the text identifies her (4.2), the wife of Augustus himself and adoptive member of the Julian family, to whom Seneca suggests Marcia ought to compare herself (6.1).¹⁹ It falls to Livia, following the death of her beloved son Drusus, to determine the meaning of Arius’ consolation, and not just because in the case of consolation illocutionary force is typically subordinate to perlocutionary expectations, or, in other words, because the *consolator*’s advice must be desired, anticipated, and welcome to the *consolandus* in order for the speech-act to arrive

et Mediaevalia 46 (1995). Her argument suggests the right path, that Seneca is creating an enabling paradigm for himself.

¹⁸ Cf. *Sen. Dial.* 6.1.1 and 6.1.5, where he describes the “*virtus*” and the “*magnitudo animi*” that permit Seneca to approach a woman in mourning. Wilcox has studied the application of these masculine attributes to a noble Roman matron in Amanda Wilcox, “Exemplary Grief: Gender and Virtue in Seneca’s Consolations to Women,” *Helios* 33, no. 1 (2006). She argues that they ultimately serve to reinforce the gender ideology, insofar as the exemplary women he discusses demonstrate the qualities that distinguish men within a circumscribed domain proper to women. But it is clear that the celebration of Marcia appears at the beginning also to ease the potential for indecently aggressive in Seneca’s consolation to a respectable woman.

¹⁹ A short description of Livia’s life and role in history appears at Manning, *Ad Marciam*: 37.

at a felicitous performance. It is also her *auctoritas*, the godlike supremacy with which the first family guided Roman affairs, that seals the meaning of Arius' consolation. Consolation within Seneca's texts is therefore defined first of all by this exemplary situation, in which Livia calls upon "her husband's philosopher" ("*philosopho viri sui*," 4.2), and thus creates the conditions in which consolation may occur.

Looking to the prosopopoeia by which, in Arius' own voice, Seneca delivers a short consolatory discourse, one may characterize that hypothetical speech quite generally as *parrhesiastic* discourse of the kind that Foucault analyzed in his late works.²⁰ From 4.3, Arius begins by observing the long-standing familiarity with her and her husband. He emphasizes there that he knows not only "what remarks" she has "sent out into public," but even "all the more hidden movements of your soul" ("*quae in publicum emittuntur nota, sed omnes sunt secretiores animorum vestrorum motus*," 4.3). She has calculated that her behavior must remain beyond reproach, and carefully controls all that she does so that she maintains an immaculate "*fama*," or reputation, which Arius dubs the "*liberrima principum iudex*," "the most freespoken judge of princes" (4.4). Commending the traditional wisdom which holds that those in positions of prestige must offer pardon to many, but should seek it from none, he recommends to Livia that she hold fast to what has always been her custom (4.4). The polite but forthright address continues as one would expect, so that Arius recommends that Livia cooperate with her friends who wish

²⁰ Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*; Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*; Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*.

to speak of Drusus in her presence, even when she would not hear it (5.1-3), that she acknowledge not only Fortuna's cruelty, but also her generosity, taking the bad with the good (5.4), and that she restrain herself and take hardship as a matter of course, as a pilot who best shows his skill in troubled waters (5.5). He concludes by recommending that she must maintain a stable balance, and look to her other son and grandsons for help (5.6).

There is nothing surprising in any of this, except the important positions of the *consolator* and the *consolanda*. Seneca's comments just prior to this prosopopoeia clarify their respective positions. Livia had admitted at that time, so Seneca says, that she benefited from Arius' advice, in fact, more greatly than from the *populus Romanus*, who could have shared her grief if she were not too concerned to protect them from her sadness, more greatly than from Augustus, who had his own despondency to overcome, and more greatly than from Tiberius, whose *pietas* at once assuaged and brought to mind what was lost in Drusus' death (4.2). All these admissions indicate to Marcia that she should benefit in the same way from Seneca's counsel. But laboring over the inadequacy of the imperial family in this way, listing point by point the resources available to Livia, and showing that in every case what she required was someone entirely *external* to the family, Augustus' house philosopher Arius, these words suggest another motive.

As in Cicero's letters, philosophical consolation occurs at the meeting place of private affects and public opinion, where the powerful must repress their personality for the sake of their office; here, however, philosophers, not friends of equal social

importance, must have the courage and the tact to speak in this assertive way.²¹ The philosophers' freedom in speaking, which they preserve as a way of life, makes them the ideal operatives for consoling those in possession of sovereign power; for their ethical comportment requires of them not only that they speak the truth in spite of personal danger, but also that they put themselves at risk as a test of their mettle.²² But under the principate, if the *populus Romanus* may be "quite free" ("*liberrima*," 4.3) in its judgment of *principes*, philosophers do not have this same ease of anonymity.²³ Their situation as consolers demands of them that they show the courage to claim freedom in speaking, even though they may not possess it as a *de facto* right. In this way, the task of offering private consolation bears comparison to the public, democratic performance of *parrhēsia*, but it clearly differs as long as it remains private.²⁴ Though one could enrage a ruler with consolation, it is not likely that such an act would provoke extreme reactions, unless that consolation somehow were performed before a public. A published consolatory letter, like any of Seneca's extended "essays," at least potentially runs the risk of speaking too frankly. Whereas there is no such danger with Marcia herself, since she holds no power of life and death over Seneca—at worst, his act of consolation may provoke resentment

²¹ See Chapter 5, section 5.2-3.

²² For this point, see my discussion of Foucault in the Introduction, pp. 40-48.

²³ Manning explains that this word "*liberrimam*" ought not to be edited to "*uberrimam*" as Erasmus had suggested, in agreement with Favez's reading but not his translation. Understood in connection with other uses of *liber*, such as those at 1.4 at 22.4, Seneca can be seen to mean that the public may judge as "freely" as it likes and spread that judgment as rumor. Manning, *Ad Marciam*: 47.

²⁴ Cf. my discussion on Foucault in the Introduction, pp. 40-48, as well as in my discussion of Boethius, pp. 85-95.

or repugnance—his strategy of legitimation, in which he associates Marcia with Livia, walks a fine line. Through the use of *exempla*, Seneca is able to situate Marcia's loss of her son in relation to the imperial *domus*' losses. The leaders of the imperial family do indeed possess an unmatched power to act on the lives of others.

Seneca's risky move does not lie in his consolation proper, though. The arguments and examples he employs tend to be flattering to the imperial family, saying nothing that would put Seneca at risk. The danger lies rather in the choice of his addressee and the association of Seneca's freespoken handling of Marcia's grief for her son with her grief for another family member at 1.2-7. Her father, the historian Cremutius Cordus, had written a history of the Republic's collapse that celebrated Brutus and Cassius, apparently at the expense of the imperial family.²⁵ He had also, it seems, "angered" Sejanus, the henchman whom Tiberius so empowered that he effectively ruled over Rome in Tiberius' absence, by "having spoken out too freely on one or two occasions" (*Irascebatur illi ob unum aut alterum liberius dictum*), observing that, following reconstruction to restore the Theater of Pompey after a fire, the placement of Sejanus' statue in the theater was the final ruin of that structure (22.4-5). Cordus' truth-telling with respect to Sejanus was conflated with his historiography, so that he was

²⁵ Though Seneca commends Marcia's protection of this history at 1.3-4, saying that now it will be available to all to read because of her action, the centuries seems to have overcome her father's work, which has not survived antiquity.

charged with *maiestas* and persecuted as an enemy of the Julian family by Sejanus.²⁶ A unique feature of the narrative of Cordus' death, as it is recorded in Seneca, also distinguishes that account among the sources that preserve this episode. Seneca's narrative uniquely preserves what Foucault would have identified as the "biopolitical" stakes of Cremutius Cordus' death. His trial before the *consulum tribunalia* stands out not only as the first *maiestas* trial that involved literary censorship, as has previously been observed.²⁷ Seneca's version emphasizes that his trial also stands apart because his persecutors attempted to deprive Cordus not just of his life itself, but even more of his freedom to take his life (22.7).²⁸ Seneca goes so far as to say, "*Magna res erat in quaestione, an mortis ius rei perderent*," "The great matter in question was whether the accused have lost their right to die." It would seem, then, that Seneca has highlighted in his secret history within a consolation the most uncanny dimension of Roman imperial power, that the emperor's advancement of the praetorian guard had brought to light such agents as Sejanus, and these newcomers strove not only to establish sovereign power, the power to "let live and make die," but also what Foucault has called biopower, the power

²⁶ Marcus Wilson, "Seneca the Consoler? A New Reading of his Consolatory Writings," in *Greek and Roman Consolations: Eight Studies of a Tradition and its Afterlife*, ed. Han Baltussen (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2013): 95; Z. Stewart, "Sejanus, Gaeticulus and Seneca," *AJPh* 74 (1953): 70-85.

²⁷ E.g., Mary R. McHugh, "Historiography and Freedom of Speech: The Case of Cremutius Cordus," in *Free Speech in Classical Antiquity*, ed. Ineke Sluiter and Ralph Rosen, Mnemosyne, Supplements (Leiden: Brill, 2004): 391-408.

²⁸ Compare the accounts of Cassius Dio (57.24.2-4) and Tacitus, who make no mention of this detail.

“to make live and to let die.”²⁹ Only with this reversal of poles in power’s claim upon the lives of its subjects did it become possible for a subject’s “right to die” to hang in the balance.

From his earliest writings, then, Seneca appears as a most penetrating observer of the new political reality in its most unprecedented dimensions, and a capable writer of political history on that new reality. It should be no surprise, though, that his history remains hidden in this mode of domestic writing. By proceeding in this way, it is as if Seneca conceals his own historiography within a politically harmless consolation to a grieving mother, thereby repeating Cordus’ own gesture of dissent, but not without plausible deniability.³⁰ In this text, Seneca has amplified his own, more private practice of truth-telling, consolation, with a much more explicitly public mode, historiography. Seneca’s text shows itself to be concerned not only with Marcia’s private loss, but also with the political struggles of a new imperial situation, in which the *domus* of one family had become the center of public concern.³¹ In this new situation, Seneca stood out as perhaps the most outstanding literary talent of all, capable of challenging even Cicero's

²⁹ Michel Foucault et al., *Society must be defended : lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, 1st ed. (New York: Picador, 2003): 241. This is not to say that every dimension of the biopower that Foucault describes can be understood as ancient, so that already the Roman Empire makes the passage from government of territories to government of populations. It is to say that Foucault’s theorization of biopower can help to understand why suicide became such an important symbolic gesture of resistance.

³⁰ Compare this with Wilson’s comments on the *Ad Helviam* at Wilson, "Seneca the Consoler," 115-16.

³¹ Benedetto Fontana, "Tacitus on Empire and Republic," *History of Political Thought* XIV, no. 1 (1993): 27-40.

supremacy among the orators.³² As the new imperial situation became clear to all participants, the consolation, which appears first in Roman life as one formal variety of private epistolary exchange and had become a mode of public self-address with Cicero, transformed in Seneca's capable hands into a flexible medium for communicating the truth publicly: for though the consolation is primarily about private affairs, private affairs had displaced the Republican regime and now occupied the center of public concern. In this confusion of spaces, Seneca seems to have perceived that private modes of literary discourse could be put to good public use, while nevertheless maintaining the fiction of exclusively private concerns.

More than anything else, what confirms Seneca's practice of consolation as an alternative to Cremutius Cordus' historiographical mode of truth-telling is the intrusion of the historian's voice into Seneca's text: Cordus speaks to Marcia for himself, through Seneca's writings. Only here Cordus does not speak as a historian, in the manner "in which he bemoaned the civil wars, in which he proscribed for eternity the proscribers," but rather he speaks as a consoler, "in a manner as much more lofty as he himself is now more sublime."³³ In other words, he changes places with Seneca, who has recorded Cordus' history instead of consoling Marcia, just as Cordus, now secure in his "celestial citadel" ("*ex illa arce caelesti*," 26.1), leaves aside history for philosophical consolation.

³² Herington, "The Younger Seneca," 511-32.

³³ "...non illo ingenio, quo civilia bella deflevit, quo proscribentis in aeternum proscripsit, sed tanto elatiore, quanto est ipse sublimior, dicere..." (26.1).

His speech passes quickly from discussion of Marcia's grief for her son, though, to emphasize the potency of Fortuna, who reduces even "kings" and "Roman leaders" ("*reges...an Romanos duces*" 26.2). In other words, Cordus remains focused on political struggles, and he passes from even the mighty's resourcelessness before Fortuna to political martyrs, "those most noble and famous men who lowered their necks set to receive the strike of a soldier's sword" ("*An nobilissimos viros clarissimosque ad ictum militaris gladi composita cervica curvatos?*" 26.2). He immediately identifies her grandfather and himself, her father, as two examples of this exposure to fortune. As so often in this text, Marcia's son's death seems mere background, when compared with the courage in death that her father demonstrated. He boasts at 26.3 that, "by rejecting food," he "showed that [he] was as great in spirit as he had written" ("*cibo prohibitus ostendi tam magno me quam videbar animo scripsisse*"). Put to the test of his words, Cordus has proven true to their meaning, choosing an honest death over a shameful life.³⁴ Marcia's son, by contrast, had the most "*felix*" death of all the family, and so merits no prolonged mourning. Cordus reassures Marcia that in fact now her grandfather, her father, and her son are all together in a brilliant place, separate from the miseries of life. At 26.4 these miseries are cataloged, so that the living are exposed to all manner of violence: armies clashing, fleets breaking into one another, murder plots, strife in the forum. These are contrasted with the situation of the dead, who hold "nothing in secret, with uncovered

³⁴ Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*: 209-55.

minds and open hearts,” and live “life in public and open spaces,” experiencing “the sight of every age and of the things to come” (“...*nihil in obscuro, detectas mentes et aperta praecordia et in publico medioque vitam et omnis aevi prospectum venientumque*”).

Metaphysical horizons prove the best vantage for surveying history; from this advantageous perspective, the dead relatives of Marcia can survey all the kingdoms of all the ages and all their inevitable rises and falls with so much greater clarity than Cordus, in his lifetime, had been able to view the “*facta*” and the “*gesta*” of one period of his own nation’s history (26.5). The comparison of so many times and places positions Cordus well to offer Marcia a consolation rooted in the “common fate” of all things (“*commune fatum*” 26.6). He catalogs the great ruin of all natural things in time, stressing the Stoic vision of perpetual change culminating in a great conflagration. He ends his consolation by allowing that even the immortal souls of Marcia’s relatives will finally be reduced to their elements, at a time that is pleasing to god (26.7).

At this point Cordus’ speech breaks off, and Seneca stresses again how “*felix*” Marcia’s son must be, since he shares in this knowledge that her father has communicated. But in a way it is Seneca speaking through Cordus to whom one must give attention. By showing his interchangeability with Cremutius Cordus, taking the voice of this rebellious historian, Seneca offers himself up as a substitute for this lost author. But what ultimately shows through in that voice’s consolation is not a practical political program of any kind. Rather, he can only share a metaphysical vision, assuring that cosmic principles prove a bad regime must eventually fall. Little comfort comes to

the living, though, in knowing such wisdom as that, and, if Cordus represented the lost senatorial cause in a time of Julian ascendancy, Seneca's truth-telling could only valorize a gesture of resistance, keep a mode of subversive subjectivity in play, not offer an alternative program of organization.³⁵ Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that this weak political vision did nothing to protect Seneca's fortunes when a new regime came to power and the senatorial elites, in whom he had trusted his aspirations by composing this text, sentenced Seneca to death for his alleged intrigue with the imperial families. He must have been shocked when the emperor himself, who had almost certainly orchestrated the Senate's sentencing, at last proved Seneca's salvation, when he reduced the sentence to exile and therefore became the philosopher's only hope for escape from exile.

4.3. Sovereign Power and Bare Life in the Consolation Ad Polybium

4.3.1. Introduction

Composed sometime between the end of February in 41 and mid-year in 43 CE, the *Ad Polybium* seems to have been the second consolation that Seneca composed, but, as I will argue, it was his first experiment with self-consolation.³⁶ Seneca addresses this

³⁵ Elizabeth Asmis, "Seneca on fortune and the kingdom of god," in *Seneca and the Self*, ed. Shadi Bartsch and David Wray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 115-38.

³⁶ Abel has observed that internal evidence sets the *terminus ante quem* at Claudius' triumph following the invasion of Britain, which began in the middle of 43 CE. Seneca exclaims at 13.2, "*hic Germaniam pacet Britanniam aperiat et patrios triumphos ducat et novos*,"—"May this man [Claudius] pacify Germania, lay

open letter to a fellow court attendant, philosopher, and *litterateur* whose brother has suffered an untimely death.³⁷ As a consolation, the text necessarily deals with an economy of loss, wherein the vanishing of an object of affection must be compensated by strategies of rationalization. Seneca proceeds in this text, though, according to a curious design in which several levels of loss are juxtaposed. First of all, Seneca keeps imposing his own grief, occasioned by his recent exile,³⁸ into the economy of affects circulating

open Britannia, and lead both his father's and new triumphs." Abel, *Bauformen*: 163. Seneca therefore indicates with this sentence that his wish remains unfulfilled, that Claudius has not yet conquered these regions, but Seneca is at least apparently hopeful that Claudius may do so. This date is confirmed in the following sentence by the expressed wish that Claudius may recall Seneca from exile, so that he can witness the triumph. The *terminus post quem* can be determined by comparing the internal evidence of the text, which makes mention of Seneca's exile in several passages, with a well known passage from Dio's history. There it is reported that in 41 CE, the first year of Claudius' reign, Seneca was exiled when Claudius' wife Valeria Messalina accused her niece Julia Livilla of committing adultery (*Dio Cass.* 60.8.5). As Abel explains, allowing that Claudius did not enter the Senate until thirty days had passed from the date of his accession (*Dio Cass.* 60.3.2), and that the date of Claudius' accession has been established as January 24, 41 CE, then Seneca must have composed this text sometime between the end of February 41 CE and the middle of 43 CE. J. E. Atkinson, "Seneca's 'Consolatio ad Polybium'," in *Principat: Sprache und Literatur (Literatur der Julisch-Claudischen und der Flavischen Zeit [Forts.])*, ed. Wolfgang Haase (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1985), 864-66.

³⁷ Few take seriously Diderot's notorious attempt to undermine the authenticity of this work, although K. Buresch seems to have supported it, arguing that the forger must have read Dio Cassius LXI 10.2, placing the date of the forged letter to the third century CE. Denis Diderot, "La consolation à Polybe," in *Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron et sur les mœurs et les écrits de Sénèque*, ed. J. Assézat 3 (Paris: 1875; reprint, *Oeuvres complètes*): 345-53; Buresch, *historia critica*, 9, 1: 114; Atkinson, "ad Polybium," 861; Karlhans Abel, "Das Problem der Faktizität der senecanischen Korrespondenz," *Hermes* 109 (1981): 472-99. On the question of the letter's authenticity and possible later revisions, see especially Griffin, *Seneca*: 415, 27; W. H. Alexander, "Seneca's Ad Polybium de consolatione: a reappraisal," *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada* 37, no. 3.2 (1943): 35-36; Francesco Giancotti, "La consolazione di Seneca a Polibio in Cassio Dione LXI, 10, 2," *Rivista di filologia e di istruzione classica* 84 (1956): 32-33; K. Münscher, "Senecas Werk. Untersuchungen zur Abfassungszeit und Echtheit," *Philologus* 16 (Supplement), no. 1 (1922): esp. 31; W. Isleib, "De Senecae dialogo undecimo qui est ad Polybium de consolatione" (diss., 1906), 2, where he cites Cicero, *Ad Atticum* XIII, 13.1, and Ovid, *Trist.* I.7.13 and 23.

³⁸ Seneca was most likely exiled for an alleged affair with Julia Livilla. *Adulterium* was a serious crime covered from 17 BCE under the *Lex Julia de adulteriis coercendis* (see *Dig.* 48.5). Seneca's original

within the freedman Polybius' grieving *domus*. In this one way already Seneca has parted with the normal modes of consolation, since he has not written simply a *consolatio* for death or a *consolatio* for exile;³⁹ rather, he has confused the two and brought them into proximity as an exiled *consolator* addressing a bereaved *consolandus*.⁴⁰ But more importantly, Seneca also takes advantage of Polybius' proximity to the emperor Claudius—in some unexplained way Polybius' literary success has placed him in a high office in the service of the emperor—to explore the economy of loss within the *domus* of the *princeps*.⁴¹ The intersecting relations of these three homes, Seneca's, Polybius', and Claudius' *domus*, center upon the grief of Polybius for his lost brother, but Seneca's encounter with Claudius, in which the senate only spared Seneca from execution and delivered him to exile in Corsica because of Claudius' intervention, intrudes upon this private scene and overtakes its significance. Just as in the case of Cremutius Cordus where the sovereign power of the principate showed its most novel dimensions not in its capacity to kill, but rather in its power to make live, so too did Seneca find himself

penalty was execution though, as he makes clear in the *Ad Polybium* at 13.2, and adultery would not normally merit this.

³⁹ Fantham has emphasized the intersecting topics of Seneca's text in her reading of the two consolations from exile. Fantham, "Dialogues of Displacement," 191. She is also the only reader of this text who has previously identified the strategy of self-consolation in this text. She leaves this theme relatively undeveloped in her essay though.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 184-92; Rita Degl'Innocenti Pierini, *Tra Ovidio e Seneca* (Bologna: Pàtron, 1990): 112-13.

⁴¹ He was positioned so high, in fact, that he is said to have "walked between the two consuls," "*Libertorum praecipue suspexit...Polybium ab studiis, qui saepe inter duos consules ambulabat...*" Suet. *Claud.* 28. Later, he was put to death, an event, according to Dio (Dio Cass. 61.31.3), that precipitated Messalina's own ruin.

consigned to a space between two deaths, persisting between his legal death and his actual death, perhaps hoping that the emperor would grant him a fuller restoration of life.

In some way, then, this text has always rightly been conceived as involved in the intrigue of the court, and it is often considered an appeal to Claudius' clemency on behalf of its exiled author.⁴² Curiously, where so much scholarship on Boethius' consolation minimizes its political context in order to focus upon the consolation offered through metaphysics and theology, giving special attention to the problem of doctrinal orthodoxy, the scholarship on Seneca's *Ad Polybium* has moved in the exact opposite direction, sidelining his consolatory practice in order to focus upon his panegyric for the emperor—admittedly a surprising aspect of this composition.⁴³ Certainly there is something correct in this; Seneca would not have written a consolation to a freedman as highly positioned as Polybius, and he would not have included so much flattery of Claudius, if his intentions were not somehow political.⁴⁴ But it also ought not to be the case that, as critics focus on the politics of the *Ad Polybium*, the consolation itself, the literary form in which

⁴² E.g., H. Dahlmann, "Zu Senecas Trostschrift an Polybius," *Hermes* 71 (1936): 374-75; H. Dahlmann, "Untersuchungen zu den Dialogschriften Senecas by Erich Köstermann," *Gnomon* 13, no. 7 (1937): 371-72; Abel, *Bauformen*: 88-93; Atkinson, "ad Polybium," 872-79. Against this view, see Alexander, "Seneca's *Ad Polybium de consolatione*: a reappraisal," 41; Arnaldo Momigliano, *Claudius. The emperor and his achievement*, trans. W. D. Hogarth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934): 120.

⁴³ For an overview of the issue, see Atkinson, "ad Polybium," 872-79.

⁴⁴ Seneca's own position may even seem to support this neglect of consolation, insofar as he exclaims that Claudius must have already provided all the consolation that Polybius needs, thus rendering Seneca's attempt superfluous, and this has probably contributed to the low levels of interest in the consolatory aspects of this text (e.g. 12.4, 14.1).

this “panegyric” masquerades, is left to the side.⁴⁵ By connecting these two different levels of the text, the consolation and the seemingly out of place adulation of the *princeps*, I propose to offer a somewhat different account of Seneca's voice.

Critical analysis of Seneca’s voice in the text has been steered by the investigation of whether Seneca’s adulation of the ruler may be identified as sincere flattery or ironic mockery of the emperor and his ideological self-presentation.⁴⁶ To be sure, there is a perceptible density in Seneca’s expression that raises questions, and it is this irregular texture of the *Ad Polybium* that most requires explanation. I argue that the impenetrability of Seneca’s text can be explained by attending to the manner in which Seneca’s half-aware struggles to establish within the text a self-consolation alongside his consolation to Polybius displace the primary consolatory function of the text. A second level of meaning emerges in which the exiled subject appeals to the exiling sovereign, Claudius, so that Seneca begs the emperor to console him just as he must have already consoled Polybius, a trusted and respected confidant. Thus, just as sovereign power displaces the public

⁴⁵ When scholars do treat the consolation of the *Ad Polybium*, it often involves value judgements on the quality of the letter and analyses of its structure. See in particular, Atkinson, "ad Polybium," 867-69; Abel, *Bauformen*: 70-84; Michele Coccia, "La *consolatio* in Seneca," *Rivista di cultura classica e medioevale* 1, no. 2 (1959): 148-80; Kassel, *Untersuchungen zur Konsolationsliteratur*; G. De Vico, "Premesse per una lettura delle Consolationes di Seneca," *GIF* 8 (1955): 345-48; E. Jacoby, "Composizione ed elementi costitutivi delle consolazioni Senecane a Marcia e a Polibio," *Athenaeum* 9 (1931): 251-52; Eugène Albertini, *La composition dans les ouvrages philosophiques de Sénèque* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1923): 65-67, 256-58.

⁴⁶ Atkinson summarizes the scholarship prior to his work, explaining, “The implications of one’s judgement on this issue are so important that it is surprising that so little attention has been given to an analysis of the internal evidence, that is the text itself.” He goes on to explain that analysis has been obstructed by the subjective ethical judgments of Seneca’s character, based not upon analysis but rather upon presuppositions. Atkinson, "ad Polybium," 872-73.

space of the *res publica*, leaving in its place a confusion of public and private spaces, so that the palatial *domus* of the *princeps* becomes the center of public life, the *consolatio* that Seneca composes illustrates a consequent displacement in the psychology of Roman subjects, whereby the emperor's public *persona* infiltrates the domestic sphere in which the intimacy of grief was once shared between family, friends, and notable peers of equal status.⁴⁷ The innermost spaces of the self and its affects thereby become a public spectacle, reflective of the sovereign's authority and beneficence with respect to his subjects.

But this is only half of the story. The effect upon the reader of Seneca's attempts at self-consolation must also be taken into consideration. The very fact that a man in exile would seek consolation for that exile from the same ruler who commanded this punishment for him has provoked feelings of repulsion in at least some of his readers, both ancient and modern.⁴⁸ The problem is not simply what Seneca says, but rather *that* he speaks at all. In the language of Lacanian critical theory, Seneca speaks from the "other scene," the hidden place where power's obscene excess transgresses the rules that it sets for itself, exercising a more violent and direct authority over its subjects.⁴⁹ Put otherwise, it is as if with Seneca the bare life that stands exposed to sovereign power possesses a spectral voice that survives its own ruin, but preserves only some meager

⁴⁷ Cf. Chapter 5.

⁴⁸ Dio Cass. 61.10.2. Giacotti, "La consolazione a Polibio," 60; E. Köstermann, *Untersuchungen zu den Dialogschriften Senecas* (Berlin: Verlag der Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1934); Diderot, "La consolation à Polybe," 345-53.

⁴⁹ Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*: xiii-xv.

ability to testify to that ruin. All the same, that bare life stands as the embarrassing truth of sovereign power, a subject so abject that it clings to sovereign power and thereby exposes sovereign power's most grandiose pretensions. On this reading, it is not Seneca's cryptic irony that most exposes Claudius' principate as a pernicious appropriation of the Julians' dynasty, but rather the most unsettling elements of this text are Seneca's apparently sincere efforts to console without the power to do so, to praise the emperor from his position beyond society's recognized order, or to be consoled by the emperor himself.

4.3.2. The Valences of Truth-Telling: Sincerity, Irony, Doublespeak, and Overidentification

The major problem presented by the current scholarship on the *Ad Polybium* is whether or to what extent Seneca's appeal may have involved ironic dissimulation. The difficulties with isolating irony are all too well known, but much of Seneca's appeal in postmodern philosophical circles has to do with the ironic self-presentation that many discover in his texts and the subversiveness associated with this irony. But the postmodern ironist and the "Senecan self," which, despite their many differences, share a certain comfort with mutability and self-transformation, may also be read as so many failed attempts to live up to the most perverse demands of power. In this section, I show that Seneca is actually involved in a much more subtle performance than the terms dissimulation or irony can capture, however much these may be features of his discourse. For, far from simply repeating with an inner distance the imperial ideology of the Julio-

Claudian dynasty's centrality to the survival of the Roman empire or delivering his distance from that ideology as a subtext undermining his own discourse, Seneca's performance in the *Ad Polybium de consolatione* challenges that ideology by taking it all too seriously, staging himself as a true believer in Claudius' cause. This strategy, which Žižek calls "overidentification," takes the system more seriously than the system takes itself, so that Seneca reveals ironic subversiveness as nothing more than a psychological coping mechanism.⁵⁰ He thus pushes the subjects of Claudius' ideology towards an uncomfortable encounter with the truth of their own subjective dependence upon Claudius' image and his power.

Atkinson provides a convenient summary of prior attempts to make sense out of the peculiar texture of Seneca's discourse in the *Ad Polybium*. The major controversy defining the criticism of the text concerns Seneca's questionable sincerity: either his attempts to console Polybius and to praise Claudius are sincere, or, conversely, these attempts are undermined by intentional or situational irony.⁵¹ The scholar most associated

⁵⁰ For a concise description of this concept and its importance for Lacanian political thought, see Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2007): 79-90.

⁵¹ Atkinson cites Diderot, Momigliano, Alexander, Marchesi, and Mazzoli as critics who regard the text as somehow ironic, and Birt, Dahlmann, Giancotti, Abel, Meinel, Griffin, Trillitzsch, and Rozelaar as critics who regard the text as sincere or else not charged with irony meant to be wounding in any way. Atkinson, "ad Polybium," 872. His further observation, however, that analyses of Seneca's alleged irony have traditionally failed to establish an "objective method" by which irony may be detected, would trouble few scholars working in the wake of deconstruction, which rendered all attempts to develop such a general theory of irony highly suspect. Still, Atkinson's suspicion that some "concealed level of meaning" lies hidden within the text cannot be misplaced, since the situation of its composition leaves open the possibility that irony can be read into the text, perhaps even against its author's own intentions. What his observation indicates is that not enough readings of the tonality that Seneca's work reaches ground their conclusions in close attention to the dynamics of the text itself.

with reading Seneca's consolation ironically is Alexander, who understood the *Ad Polybium* as a satire of Claudius and his court.⁵² The irony, then, conceals this satire and protects Seneca from any persecution that the satire could cause, if detected. Atkinson rightly criticizes Alexander's argument for its dependence upon external, circumstantial evidence.⁵³ Criticism of Claudius appearing elsewhere in Seneca's writings or in reports of his rhetoric is not enough to prove the presence of irony in the *Ad Polybium*; Seneca could have changed positions on Claudius from one composition to another. Momigliano took a different stand on this problem, arguing that, whatever Seneca's intentions may have been, the *Ad Polybium*'s presentation of Claudius necessarily differed from the reality of the man, and thus could be read equally as ideology or satire.⁵⁴ In the end, Momigliano explicitly rejected the claim that Seneca employed intentional sarcasm in the text. Instead, he argued for situational irony in the disconnect between Seneca's panegyric and the reality of Claudius' rule. Atkinson himself identifies examples of irony that he considers objective, insofar as they come from the text itself. Especially, he highlights ambiguities in Seneca's arrangement of words, the errors in Claudius' historical account of Republican dynasts, the indelicacies such as Antony's revenge on his brother's killers, and the omission of Phaedrus' *Fabulae* in his recommendation to Polybius that he should consider translating Aesop, once he has recovered some

⁵² Alexander, "Seneca's *Ad Polybium de consolatione*: a reappraisal," 33-53; Atkinson, "ad *Polybium*," 873-74.

⁵³ See Atkinson for further criticism of Alexander's position. Atkinson, "ad *Polybium*," 873-74.

⁵⁴ Momigliano, *Claudius. The emperor and his achievement*: 119-20.

stability.⁵⁵ Still, Atkinson fails to meet one of his own criteria for a convincing reading of irony in the text: he cannot establish a function that the irony would serve.⁵⁶ He concludes with the suggestion that Seneca may have employed irony to signal to his upper-class audience that he found it objectionable to grovel before Claudius and Polybius in this way.⁵⁷ However, if his purpose were to indicate his discontent at this groveling, then the *Ad Polybium* would run the risk of getting caught by a ruler who had already proven himself dangerous enough to bring about Seneca's near execution. It strikes me as dubious that Seneca would be so imprudent as to risk his life for the sake of signalling to his peers that he found Polybius and Claudius beneath him.

More recently, Shadi Bartsch's work on the Flavian period suggested to Elaine Fantham the intriguing possibility that Seneca may have been practicing a form of "doublespeak," as Bartsch calls it.⁵⁸ According to this reading, it is not enough to identify a text as ironic, but rather the texts Fantham studies address multiple messages to multiple audiences, so that fellow dissidents may decode one interpretation and the emperor and his supporters may identify another, ideologically acceptable meaning of the

⁵⁵ Atkinson, "ad Polybium," 877-78.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 875.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 879.

⁵⁸ Bartsch's intelligent presentation of the concept appears in her fourth chapter on Tacitus and Juvenal. Shadi Bartsch, *Actors in the Audience: Theatricality and Doublespeak from Nero to Hadrian* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994): 98-147. Fantham cites her work in footnotes 48 and 50 on p. 186 of a chapter in an edited volume, but makes her dependence upon Bartsch most clear in her conclusion, where she refers to the "double audience" this text was aimed to satisfy and the "image" of himself that Seneca intended to convey to each group. Fantham, "Dialogues of Displacement," 192.

text.⁵⁹ On this reading, Seneca's text would not need to be exclusively either sincere and laudatory or insincere and subversive; Seneca would be composing a text that, as doublespeak, offers sincere praise even as it undermines that praise with a dissimulated critique of that praise, so that the author's intention vanishes behind the plurality of messages that his discourse supports.⁶⁰ Put otherwise, one could say that the author does not have just one intention, and that each facet of his discourse supports a different intention.

But, as Slavoj Žižek has observed of critics reading another artist working in a different political context, there is a problem with "the idea" that a "true message" could be "*absolutely transparent* to all fellow dissidents" and "yet at the same time, in some mysterious way, *absolutely opaque* to those in power."⁶¹ Or, to paraphrase Fantham, "Emperors [and their supporters, we may add] were not more stupid than other readers," allowing "irony to sail over their...heads; on the contrary they were deeply suspicious."⁶² Žižek is surely right to suggest that there is a methodological problem in presupposing so competent an author that he could determine which audience would receive which message, so that his mastery was not only over his own discourse, but also over his

⁵⁹ Importantly, Bartsch's reading focuses upon Tacitus, Juvenal, and Pliny — not Seneca — and so Fantham must extrapolate from her argument in order to see Seneca as employing Bartsch's "doublespeak."

⁶⁰ This is Fantham's ultimate argument on the meaning of the *Ad Polybium*. Fantham, "Dialogues of Displacement," 192.

⁶¹ Slavoj Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism? Five Interventions in the (Mis)use of a Notion* (London: Verso, 2001): 124.

⁶² Fantham, "Dialogues of Displacement," 186. Compare this with Žižek's rhetorical question: "Were the *nomenklatura* really so incredibly stupid that they did not get what hundreds of ordinary people got?" Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?:* 124.

readers' reception of that discourse. Žižek proposes that, for the purposes of ideological analysis, the proper way to proceed is to imagine an audience for whom both the subversive, dissident's message and the official, ideologically appropriate text are legible and coherent.⁶³ On this reading, the ironic message is not so much a subversive relay of political machinations, an organized political opposition delivering coded messages in public texts, but rather a subjective stance of internal distance from the regime's official message that ultimately supports the regime, insofar as it renders the everyday frustrations of imperial power minimally bearable to its subjects. Irony does not undermine the ideological rhetoric of the emperor's divine power; rather, it allows the subjects of that power to imagine themselves still in possession of a comfortable distance from that power.

Where does this leave the problem of irony in Seneca's text? If what Žižek says is taken into consideration, then one must imagine for Seneca's audience that they were

⁶³ Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?*: 124. I understand him to mean by this that the subversive, dissident's message only presents a contrary message to the official, ideological message, so that they do not present a contradiction. In other words, the subversive, ironic distance that subjects take toward the official ideology of a ruling regime is the minimal distance that makes life livable under the regime's heavy oppression of subjective freedom. The subjects of imperial power, even the emperor himself, must be able to support the ideology of the regime, but they must also find relief from that office in the form of ironic dismissal of that message's demand upon them.

Žižek argues, then, that irony actually supports one's participation in the official, ideological practices of a regime. He argues further that the common participation in transgressive practices that seemingly go against the official ideological message of a regime in truth create the deeper solidarity of the actors involved in the violation of a law or a rule. He compares this to the way in which the Hollywood Hayes Production Code both prohibits the direct representation of sexual activity and at once produces and codifies a positive language for articulating sexuality, such as with trains passing through tunnels. A better example demonstrates this point more clearly, from Dio's account of Claudius' reign. The anecdote demonstrates not only the ironic distance that a highly placed official like Polybius could take to his power, and also how that distance actually served to deepen Claudius' appreciation of him.

able to read the ideological text as sincere even as they could decode its ironic subtext. The shifting political terrain in the first years of Claudius' rule establishes conditions in which these two levels of the text were not actually opposed. Ironic distance from one's title, duties, and office were in fact the norm under Claudius' rule, since, as I show in the next section, Claudius was the first Caesar to hold the title while holding no legitimate claim to it, or, more accurately, it only retroactively became true that Claudius was worthy of the title, after the praetorian guard pressured the Senate into deeming Claudius the Caesar.⁶⁴ At some level, Claudius always knew that he reigned after Gaius not because the gods had elected him to this authority, but because his ideological position had to be maintained as a fiction necessary to social order itself.

This was not without its consequences. The subjects of Claudius' power could likewise maintain a certain measure of ironic distance from their official titles.⁶⁵ An anecdote from Dio clarifies this point. At 61.29.3-4, he records an account of a theatrical performance at which, as it happens, the Polybius to whom Seneca addresses this consolation was in attendance. Dio reports that, when the actor spoke a famous line, “ἀφόρητός ἐστιν ἐτυχῶν μαστιγίας,” “the good fortune of a whipping-boy is unbearable,” the entire audience turned and looked at Polybius, the emperor's favored freedman and, at different points in his career, secretary *a libellis* and secretary *a*

⁶⁴ See section 4.3.3-4 below.

⁶⁵ See section 4.3.4 below.

studiis.⁶⁶ Polybius responded with the observation that the same poet had elsewhere written, “βασιλεῖς ἐγένοντο χοῖ πρὶν ὄντες αἰπόλοι,” “Those who were goatherds before have become kings.” The detail with which Dio concludes this paragraph is crucial. He adds at 61.29.4 that, even though Polybius had said this, Claudius did nothing to punish him. This detail shows that the passage is not exhausted by its function as evidence for the ancient audience’s freedom in interpreting a poet’s words in a variety of different senses.⁶⁷ The point that Dio makes when he introduces this story is that Claudius may have been cruel and merciless with the freedmen of others, but he was always lenient and even indulgent with his own (61.29.2). The other members of the audience see Polybius as man beneath his office, too lowly in status for his power over society, but Polybius’ response is not to insist upon his proper belonging to this role, referencing his achievements, credentials, and above all his election by the ruler himself. Instead, he observes that one who was once a goatherd now occupies the highest office imaginable; in other words, his quip can be understood to mean that the emperor was a country bumpkin, and yet he is still the emperor. The implication of this reading is that Polybius may not have the right social status for the office and power that he holds, but the same is true of the emperor himself. Polybius is capable of taking this minimal distance from his office, acknowledging that in some sense he is not really, objectively the proper man for

⁶⁶ Dio Cass. 61.29.3.

⁶⁷ Though of course it does prove that, too. Bartsch, *Actors in the Audience: Theatricality and Doublespeak from Nero to Hadrian*: 98-147.

this job. In the same way, he suggests that he knows that the emperor is not the proper man, either. That Claudius did not punish Polybius for implying such a thing in a very public setting proves how little what Polybius said undermined the authority of both as actors in these offices. Claudius could enact the authority of the principate even in spite of the general awareness throughout society that he was perhaps in some sense not the exclusively elect man for this position. This is characteristic of Claudius' regime, and it marks off an important difference between his principate and that of Gaius, his predecessor, who seems to have fully identified with his divine status.⁶⁸

In these circumstances, Atkinson's third criterion for establishing an ironic reading of the *Ad Polybium* can be approached in another light. Normally, it is assumed that, if Seneca layered his text with irony, then this must have somehow represented an attack on the principate, or at least it could be read as a subversive text.⁶⁹ If irony represents not the subversive opposition to Claudius and the freedmen in his service, but rather somehow characterizes a deeper solidarity among the trusted and loyal inner circle upon which he relied, then Seneca's irony may have a different function with respect to its audience. In those places where Seneca's irony is detectable, I argue, that feature of his text is not in itself subversive or hostile to the regime, but rather represents Seneca's attempts to show himself as an insider, as one of the few who belong in the emperor's

⁶⁸ See, for instance, Josiah Osgood, *Claudius Caesar: Image and Power in the Early Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011): 74, 138-40, 254-55; C. J. Simpson, "The Cult of the Emperor Gaius," *Latomus* 40, no. 3 (1981): 489-511.

⁶⁹ Cf. section 4.3.2 above.

company. He is capable of playing the game, and therefore would be an asset if brought back from exile.

But this is wherein the problem with Seneca lies. It is not his irony, but rather his sincerity that makes him suspect. It is awkward and uncomfortable to read in this text the words of a defeated man writing from exile to praise the virtues of the ruler who sent him into exile. He is essentially the wrong subject for this discourse. Associating himself with the political insiders in this way can only be received by those insiders as unwelcome, since no one wants to be too closely tied to a man who has fallen out of favor. Lacan coined the term “extimacy” to mark the way in which a point of identification external to the self also comes to mark the most interior spaces of the self like the stain of a foreign body.⁷⁰ I hold that the relationship between Seneca and Polybius, or between Seneca and Claudius, can be defined as extimate in this sense: though it is certainly disturbing how deeply the psychology of Seneca or Polybius depends upon an idealized image of Claudius, it is equally disturbing to the functioning of the ideology that supports Claudius’ claim to the principate how deeply Seneca identifies with that ideology. Žižek has labelled the wrong subject's identification with the highest ideals of a regime as “overidentification:” the effect of this strategy in this case is to demonstrate the ultimately undesirable and even disturbing presence of the emperor’s intrusion into every

⁷⁰ Jacques-Alain Miller, "Extimacy," *The Symptom* 9 (2008): 1-10.

aspect of Roman life.⁷¹ The reader is forced to ask, paraphrasing Žižek's rhetorical question, what kind of a republic is this, in which the supreme Leader himself has to dispense advice on avoiding distress?⁷² In other words, the *princeps*' "intervention in everyday life" that Seneca stages awakens the imperial subjects to the reality that they have lost their last thread of psychological independence of the emperor.⁷³ The ideology appears a little too real in this light, so that Seneca's readers are forced to reckon with their discontentment at their own dependence upon the imperial sovereign.

Following this line of thought, I argue that in the *Ad Polybium* Seneca represents himself as the wrong subject to support two different discursive practices, or, to put it another way, he is the bare life that remains after two failed subjectivizations. On the one hand, he is an improper *consolator*, who contorts the traditional form of the *consolatio* by working toward a consolation of the self, so that the text necessarily loses sight of its main object, consoling Polybius. On the other, he fails as the proper subject of imperial

⁷¹ It should be clarified that overidentification does not simply denote the excessive investment of a subject in the ideology that defines him or her. The external point of identification, as in Seneca's case the emperor's sovereign power, also intrudes into the subjectivity of the identifying subject, what is "in you more than you" in Žižek's often repeated phrase. The subject both actively overidentifies with the external object of ideology, but he is also rendered passive as the object of a process of subjectivization. The overidentifying subject is an identity of opposites, two terms that necessarily occur together and define one another even as they inevitably express an antagonism.

⁷² His commentary is on the Bukharin trial and its meaning for the ideology supporting Stalin's regime during the period of his show-trials. He writes, "This implicit acknowledgement of impotence [the regime's use of show-trials to conceal its inefficiency in producing the resources necessary to everyday life] is also the hidden truth of the divinization of the Stalinist Leader into a Supreme Genius who can give advice on almost any topic, from how to repair a tractor to how to cultivate flowers: what this Leader's intervention in everyday life means is that things do not function on the most everyday level—what kind of country is this, in which the supreme Leader himself has to dispense advice about how to repair tractors?" Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?*: 120.

⁷³ Ibid.

ideological discourse, insofar as he has lost all social ties upon going into exile. In other words, he fails to become the subject capable of delivering a philosophical consolatory discourse, so long as he remains fixed in the subject position of an exile. But before I proceed to a demonstration of this reading through analysis of the text itself, it will first be necessary to account for the series of events that led to Seneca's exile, the condition in which one finds him at the beginning of this text.

4.3.3. Historical and Political Context of Seneca's Composition, I: Julians and Claudians

A series of decisive events following upon Claudius' accession to the principate condition the circumstances in which Seneca composed the *Ad Polybium*. Josiah Osgood has most recently thought through the challenges presented to Claudius upon his acclamation by the Praetorians who assassinated Caligula:

While the new Leader [Claudius]...was Caligula's kinsman and, more importantly, a member of the dynastic house established by Augustus, he had neither been adopted by any earlier emperor, nor shared many honors with them, nor (it seems) been named chief heir of any of them, the main formulas Augustus had established for promoting a smooth succession of power; he was neither a member of the Julian family nor a Caesar, as the other actual, or designated, successors of Augustus were.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Osgood, *Claudius Caesar*: 11. I have relied heavily upon this resource because it seems to me the most thorough and up to date study of Claudius' principate. Osgood's study tries to avoid the representation of Claudius' rule found in the earlier scholarship that shows him to be largely an incompetent fool, and that found in Momigliano and Graves who rehabilitated Claudius' image in different ways, by studying the political situation that conditioned Claudius' rule: "he was the first emperor of Rome whose selection might seem to rest on no authority whatever..." Ibid.; Barbara Levick, *Claudius* (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1990): 44-45.

In fact, it was far from obvious that Claudius, essentially an unknown within the dynastic family, would be the next *princeps*. Unlike the men whose service in command of legions marked them with what was arguably the second most important marker of imperial qualification, Claudius had absolutely no military credentials.⁷⁵ Claudius could have compensated this deficiency with an official claim to inheritance of the principate, but, as Osgood rightly points out, this simply was not available to Claudius.⁷⁶ With the untimely assassination of Caligula while he was still very young and not thinking of his legacy, the control of the government reverted to the consuls and the Republic was at least notionally restored for one night.⁷⁷ But for the praetorians Caligula's death left a void to be filled. Claudius was unknown and in no obvious sense the one legitimate heir. Thus he had to establish himself over all other contenders for the highest position of authority.⁷⁸ For,

⁷⁵ Osgood, *Claudius Caesar*: 11. The praetorians gave him some legitimacy in this capacity, but the invasion of Britain, which is best understood as an attempt to display Claudius' role as a military leader capable of completing the unfinished business of the granddaddy of all Roman emperors, Julius Caesar himself, shows that Claudius had to develop this deficiency in his public image long after his acclamation. It is difficult to overstate the importance of this real base of imperial power in the command of military forces.

⁷⁶ Augustus had established Tiberius as his successor through adoption, and Caligula, who had also been adopted into the Julian family and thus benefited in the same way from this connection to Augustus, had also seemed a happy alternative to Tiberius, at least when he came to power. *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ "Accordingly Cn. Sentius Saturninus and Q. Pomponius Secundus, the consuls then in office, summoned the Senate to the Capitol, deliberately avoiding the Curia Julia because of its name. Saturninus congratulated the *patres* on the return of liberty and law, which had been lost when Caesar the dictator came to power and never restored under the arbitrary despotism of his successors. The ninety-year rule of the Caesars was over; it was proposed that their memory be abolished and their temples pulled down." T. P. Wiseman, "Calpurnius Siculus and the Claudian Civil War," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 72 (1982): 59.

⁷⁸ "...even shortly before Caligula's assassination in AD 41, the notion that Claudius might be proclaimed emperor – as he was, by the Praetorians – would have been unsettling. While the new Leader (to give one English equivalent) was Caligula's kinsman and, more importantly, a member of the dynastic house established by Augustus, he had neither been adopted by any earlier emperor, nor shared many honors with

even if he had not desired to take power, Cassius Chaerea and the other praetorians who assassinated Caligula had forced Claudius to act when they acclaimed him as emperor; had another contender come to power, the praetorians' actions would have sent Claudius to his death as a co-conspirator—whether he was one or not.⁷⁹

The praetorian guards' oath of allegiance did much to establish Claudius' legitimacy though. With their act, he became an *imperator*, an important first name of any emperor, and it was their support that guaranteed Claudius' recognition by the senate, whose members could choose only between a civil war that they would certainly lose and acquiescence to the praetorians.⁸⁰ The senators recognized Claudius with an array of symbolic powers, such as legal *imperium* over the provinces and their armies, tribunician power and its associated inviolability, membership in numerous priestly *collegia* and the

them, nor (it seems) been named chief heir of any of them, the main formulas Augustus has established for promoting a smooth succession of power; he was neither a member of the Julian family nor a Caesar, as the other actual, or designated successors of Augustus were. Caligula, only twenty-eight years old, had left no clear plans at all for what was to happen. Members of the Senate, appalled by the young man's final months of rule, contemplated a restoration of the Republic, or a candidate of more proven competence than Claudius. In Spain with three legions was C. Appius Junius Silanus, whose extra first name proclaimed ancestry in another branch of the Claudian clan; in Dalmatia, with two, L. Arruntius Camillus Scribonianus, descendant of Pompey, Sulla, and the Furius Camillus enshrined in the legendary history of Rome; in Upper Germany, with four or five, Ser. Sulpicius Galba, who did become emperor in AD 68." Osgood, *Claudius Caesar*: 11.

⁷⁹ Osgood is at least open to the possibility that Claudius was in fact a co-conspirator with the praetorians who assassinated Caligula. *Ibid.*, 30.

⁸⁰ Osgood, citing Joseph. *AJ* 19.164, says that the senators shunned the praetorians' decision for as long as they had military forces, but that with these scattered the senators capitulated to the praetorians' election of Claudius. *Ibid.* See also Dio Cass. 60.1.2.

office of *pontifex maximus*, honors such as the oak leaves that decorated a soldier who had saved a citizen in battle, and the identifying titles “*Augustus*” and “*Caesar*.”⁸¹

Claudius’ initial strategy was to secure his position by seeking amicable relations with all parties involved. For the *senatus populusque Romanus*, Claudius offered amnesty to his opposition, remission of taxes, dismissal of the previous ruler's treason trials, the recall of exiles,⁸² and the Theater of Pompey was rededicated, with games held in honor of the event.⁸³ To win the legions’ confidence, Osgood emphasizes that Claudius had to find the finances necessary for securing military loyalty. These were to be found in the old treasury of Rome in the Temple of Saturn and in the treasury established by Augustus in his will for paying military pensions. Both accounts were managed by the emperor’s “personal staff,” the freedmen and slaves attached to the *domus* of the Julian family on the Palatine. This last constituency, the freedmen and slaves on the Palatine, had an essential function within the administrative apparatus as the bearers of knowledge essential to the day-to-day operation of the empire.⁸⁴ Above all, they knew to whom payments had to go in the far reaches of the empire. By swiftly moving into the position of the master in the august house, Claudius not only accessed the revenues he needed to

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁸² Dio Cass. 60.3.1; Suet. *Claud.* 11.1.

⁸³ Suet. *Claud.* 21.1; Dio Cass. 60.6.8-9.

⁸⁴ The ascendancy of freedmen such as Polybius must be understood in this perspective. Their loyalty to the emperor was reliable in a way that no senator or equestrian could be trusted. Osgood, *Claudius Caesar*: 38-41; Levick, *Claudius*: 47-51.

secure the military's loyalty, he also virtually guaranteed the persistence of the monarchical regime, on which the advancement of the freedmen depended.

Osgood highlights a singular difficulty in Claudius' seizure of the august house. As a descendant of Livia, Claudius had a rightful place within the first family, but in private law he did not have a legitimate claim on possession of the *domus* on the Palatine, which belonged to the Julians. The palace should therefore have gone to Caligula's heirs, had Chaerea and the other praetorians not already dispatched their lives, or to Caligula's siblings, among whom Julia Livilla and Julia Agrippina had recently been recalled from exile during Claudius' goodwill campaign.⁸⁵ However, the Augustan *domus* was designed as sacred property that acted at once as a private estate for the family of Augustus and as a public estate for the *pontifex maximus*, the high priest of Rome. If the sisters of Caligula did have a rightful private claim, at the very least, to the additions that Caligula had made to the properties of the *princeps* on the Palatine hill, that claim was subsumed within the zone of indeterminacy that had opened up between private and public space. Such was the result of the state of exception that the principate both overcame and preserved in

⁸⁵ However, Osgood explains that in accordance with public law it could perhaps have been determined that Claudius had some claim to the Palatine estates of the imperial family as *pontifex maximus*, which title Claudius had received from the Senate. Osgood cites Dio Cassius, who recorded that Augustus had "made his entire estate public property" ("ὁ δὲ Αὐγούστος τὴν οἰκίαν...ἐδημόσιωσε πᾶσαν," 55.12.5), either because its completion had been financed by the public, or because Augustus was the "ἀρχιτέρας," the "high priest." What Osgood does not say is that the purpose clause clarifying these two possible explanations applies in either case, so that Augustus made his estate public, "ἵν' ἐν τοῖς ἰδίοις ἅμα καὶ ἐν τοῖς κοινοῖς οἰκοίῃ," "in order that he might dwell at once in private and in public estates."

itself.⁸⁶ What was unprecedented in Claudius' claim of the Julian properties is the displacement of Julian authority, and therefore the formation of a new Julio-Claudian dynasty. Though the Praetorian Guard had thrown the state into a kind of confusion in which no normal legal resolution could resolve the crisis, Claudius' action in taking possession of the Julian properties definitively transformed the principate from the rightful inheritance of a son taking over his father's place in society to a position that could be occupied by anyone powerful enough to challenge the reigning emperor. With Claudius, a void opens behind the power of the principate, so that no proper name, no lineage going back to Venus through the Julian line, defines his sovereign power; rather, it was rooted in nothing so much as in the necessity that his position remain occupied by someone. It is as if all of the determinate ties to Roman Republican law fell away and *auctoritas* alone defined his position.

4.3.4. Historical and Political Context of Seneca's Composition, II: Claudius' Trial System

One of the ways that Claudius tried to maintain himself in his unstable position was to broaden his judicial presence, and Seneca was just one of the many who went on trial as this program took form. In the ancient sources and much modern scholarship, Claudius is represented as a leader possessed of a powerful enthusiasm for holding

⁸⁶ Agamben, *State of Exception*: 67-69. On these pages, Agamben refers to Suet. *Aug.* 99.

courts.⁸⁷ One may also understand his action, though, as an attempt to compensate his lack of authority in other areas, such as public reputation, military experience, and a proper dynastic inheritance of the Julian title, with visibility and daily action in another important arena of imperial authority. This would explain two features of Claudius' persistence in this role. First, though the frequent rhythm and somewhat arbitrary character of Claudius' courts roused general resentment, so that it was the most memorably troubling aspects of his reign, Claudius nevertheless persisted in this activity and expanded the judicial authority of the principate by creating continuous courts that no longer followed the traditional republican calendar of sessions.⁸⁸ Such inflexibility could merely be the kind of eccentric behavior that readers of ancient history since time immemorial have come to expect of the interpretation of Claudius' reign, but Osgood's presentation of Claudius consistently shows him to have been a more thoughtful and prudent ruler than the tradition has represented. His expansion of the principate's judicial authority could also have been motivated and strategic, an attempt to situate himself in public view as the leader. Besides, the eccentric behavior itself may also be explained by the public face of the show-trials, in which, after all, even the *princeps* himself, despite his authority, was not above calculated performance. One case in particular, the details of which Suetonius does not share, shows this with great clarity. Suetonius tells of one

⁸⁷ Hurley provides a helpful summary of the judicial systems of Rome and the emperor's role within it, together with the major bibliography for trials in the imperial period in Donna W. Hurley, ed. *Suetonius: Divus Claudius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 116-18.

⁸⁸ Suet. *Claud.* 23.1.

occasion when Claudius offered a written decision, stating, “I decide in favor of whoever has told the truth” (*Claud.* 15.3). The biographer dismisses this behavior as Claudius’ typically strange manner in court. However, it is more likely that, in some cases, Claudius could not choose one side over another without bringing himself into a dangerous political position, so that his decision would be best left undecided. In this one instance, at least, he seems to have resorted to the dissimulation that one would more typically expect from a courtier than from the man who holds court himself. Whatever the details may have been, this decision shows quite clearly that even Claudius was constrained in his performance in court, so that it is not enough to dismiss the trials held under Claudius as an eccentric trait of his personality. One must appreciate their function as a strategy, not entirely within the control of the *princeps*, by which Claudius could exercise power in circumstances where his legitimacy as a successor to the Julian legacy remained in doubt.

The relevant show-trials for Seneca’s *Ad Polybium* are two: Seneca’s own trial and Julia Livilla’s. Inevitably, the repressed Julian dynasty, persisting in the form of Caligula’s two Julian sisters, Julia Agrippina and Julia Livilla, returned to challenge Claudius.⁸⁹ He had recalled them from exile shortly after he came to power,⁹⁰ but it quickly became clear that each had their own designs for advancement.⁹¹ Julia Agrippina

⁸⁹ In the end, the dismissal of one sister and the later promotion of the other show that, though Claudius had redefined the institution that he held, he could not ensure that the Julian legacy, upon which his ascendancy depended and against which his ascendancy also had to define itself, would remain only a memory from the past.

⁹⁰ Dio Cass. 60.4.1.

⁹¹ On these sisters, see further Dio Cass. 59.22.5, Suet. *Calig.* 24.3, 29.1, 39.1; *Claud.* 9.1.

would eventually displace Messalina, Claudius' wife from the time before his accession.⁹² Julia Livilla, by contrast, posed a threat almost immediately after Claudius' recalled her from exile. Dio reports that Julia Livilla had roused the ire of Messalina by shunning her, paying her no favor, and spending too much time in Claudius' presence.⁹³ This would perhaps not have been such a problem, Dio suggests, if Livilla had not also been especially beautiful. Accused of committing adultery, she was found guilty and sent into exile once again, where before long she was put to death by starvation. But this accusation must have been pretext obscured through ideology, a verdict introduced for the sake of protecting Claudius and Messalina's dynastic claims. Osgood observes that Livilla's husband Marcus Vinicius had been a "potential candidate for emperor," and Livilla herself may have been plotting to remove Claudius and Messalina, or else she at least must have been accused of such intrigue.⁹⁴

It is among such dynastic struggles that Seneca returns to the frame, since he was implicated in Julia Livilla's alleged affair, and therefore tried before the Senate. Her trial conforms to this account of Claudius' judicial activity: by having this prominent member

⁹² Agrippina convinced Claudius of Messalina's disloyalty and he had her executed in 48 CE (She also organized Seneca's recall from exile at that time; cf. Tac. *Ann.* 12.8.2). Agrippina then situated herself as the new wife of Claudius by the next year, and she established her son Nero as Claudius' adoptive son and heir (over Britannicus, Claudius' natural born son). On Suetonius' account, Agrippina and her son afterwards conspired to assassinate Claudius, so that in the end the power reverted to a Julian whose membership in the dynastic family was unquestionable (Suet. *Claud.* 44-45).

⁹³ Dio Cass. 60.8.5.

⁹⁴ Wiseman mentions him in connection with the urban cohorts in particular, who supported a *princeps* in concept, but did not want Claudius. Wiseman suggests that Vinicius himself decided that he would not seek to challenge Claudius. Wiseman, "Calpurnius Siculus," 60; Osgood, *Claudius Caesar*: 42-43.

of Gaius' immediate family tried, exiled, and eventually put to death, Claudius exercised power over her in such a way that established publicly his possession of the principate and her and her husband's subjection to his authority. Seneca, by contrast, was what we now call a "fall guy"—the man to whom, perhaps even randomly, Julia Livilla's guilt had to cling, since an extramarital affair requires at least two guilty parties.⁹⁵ Even if Seneca had been innocent of this crime, there is a recognizable court practice of what one might call forced infidelity: because of the law's severity toward this act, conditions in which illegal infidelity became an enforced rule of proper belonging at court took shape, so that highly positioned figures could control those in lower positions through forcing them to participate in extramarital affairs, or at least spreading the rumor that they had participated in them.⁹⁶ In this way, the exposure to potential accusation that such participation in a real or fictive crime entailed became the bond that held together the opposing divisions of the court in their struggle to maintain or advance their positions.⁹⁷

One of the curious parallels in the lives of Seneca and Polybius is that Polybius himself

⁹⁵ Osgood disputes whether he was accused as the other guilty party or as an accomplice. The two possibilities emerge from the differing accounts in the ancient sources. In one place, Seneca is "*consci*us" of Julia's infidelities (Schol. ad Juv. 5.109), but according to others he is himself accused of adultery as well (Tac. *Ann.* 13.42.2-3; Dio Cass. 60.8.5, 61.10.1). Osgood indicates that Seneca may have been accused of committing adultery at a later date with another woman of high-standing, not Julia Livilla herself. However, this is speculation, since there is no evidence to support the position that another incident had occurred, in which Seneca was implicated. He was certainly implicated somehow in Julia Livilla's adultery, and that much is worth preserving.

Osgood's hesitation seems to rest on the testimony from the scholia to Juvenal. Note that *consci*us, used as a substantive, can indicate a conspirator or a participant in a plot (cf. Nep. *Dion* 9.1, Quint. 4.2.48, Suet. *Dom.* 10). In the case of an affair, this must mean that Seneca was the other partner in crime.

⁹⁶ Dio Cass. 60.14, 60.18, 60.22.3-5, 60.27.4, 60.31; Suet. *Claud.* 26.

⁹⁷ Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*: 79-90; Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?*: 88-140.

eventually fell victim to this same practice, when Messalina, on whom most of the ancient historians focus their accounts of this practice and with whom Polybius was reportedly having an affair, “betrayed” him and had him executed.⁹⁸ Just as Polybius, Seneca need not have been involved in a plot or an affair at all, since such accusations had come to be an important tool for controlling access and participation in the life of the court. When Seneca found himself on trial for this affair, it hardly mattered what he had actually done or not done. He only had to be a likely suspect.

But Seneca’s text tells its own story about his trial, however brief that story may be. In fact, no ancient source gives more information on the unfolding of this trial than Seneca's *Ad Polybium* itself, where at paragraph 13 Seneca allows some of the details to appear:

Nec enim sic me deiecit, ut nollet erigere, immo ne deiecit quidem, sed impulsus a Fortuna et cadentem sustinuit et in praeceps euntem leniter divinae manus usus moderatione deposuit: deprecatus est pro me senatum et vitam mihi non tantum dedit sed etiam petit. Viderit: qualem volet esse, existimet causam meam; vel iustitia eius bonam perspiciat vel clementia faciat bonam: utrumque in aequo mihi eius beneficium erit, sive innocentem me scierit esse, sive voluerit. (13.2-3)

He [Claudius] has not so cast me down, that he would not want me to rise up again—or he has not cast me down at all, but he has supported me, when I have been struck by Fortune and I have fallen, and, as I was rushing headlong, the

⁹⁸ Dio Cass. 60.31.2. The crucial word here is “διαβάλλω,” which I translate as “betray,” though it may well mean “slander” or “wrongfully accuse.” I prefer “betray” because Dio says that Messalina did this, even though Polybius was having an affair with her. There is no obvious reason why he would bring up the affair, if it were not relevant to her betrayal of him.

Dio’s dismay at her betrayal is unwarranted. The affair must be understood instead as an attempt to control Polybius and the later betrayal as the disposal of someone who had no longer become useful. At this same moment, Messalina was designing to take a second husband and displace Claudius, to whom Polybius owed his prominent position and to whom he must have remained quite loyal.

application [*usus*] of his divine hand has gently put me in my place [*deposuit*] with restraint. He interceded with the Senate on my behalf and not only gave me life but also petitioned it for me. May he have looked into it: let him judge my case to be of what sort he would will it to be, may his justice determine that it is good or his clemency make it good. Both in equal measure will be his favor to me, whether he will have known that I am innocent, or he will have willed that it be so.

This passage establishes that Seneca was tried before the Senate, and further that it was at least formally the Senate that found him guilty of a crime severe enough to merit death. It also shows that Claudius' intervened to protect Seneca, so that his sentence was reduced to banishment. Mystifying language clouds this passage, making it difficult to discern precisely what happened. In the first sentence, Seneca introduces the idea that he has been "cast down" by Claudius, but not so finally that he must be utterly hopeless for his future. In other words, as the passage goes on to reveal, Seneca claims that Claudius has punished Seneca, but the emperor has not put him to death. But Seneca withdraws this idea as quickly as he advanced it, shifting his claim to the position that Claudius had no responsibility whatsoever for his downfall; "rather" ("*immo*"), he says, it was Fortuna who cast him down, and Claudius who held him up in these circumstances. Claudius is then Seneca's protector, and Fortuna has put the philosopher in a position where punishment is nothing more than correction.⁹⁹ However, unlike in live speech, in which medium Seneca could have made this backtracking seem to be a correction, in a written document it cannot be simply so regarded. Seneca could have completely erased his first

⁹⁹ Fortuna's role in this text is just as problematic as it is in Boethius' consolation. I return to this problem below. See Section 4.3.13.

misspoken attribution of his downfall to Claudius, if that was not his intended claim. Instead, he has left both his seemingly misspoken attribution and a correction of it, so that he has blamed the emperor for his downfall, allowed that to stand, and then shifted that blame away from the emperor onto Fortuna. Seneca explains further that Claudius' power to intervene with Fortuna, to check her by his *dispositio* (“*deposuit*”) and the “*divinae manus usus*,” the use of his divine hand, saved him from utter ruin. As we saw with Boethius, a divine figure enters the picture as the agent of fortune’s defeat; just as Philosophia had introduced the Neoplatonic god and an immanent *dispositio* of divine activity in the world, in order to displace Boethius’ desire from Fortuna to the one, true good, so here does Seneca introduce Claudius as the god who saves him from his “headlong rush” into ruinous fortune.

But this is not the whole story. Continuing with this paragraph, Seneca goes on from there to clarify that this figure of double fault, the double accusation first of Claudius and then of Fortuna, expresses in terms of cosmic justice what actually happened in a juridical space. Though Seneca is not generous with details, certain facts are undoubtedly clear. Seneca says that the emperor “not only gave life” to him “but also petitioned for it” (“*vitam mihi non tantum dedit sed etiam petit*”). This seems to involve a historical claim that the senate had condemned Seneca to death before Claudius

intervened to reduce the sentence.¹⁰⁰ But it also involves an ideological claim, that Claudius had “given” Seneca his life, as if he fathered him.¹⁰¹ Claudius stands in here as a sort of surrogate parent, greater than Seneca's actual parents, who may have given Seneca life but could not create the conditions in which the survival of life is possible in the first place.¹⁰² Though these two levels can be distinguished in analysis as the factual circumstances of Seneca’s trial and Seneca’s ideological presentation of that trial, it would be wrong to regard them as distinct and irrelevant to one another, a merely literary decoration of historical truth with ideological coding. The ideological claim is rather immanent to the historical event, and conditions the unfolding of the trial. The crucial ideological point that this passage makes clear is that Claudius’ supreme power over life and death, the ability not only to take it but also to grant it, secures for him the authority

¹⁰⁰ Giardina argues on the basis of this passage that Claudius did not appear in court as *princeps senatus* when Seneca was tried, that he was at least “formally” unaware of the circumstances of Seneca’s trial. Substantially, he may have actually orchestrated the trial, but he maintained distance from it publicly. She holds that a senator, at the urging of Messalina, must have introduced the charges against Seneca. Andrea Giardina, “Storie riflesse: Claudio e Seneca,” in *Seneca e il suo tempo*, ed. Piergiorgio Parroni (Rome: Salerno editrice, 2000): 77-79.

Still, Seneca holds Claudius responsible for the decision, even if he seems to place the blame on “Fortune,” so there must have been some basis for assuming his knowledge of and even responsibility for the trial and its decisions. Besides, one way or another Claudius did intervene to overrule the Senate’s decision on Seneca’s life.

¹⁰¹ Giardina disregards the introduction of Fortuna as the agent of Seneca’s downfall, considering only the Senate and the *princeps* as parties at fault. *Ibid.*, 76-77.

¹⁰² Compare this with Seneca’s remark immediately after the prosopopoeia of Claudius, where Seneca refers to Claudius as the “*publicus parens*,” the “public parent” (16.4). This was an alternative to the formal title *pater patriae*, awarded not only to Augustus (Aug. *RG* 35.1), but also to Cicero (Cic. *Sest.* 121).

to overrule the Senate's legal decision, so that they must acquiesce to Claudius' "justice" and "clemency,"¹⁰³ even when it does not agree with their own.

This is the sovereign decision at its purest. Seneca proclaims that the truth of his case, whether justice is served by Claudius' reduction of Seneca's sentence, in which case Seneca would be objectively innocent and wrongfully missentenced, or Claudius' clemency reduces Seneca's sentence, so that Seneca would be objectively guilty but worthy of mercy, rests entirely upon Claudius' will ("*qualem volet esse, existimet causam meam*"). From that will there emanates the authority and the power to overturn the Senate's decision on Seneca's life, by establishing an exception to the law in his case. Claudius' decision on his life, the exception that he made to the law, allows the emperor to stand above the Senate in a way that only a genuine *princeps* can. Far from a confession, this text indicates rather Seneca's recognition of Claudius' authority, and even more his absolute subjection to it.¹⁰⁴ Claudius' will makes even the objective facts such as they must be, so that, if Seneca had tried to maintain some subjective distance from the decision on his life that Claudius advances, he would nevertheless have been objectively innocent or guilty only according to Claudius' will.¹⁰⁵ But Seneca has foregone any attempt to dispute or challenge the power that Claudius holds over his own

¹⁰³ Perhaps it is of some importance that neither of these imperial virtues were celebrated by Claudius in the issues released upon his accession. J. Rufus Fears, "The Cult of Virtues and Roman Imperial Ideology," *ANRW* II.17.2 (1981): 893-95. Their choice is of course natural and appropriate for Seneca's situation.

¹⁰⁴ Fantham and Rudich each interpret this passage as a confession. Fantham, "Dialogues of Displacement," 190; Rudich, *Dissidence and Literature under Nero*: 32.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Žižek's remarks on the Bukharin trial in Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?*

life. He assumes his objective guilt as inherent to the logic of the show trial, as a point ultimately beyond contention.

4.3.5. Seneca's Compromised Voice and the Questionable Ground of his Discourse

If the *Ad Marciam* shows Seneca attempting to make his way among the philosophical and literary circles of the senatorial class,¹⁰⁶ the *Ad Polybium* establishes that he had not been able to protect himself by building these relationships, since, in the end, it was the senators who punished Seneca with death and Claudius who intervened to reduce his punishment to relegation.¹⁰⁷ The philosopher, in writing this text, took no stand against Claudius' decision, and instead he fully accepts as given in his discourse that Claudius possesses the freedom to dispose in accordance with his will the trial's decision, its consequences, and even its grounding facts. Seneca thus shows himself in this text as a

¹⁰⁶ See section 4.2 above.

¹⁰⁷ Seneca's punishment has most often been described as *relegatio*, even among the ancient sources, but this milder form of *deportatio* did not apply to capital cases and did not involve loss of citizenship (Dig. 48.1.2; 48.19.28.1). *Deportatio* is therefore more appropriate: "Banishment to an island or a desert oasis was a capital punishment in Roman law; in the Principate (at the latest from Trajan's time, soon after AD 100) it replaced the *aqua et igni interdictio*, which had replaced the death penalty for upper-class citizens towards the end of the Republic. The *aqua et igni interdictio* and *deportatio* involved lifelong loss of citizenship rights and property. As the offender had not escaped penalty by voluntary flight into exile, banishment—generally to a quite specific location (Dig. 48.22.6,1)—became part of the verdict. As the literal meaning of *deportatio* implies, this usually meant that the person found guilty was forcibly transported to the place of banishment. Commutation of the sentence was possible with imperial clemency. In that event citizenship rights and the right to own property could be restored (*postliminium*). A milder form of *deportatio*, intentionally of more limited duration, was the *relegatio*. The *deportatio* was imposed for the most varied range of offences: from 'political offences' such as *lèse majesté* (*maiestas*) and various forms of abuse of office (e.g. *repetundae* and *peculatus*) to murder, kidnapping or sexual crimes. Even adultery (*adulterium*) was sometimes punished by *deportatio*." Schiemannt Gottfried, "Deportatio," in *Brill's New Pauly*, ed. Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Scheider (Tübingen: Brill Online, 2014, 2006).

product of Claudius' decision on his life, as bare life, in Agamben's sense, exposed to a kind of living death by sovereign power. By assuming this status, or rather this complete lack of status, as the situation of his text, Seneca frees himself to use that non-status as the condition for his text's production. It simply would not have been possible for Seneca to compose this text if Claudius had not sent him into exile, delivering him over to a living death outside of proper social relations, yet not beyond them.¹⁰⁸ Seneca receives bare life as a welcome term in an ideological exchange, and foregrounds his own abjection in order to situate his voice with respect to the production of this text.

It is important to see how Seneca's self-appointed task of truth-telling is compromised by his misfortunate downfall and its effects on his character.¹⁰⁹ The consolatory task Seneca would perform requires of him not only that he not mince words, that he tell Polybius the uncomfortable truth that the bereaved must hear, but also that he have impressive self-possession, even self-mastery, as the ethical condition upon which his discourse depends. A philosopher would hardly command a convincing voice of exhortation, if he were not able to overcome his own sense of dejection. As I have already mentioned, though, Seneca composed the *Ad Polybium* in the period immediately following his trial, after which Claudius confined him to Corsica. According to his own

¹⁰⁸ Agamben connects his analysis of *homo sacer* to the scapegoat, the werewolf, and the bandit. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*: 104-11. He treats exile in particular on p. 110, emphasizing an ambiguity that conditions exile through its long history of legal transformations, he cites Cicero's declaration that exile is not a penalty, but a refulge from punishment (*Pro Cael.*, 34). He writes, "What has been banned is delivered over to its own separateness and, at the same time, consigned to the mercy of the one who abandons it—at once excluded and included, removed and at the same time captured."

¹⁰⁹ See my discussion on parrhesia in the context of Boethius' *Consolation*, pp. 85-95, and section 4.2.

self-representation in the *Ad Polybium*, this forced removal from Rome and confinement on a distant island had ruinous effects on Seneca's ethical composure—or so he at least feigns. His response to his exile potentially undermines the entire task in which Seneca is involved, so that writing a consolation to Polybius would be quite out of the question.

At two points in this consolation, paragraph 2 and paragraph 18, the philosopher draws attention to his predicament. At 2.1, the text reads as follows:

Illud quoque te non minimum adiuverit, si cogitaveris nihil profuturum dolorem tuum nec illi, quem desideras, nec tibi; noles enim longum esse, quod inritum est. Nam si quicquam tristitia profecturi sumus, non recuso quicquid lacrimarum fortunae meae superfuit tuae fundere; inveniam etiamnunc per hos exhaustos iam fletibus domesticis oculos quod effluat, si modo id tibi futurum bono est. Quid cessas? Conqueramur, atque adeo ipse hanc litem meam faciam...

This also will be to no small extent helpful to you, if you will consider that in no way will your grief be useful, neither to him, whom you miss, nor to you. Indeed, you would not want what is useless to last long. Now if we should gain anything by our sadness, I would not refuse to weep for your misfortune (*fortunae*) with whatever remains of the tears poured over my own. Even now I would find something to flow from these eyes now worn out by domestic lamentations, if only that could do some good for you. Why do you hesitate? Let us complain together, and thus I myself will make this dispute my own...

The first sentence simply utters a potentially consoling thought. There is no claim that the assertion is true here, only the suggestion that believing this, thinking that grief is useless, may help the bereaved to leave off his grieving. If the philosopher's goal is to reclaim self-mastery in a potentially destabilizing situation, such a thought may be helpful. The second sentence pushes this point further, stressing that one may terminate grieving precisely because it does neither the deceased nor the bereaved any good. Long-standing grief can certainly undermine one's sense of self-mastery, since it indicates dependence

on the lost other, over whom one has no power, so bringing this useless activity to its closure is best. Again, whether this is true or not is beside the point; such an argument may be helpful or useful (“*profuturum*”), and that is the criterion that Seneca has advanced in this paragraph. His next claim continues this line of reasoning, but does so in a way that allows Seneca to transition to the next move he will make in his text, offering a lamentation on behalf of Polybius’ bad *fortuna*. In other words, Seneca introduces himself into the argument, claiming that he too would weep for the bereaved Polybius, if there were some benefit in lamentation.¹¹⁰ This is not simply *recusatio* though, a gesture by which Seneca would dismiss weeping as useless and then pass to another, more consoling sentiment. Instead, he says that he has spent all his tears on “his own fortune” or his own “domestic lamentations” (“*fortunae meae...fletibus domesticis*”). Seneca then goes on to offer just that lamentation that he has rejected. Although Seneca admits that mourning, grief, and lamentation can in no way be helpful for Polybius or for his deceased brother, this does not stop this counselor from proceeding to encourage Polybius in this useless activity, even to participate in it himself. What follows is a long quotation, in which Seneca, in unison with Polybius, utters a litany against Fortuna (2.2-7), personified here as she was in Boethius’ text.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Thomas Kurth, *Senecas Trostschrift an Polybius, Dialog 11: ein Kommentar*, vol. 59, Beiträge zur Altertumskunde (Stuttgart and Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1994): 36-37; Johann, *Trauer und Trost*: 153-55; Rita Degl’Innocenti Pierini, "Motivi consolatorii e ideologia imperiale nella *Consolatio ad Polybium* di Seneca," in *Cultura e ideologia da Cicerone a Seneca*, ed. Alessandro Ronconi (Florence: Felice le monnier, 1981).

¹¹¹ See also sections 2.3.2 and 3.1.

I will return to this litany in a moment. For now, I emphasize that Seneca has cast himself in a dubious role. He may have started this paragraph with a few useful suggestions, but then he ignores his own advice and goes ahead with complaining, lamenting, and wailing in just the way that a moment before he had recommended Polybius should avoid. Furthermore, he has admitted that he has been so carried away by the ruin of his own house, that he can hardly spare any sympathy for the bereaved Polybius—as strange a comfort to the bereaved as ever there could be. Though Seneca will try to recover his initial position in the fourth paragraph, at least in this opening he has shown himself quite unreliable as a consoler, unfit for the task to which he has assigned himself.

This incompetence, whether feigned or real, is brought out much more poignantly in the final paragraph of this consolation. At 18.9, Seneca concludes all that he has said up to this point with one final comment on his own attempt at consoling Polybius:

Haec, utcumque potui, longo iam situ obsoleto et hebetato animo composui. Quae si aut parum respondere ingenio tuo aut parum mederi dolori videbuntur, cogita, quam non possit is alienae vacare consolationi, quem sua mala occupatum tenent, et quam non facile Latina ei homini verba succurrant, quem barbarorum inconditus et barbaris quoque humanioribus gravis fremitus circumsonat.

These things, in whatever way I could, I have composed in a distant region with a worn out and dulled mind. If they seem to answer too little to your intellect or to heal your grief too little, consider that a man cannot be free to attend to the consolation of another, if that man's own troubles keep him occupied, and consider that Latin words do not easily occur [*succurrant*] to that person, around whom the barbarians' confused grunting, harsh also to more civilized barbarians, resounds.

In these sentences, Seneca is far clearer about his compromised position. Surrounded by the natives of Corsica, whose language Seneca dismisses as “confused” and “harsh,” he observes that Polybius could hardly expect him to have retained in exile his former mastery of Latin expression.¹¹² The words no longer “*succurrant*,” “rush up” to him, as they did before. With a “dull” and “worn out” intellect, Seneca has done the best he could to bring some consolation to the bereaved, but he does not expect that he has succeeded. Finally, and most importantly for the logic of Seneca's discourse, he begs Polybius to consider that offering a consolation is practically impossible for someone preoccupied with his own miseries (“*cogita, quam non possit is alienae vacare consolationi...*”). This is the pretext, then, that excuses Seneca to end a letter supposedly concerned above all with the addressee's troubles by commenting upon his own lamentable isolation. Such strange aberrations from the course of therapeutic counsel can only be explained by the conditions that Seneca fails to meet as a consoler.¹¹³ As Foucault has emphasized and as Seneca's own invocation of Arius Didymus in the *Ad Marciam* indicate, to perform felicitously the task of a parrhesiast, one must not only speak the truth, one must also demonstrate the *ēthos* that equally supports one's position as a parrhesiast.¹¹⁴ Seneca fails to meet the basic ethical requirement and he openly admits it, so that the truth which he

¹¹² Following Fantham, "Dialogues of Displacement," 173-92.

¹¹³ Cf. Fantham's claim that Seneca's excuse here is “typical self-deprecation,” comparable to what one would find in Ovid, Catullus, or Horace, designed to excuse Seneca's potential failure as a consoler, fails to connect that dismal condition in which Seneca shows himself with the trial that appears briefly at 13, with Claudius' banishment. By ending with such a vivid portrayal of his own ruin, Seneca leaves the reader with this image of a ruined life most prominent in the mind. *Ibid.*, 191.

¹¹⁴ See pp. 40-48, and section 4.2.

speaks must be recognized as at best unreliable, worthy of cross-examination. I will return to the problem of Seneca's unreliable voice below, and suggest a deepening of this interpretation. For now, let it be enough to have observed that Seneca has presented himself as someone not exactly to be trusted, a consoler not really up to the task, and to have shown the emperor's role in the decision that has caused Seneca's ethical and psychological deterioration.

4.3.6. The Function of Fortuna

By the second paragraph of the surviving text and emphatically at the text's end, then, Seneca's own grief has intruded into the text and obscures his focus on the task at hand, consoling Polybius.¹¹⁵ How can this consolation from the point of greatest abjection be understood? The text makes a connection between the lamentation and the trial that now must be come into focus. At 13.2, as I have shown, Seneca provides two accounts of his downfall, the event that reduced him to this condition of inadequacy. On one account, the emperor Claudius caused his fall: by intervening with the Senate, who had sentenced Seneca to death, Claudius reduced Seneca's sentence but did not entirely forgive his crime, so that he went into exile on account of the crime of which the Senate found him guilty. On the other, Claudius did not do anything that could be considered cruel or merciless, and it was Fortuna who led Seneca into exile. Recalling that Seneca's

¹¹⁵ Wilson, "Seneca the Consoler," 94.

complaint from paragraph 2.1 addresses an apostrophe to the goddess Fortuna, who has attacked Polybius by depriving him of his dear brother, the course of consolatory therapy that Seneca advances in this text begins from the very goddess upon whom Seneca places the blame for his own miseries in the context of his discussion of his trial. It is this device, then, the introduction in each case of a personified Fortuna, that connects Seneca's execution and salvation to Polybius' grief for his deceased brother, and enables Seneca's shaky attempt at self-consolation to emerge from their juxtaposed miseries.¹¹⁶

Fortuna's imposing agency in this text ought to be met with surprise, since the Stoic dogma to which Seneca adhered famously advances a fatalism so complete that there can be no room for chance in the Stoic picture of the cosmos. Kajanto puts this problem well:

In Seneca, references to *fortuna* are perhaps more numerous and worked out in more detail than in any major Roman writer. This may seem unexpected. According to the Stoic doctrine adopted by Seneca in all its rigidity, everything that happens, down to the smallest details, has been predetermined by *fatum* or *series causarum*...It is problematic how immovable and inexorable Fate may be reconciled with a fickle power which is its very opposite.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ On Fortuna within the *Ad Polybium*, see Fantham, "Dialogues of Displacement," 190; Abel, *Bauformen*: 78. Cf. sections 2.2-2.3.

¹¹⁷ I. Kajanto, "Fortuna," *ANRW* II.17.1 (1981): 542. He is less on track in what follows, when he says, "It is, however, futile to expect excessive consistency in a writer like Seneca, who was not so much an original thinker as a disseminator of Stoic doctrines." This view of Seneca's work has fallen out of fashion to the extent that originality in the creation of new philosophical arguments is not the sole measure of a philosopher's worth, and an appreciation of literary method has shown how consistency may be achieved through a variety of strategies beyond discursive presentation bound by logical sequence. Kajanto is closer to the right track when he points out, "The ancient Stoics, who defined *tyche* as 'indiscernable cause', also asserted that 'the sage is unhurt by *tyche*.'" *ibid.*, 543. There is thus a perspectivism that conditions the perception of Fortuna, so that she may appear real to those advancing in wisdom, whereas the sage recognizes her non-existence, knowing the true causes of all things.

Elizabeth Asmis has recently treated the problematic agency of Fortuna in Seneca's kingdom of god, suggesting that Seneca was not the fatalist that his avowed Stoicism would lead one to expect.¹¹⁸ On her account, Seneca's Fortuna is a personification of oppositional circumstances, the figure against whom Seneca pits a "new Roman hero" who demonstrates his integrity by resisting the opposition that Fortuna represents.¹¹⁹ Asmis argues that, though Seneca accepts the commonly held Stoic position that only "persons who do not know the cause—ultimately god—attribute an event to fortune,"¹²⁰ and, further, he holds that Fortune, fate, and nature are all the same thing for Seneca, still

...he portrays fate in the guise of fortune, and fortune in turn as an antagonistic force that must be defeated by obedience to god. Fortune pops out, as it were, from the Stoic stream of fate as an adversary that assaults humans from the outside. Personified as a tyrant, moreover, fortune exercises a sway that contrasts with the beneficent rule of god. The virtuous person joins god, and fate, by conquering this enemy.¹²¹

So in sum, for those who are aspiring to the status of the sage, but have not arrived at this mode of existence, Fortuna appears to be a reality against whose tyrannical whims one must struggle, but from the point of view of the sage Fortuna appears to be nothing more than a delusional reflection of the aspirant's own limited psychology. Participation in the contest with Fortuna, treated by Asmis as a mode of political resistance, indicates that one is making progress in self-mastery toward virtue and the sage's horizon as much as it

¹¹⁸ Asmis, "Seneca on fortune and the kingdom of god."

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 115.

¹²⁰ She cites *SVF* II.965-967 and *Cic. Acad.* 1.29. Ibid., 117.

¹²¹ Ibid., 117-18. She goes on to explain that the Roman cult of Fortune probably shaped Seneca's presentation of Fortuna. It is more likely the Roman tradition of declamation that Seneca draws upon to recast Fortuna as a rebel and a tyrant, defiant of natural law.

shows one's distance from this ideal. This is why Seneca and Polybius perceive their losses, Polybius of his brother, Seneca of his citizenship at Rome, as Fortuna's assaults on their well being. Fortuna's domination of Seneca's discourse in the *Ad Polybium* is a marker of Polybius' and his own distance from the ideal of sagehood.

It is worth noting that, even as Asmis describes the importance of Fortuna in Seneca's texts, giving particular attention to the political role in which the goddess is cast, Asmis leaves aside the *Ad Polybium*, the text that most vocally associates the battle against Fortuna with real political power, the holder of the principate, Claudius. Though Asmis sees the virtuous struggle against Fortuna as a mode of republican resistance to the sovereign power of the principate, in the *Ad Polybium*, where the emperor himself is the great contender with Fortuna, resistance to Fortuna cannot equate with resistance to the emperor. This would mean that Claudius opposes himself by taking a strong stand against Fortuna's attacks on his family and friends. But how then can the politicization of Fortuna in the *Ad Polybium* be explained, if it does not stand to glorify a Republican hero as an exemplary opponent of Fortuna's assaults and of the sovereign power she represents? How may one understand the celebration of Claudius' courageous resistance, where one would more typically expect Socrates or Cato?

Rudich and Fantham, independently of one another, have suggested another way to understand Fortuna's role, but neither has fully developed the consequences of their

insight. Rudich observes that Fortuna acts a “key euphemism” in the *Ad Polybium*,¹²² and by describing her so he seems to make the same point as Fantham, who writes:

Instead of disparaging reproaches against Fortune, he now displaces onto the deity whatever in his punishment might have been attributed to Claudius (or Messalina), and makes of Claudius both a sufferer from bereavements inflicted by Fortune and a healer of the empire's distress, who has already mitigated Seneca's fate and so shown himself open to appeal.¹²³

In other words, Fantham argues that the introduction of Fortuna occludes the true, historical account of Seneca's trial. When at 13.2 Seneca both blames Claudius for striking him down and then switches his account so that Claudius actually protected him and Fortuna struck him, Seneca introduces into his text a cipher that conceals the role of the *princeps* in his downfall, and in fact brings Claudius much closer to the position of Seneca or Polybius as a fellow contender against the whims of Fortuna. It must be remembered, though, that it is Seneca who makes this switch, and that elsewhere in the text, as I have just argued, Seneca shows his own voice to have become unreliable and untrustworthy. This is what Fantham overlooks in her reading of the *Ad Polybium*: the author presents his persona as a broken and deluded man, so his crediting all that has gone wrong in his life to himself and his liaisons with Fortuna must seem to be, as it also appears in Boethius' text, the deceptive testimony of a deluded mind.¹²⁴

¹²² Rudich, *Dissidence and Literature under Nero*: 31.

¹²³ Fantham, "Dialogues of Displacement," 191.

¹²⁴ Fantham concludes that the “progressor's” mistake of identifying Fortuna as the cause of his suffering vanishes along the way, so that Seneca comes to show himself and Polybius wider horizons of meaning as the text draws towards its final arguments. *Ibid.*, 189. But then it is the conclusion of Seneca's text that most emphatically declares Seneca's incompetence as a consoler, presenting his remoteness from the center

Recognizing that Seneca cannot be trusted to provide an accurate account of the events that led to his punishment, one must understand that his discourse is the uncontrolled consolation of one in need of consolation himself. The introduction of Fortuna into the text not only links Seneca's grief to Polybius' loss of his brother, it also marks Seneca, from the point of view of the sage, as a rather poor Stoic progressor, and it stands as that progressor's best attempt at comprehending the true cause of his suffering. Seneca's testimony on his trial becomes unreliable because Claudius has relegated him to conditions in which his intelligence could plausibly be represented as having diminished and his self-mastery as having become dubious.¹²⁵ Thus he who has caused Seneca's suffering—the princeps who needed a fall guy to take out a rival claimant to his authority—also causes the testimony of the only witness able to describe his own mistreatment in court to become obscure.

By reading Seneca's text in this way, the original blaming of Claudius appears as a symptom of the falsity of Seneca's consciousness when he shifts the blame to Fortuna. Not simply a self-contradiction, his misattribution shows him to be blind to the causes of his own downfall and furthermore deluded by a powerful fantasy.¹²⁶ At 13.2 he first tells

of imperial power and his proximity to the inhabitants of Corsica as the debilitating cause of his ineffective discourse. One need not, of course, identify this persona with the author's authentic voice, so that Seneca truly had become so deluded.

¹²⁵ Asmis, "Seneca on fortune and the kingdom of god," 118-23.

¹²⁶ The "progressor" is what for Stoics human agents are in most cases, souls striving for greater virtue than they possess, but not without their vices. Progressors are contrasted with the sage, who possesses perfect

the true story of his trial, as he told the true story of Cremutius Cordus' trial in the *Ad Marciam*, and then he shies away from this account in order to provide another description, this one in agreement with the ideology supporting Claudius' accession to the principate. 13.2 continues from the account of Seneca's trial as follows:

Interim magnum miseriarum mearum solacium est videre misericordiam eius totum orbem pervagantem: quae cum ex ipso angulo, in quo ego defixus sum, complures multorum iam annorum ruina obrutos effoderit et in lucem reduxerit, non vereor ne me unum transeat. Ipse autem optime novit tempus, quo cuique debeat succurrere; ego omnem operam dabo, ne pervenire ad me erubescat. O felicem clementiam tuam, Caesar, quae efficit, ut quietiorem sub te agant vitam exsules, quam nuper sub Gaio egere principes! Non trepidant nec per singulas horas gladium exspectant nec ad omnem navium conspectum pavent; per te habent ut fortunae saevientis modum ita spem quoque melioris eiusdem ac praesentis quietem. Scias licet ea demum fulmina esse iustissima, quae etiam percussi colunt. (13.3-4)

Meanwhile it is a great consolation for my sorrows to see his compassion spreading throughout the whole world: since, from that corner to which I am restricted, his compassion has dug up a great many obscured for many years with their ruin and has led them back into the light, I do not fear it passes over me alone. But he himself knows the best time at which to come to the aid of anyone; I will apply all my labor, so that he does not blush [*erubescat*] at coming through to me. O your happy clemency, Caesar, which brings to pass that exiles lead a more peaceful life under you than princes led recently under Gaius! They are not worried, they do not anxiously expect the knife [*gladium*] through every hour, and they do not respond with terror to each spotting of approaching ships [*ad omnem navium conspectum*]. Because of you just as they have a check on raging Fortuna, so also they have hope for a better fortune and peace for the present. You may

virtue and rational self-mastery without any obstruction by vice or irrationality. The sage perceives the chain of causes that makes up the order of fate, where the progressor mistakenly attributes that which he does not understand to fortune. Just as Asmis argues, progressors cannot help but experience fantasies of the power of fortune in the world. *Ibid.*, 135. Seneca thus proves himself to fall somewhere on the spectrum of progressors, while Claudius is portrayed as a sage.

know that only those thunderbolts, which even those have been struck revere, are truly most just.

It has been observed by commentators that this high estimation of the emperor's clemency, Seneca's identifying him as the best source of consolation, and Seneca's claim that he may hope for more clemency at a time that the emperor will know best, all of this may betray the true motivation of this letter.¹²⁷ Perhaps Seneca was hopeful for a recall and complete forgiveness of his real or imagined crimes, and thought that writing so flattering a piece of prose would reach the emperor's grateful ears through Polybius. Especially passages such as that which ends this paragraph quoted above encourage this view. It is difficult to understand why else Seneca would so praise the emperor's clemency ("*O felicem clementiam tuam!*"), why he would contrast it positively with Gaius' reign of terror and Fortuna's raging, if he did not hope that the emperor would regard this favorably.¹²⁸ Other critics, however, have seen this as abusive irony, an attack on the princeps in the only way open to Seneca.¹²⁹ Where critics have been prone, in the past, to speak of the irony in this text, or more recently of the doublespeak that governs Seneca's delivery, I insist that, by keeping Seneca's damaged voice in the picture, it becomes clear that, however ambiguous Seneca's text may become, all of its shifting and elusive play ultimately may be explained in terms of the relation between the punishing

¹²⁷ Atkinson, "ad Polybium," 862-66.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 872-79; Dahlmann, "Untersuchungen zu den Dialogschriften Senecas by Erich Köstermann," 371-72.

¹²⁹ Alexander, "Seneca's Ad Polybium de consolatione: a reappraisal," 45-47.

sovereign and punished bare life. If Seneca introduces Fortuna because of the many things he feels he cannot say about “dynastic intrigues”—for example, that he was made the scapegoat for removing Julia Livilla’s claim to her brother’s inheritance, or perhaps that Polybius’ brother suffered a similar fate, that many of the dynasts named in Claudius’ consolation within the consolation (14-16) were not attacked by bad luck, but rather by relatives behaving badly—this is not just politeness, “euphemism,” or ironic sneering. It is the invention of an artificial cause for Seneca’s suffering, the blaming of a harmless fiction rather than a dangerous reality, a fantasy that as much conceals true knowledge from Seneca and his audience.

4.3.7. “Weaker Remedies:” *Ad Polybium* 1-6

Moving now from the analysis of the situation in which Seneca’s discourse unfolds and defining the voice in which he describes that situation as the confused and disturbed voice of bare life, it is necessary to turn to a closer analysis of the text of the *Ad Polybium*, in order to examine not simply the formal division of the text, which is of course essential to any comprehension of its argument, but even more the digressions, interruptions, and silences that occur in Seneca’s letter. By attending to the latter features of the text, one can clarify the hierarchized levels of Seneca’s discourse in their relation to one another. Situating what Seneca writes, his panegyric for Claudius and his consolation to Polybius, in relation to the fact that it is Seneca, a courtier deprived of his property, identity, and security, who delivers this discourse, the seemingly contradictory

messages of his text reveal their internal coherence and interdependence upon one another.

The structure of the *Ad Polybium* cannot be described with complete accuracy, since a section of uncertain length has been lost,¹³⁰ but a clear structure is nevertheless evident. Even the lost portion is not that damaging to the overall sense of the composition. By comparing the *Ad Polybium* with his other two consolation texts from this period, one may hazard that there cannot be more than eight paragraphs missing from the beginning.¹³¹ So, what survives may be broken down into a few intelligible units that add up to a complete consolatory argument. Comparing this text with what I have written of Boethius' *Consolation*, that he had presented *Philosophia* as treating weaker and stronger remedies in Books II and III respectively,¹³² it is possible to discern a clear break in the text of the *Ad Polybium* at paragraph 7, where in the first sentence Seneca describes all that he has written above as "the weaker" or "lighter remedies" ("levioribus... remediis," 7.1). The sections identified in modern editions as 1-6, then, may be regarded as alike in content, offering "weaker remedies" that may be distinguished from that which follows; and within this division (1-6), one may make out a

¹³⁰ Seneca himself may have edited it out, if the *Ad Polybium* is the text to which Dio refers when he says that Seneca tried to suppress his own flattery of freedmen of Claudius after his recall to Rome (Dio Cass. LXI.10.2). On this question, see Buresch, who followed Diderot in using this passage to place Seneca's authorship in doubt. Buresch, *historia critica*, 9, 1: 114-20. Atkinson summarizes the scholarship establishing the work's authenticity and accounting for Dio's remarks in Atkinson, "ad Polybium," 861-64.

¹³¹ Besides, these texts already stretch one's sense of what may justifiably be considered a letter—even an open letter must feature some such limitation—so that there cannot have been so much more that this fiction would become utterly absurd.

¹³² See section 2.3 above.

further division between lamentation and eulogy of the dead, on the one hand (2-3), and consolation proper, on the other (4-6). What follow these weaker remedies, the “stronger remedies,” are identified as such at 14.1 (“*maiora...remedia*”). These culminate in the crucial passage of the text, a *prosopopoeia* in which Seneca assumes the voice of Claudius. By this point in the text, Seneca’s consolation to Polybius is completely displaced and overtaken by a consolation delivered by the reigning emperor himself, the very man who arranged for Seneca’s banishment to Corsica. This fills out the rest of 14 and continues through 16. Sections 17 and 18 are tacked on almost as codas: the first paragraph vilifies the former emperor Gaius as a contrast to the praise of Claudius, and the second offers some final closing remarks to Polybius. The complete structure of the work may then be understood as follows: 1-6, lamentation and the weaker remedies; 7-13, the stronger remedies; 14-16, the *prosopopoeia* of Claudius; and 17-18, the conclusion.

It is important to recognize that, though the text demonstrates a coherent arrangement, it features certain intrusions that seem inappropriate to the therapeutic regimen that Seneca sets out to provide. I suggest that Seneca has introduced into his discourse a strategy of what one may call dissociative digression. I mean that, while Seneca’s text is analyzable into a coherent order that proceeds through the divisions I have outlined above according to a logical sequence that links these units, it nevertheless wanders away from this order in a seemingly uncontrolled and inexpert way. In the following sections, I show, first, that there is a coherent order of consolatory discourse in

Seneca's text, breaking down the modern editor's paragraphing of the text into units of consolatory therapy. Then, I treat the first division, the lament and weaker remedies (1-6), showing that, within this first division, it is important not only to understand Seneca's deliberate strategy of consolation in this text, defining what the consolatory commonplaces are, how they are to be applied, and what Seneca means to achieve by them. Even more it is important to account for any aberrations or deviations from the program of consolatory therapy in Seneca's text. Keeping this formal division of the text in mind, I turn now to close analysis of each section, in order to identify the elements that define Seneca's consolatory discourse at each turn and to explain the force of the dissociative digressions that each section includes.

4.3.8. The Universality of the Fates' Law

The weaker remedies consist of rhetorically charged arguments for the following claims: that all of nature is subject to the same laws of generation and decay, and the universality of nature's destructions lightens the weight of one's own burden (1); that grief and mourning are of no use, neither for the dead nor for the living (2); that Polybius possesses great virtue, and so has the power to put aside his grief for his deceased brother (3); that the human condition universally involves subjection and even exposure to divine violence imposed by fate (4); that, beyond being useless, grief is pleasing to no one; that Polybius' social position demands his recovery as a duty (5); that one can pretend to be well and that this simulation will precipitate a condition of psychological health (6).

Going this far, there is nothing outstanding or distinctive about these topics. They are the standard fare of consolatory discourse, and Seneca has only differed from previous consolatory literature insofar as he has expressed these arguments in Latin and not Greek.¹³³ Since the text picks up where Seneca's argument has already been progressing, it is not possible to say with certainty how Seneca understood these weaker remedies to work, or whether the ones that have survived exhaust this stage of Seneca's therapy for Polybius. From some of the language of the text though, one can acquire a fairly sure sense of what they are supposed to do. What Seneca says at the beginning of 2 makes clear that these arguments are not simply to be taken as true descriptions of nature;¹³⁴ rather, they are "spiritual exercises," in Foucault's sense, for the imagination.¹³⁵ That is, they have a precise ethical function, and their truth is the transformation that they ought to effect in the one reading or writing this text. It is important that both the reader and the writer may be transformed by such an exercise, because, as I have remarked, Seneca too requires consolation for his exile, and his address to Polybius may equally operate as an act of self-transformation.¹³⁶ As each of the weaker remedies comes under consideration, it will be important to keep in mind these intersecting benefits for reader and writer, for consoler and consoled.

¹³³ Buresch, *historia critica*, 9, 1; Kassel, *Untersuchungen zur Konsolationsliteratur*: 266-67; Abel, *Bauformen*: 70-84.

¹³⁴ See section 4.3.5 above.

¹³⁵ Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*: 301-11.

¹³⁶ Consider Seneca's advice in 18, where he indicates that Polybius may find consolation in his own writing habits.

The first surviving paragraph of the *Ad Polybium*, where Seneca meditates on the mutability of all things, stressing that the whole “*universus*” will necessarily pass away (1.2), demonstrates this point about the psychagogic function of Seneca's arguments well. Already he is working from a philosophical horizon of understanding, for his claim about the destruction of the universe presupposes a contentious point from Stoic physics, the ἐκπύρωσις or *conflagratio*, in which a primordial fire periodically consumes the “world” along with “all things human and divine” (“*mundum...omnia humana atque divina*”).¹³⁷ This is also why he allows some distance from his claim that the world will be so consumed with the phrase, “*si fas putas credere*,” “if you think it is permitted to believe this”—Polybius need not be committed to this point of Stoic dogma, if he thinks it is *nefas*.¹³⁸ Still, Seneca raises the point in case Polybius is willing to go there with him to this remote, philosophical plane. He continues by introducing the dramatic example of great capital cities, Carthage, Numantia, and Corinth, that time, fate, or fortune have brought to ruin, but the effect of these is only to further diminish human life with respect to the great calamity that “that which has no place in which to fall,” again, the whole cosmos, must undergo.¹³⁹ The ultimate point to be taken away by these examples is that, since the cosmos and even great cities must fall, there can be no reason to mourn the inevitable passing of “particular souls” (“*singulas animas*,” 1.2). The true aim of this

¹³⁷ Cf. Sen. *Dial.* 6.26.6-7, where Seneca's “Cremutius Cordus” advocates the same position, expressing that even the deified sages will be consumed in the end, returned to their primordial condition.

¹³⁸ Even in Stoic dogma, this doctrine was not universally accepted.

¹³⁹ Cf. *ad Fam.* 4.5, discussed in Chapter 5, section 5.2.

spiritual exercise is not to prove that there will be a conflagration, since Polybius is free to think that this is so or not. Instead, Seneca is inviting Polybius to imagine that this is the case, so that he may situate his troubles within this universal context, if that will help. He shifts his focus now to these “individual souls,” by ridiculing those who would complain of their particular outcome that “the fates would ever dare not to have spared them some great *nefas*,” (“*fata tantum aliquando nefas ausura sibi non pepercisse*,” 1.2). “*Nefas*” here is spoken mockingly, since it may well be that the conflagration is *nefas*, but that the fates should require at some time that one man should die, this could never be considered *nefas* except in the most vainglorious of homes (1.3). He concludes by explaining the principle that has governed his argument through this paragraph:

Maximum ergo solacium est cogitare id sibi accidisse, quod omnes ante se passi sunt omnesque passuri; et ideo mihi videtur rerum natura, quod gravissimum fecerat, commune fecisse, ut crudelitatem fati consolaretur aequalitas.

It is a very great consolation, therefore, to think that all that has happened to oneself is what all before have themselves suffered and all will suffer; the nature of things seems to me to have made common what it made the heaviest burden to bear, so that our equality consoles the cruelty of our fate. (1.4)

The basic point of this paragraph, then, is that Polybius may take comfort in thinking, in applying the thought to himself that there is an *aequalitas* to which every *domus* is subject. Though it is painful that each and every thing is subject to the same laws of generation and decay, the sharing in “common” of this misery allows one to feel some relief. Seneca thus justifies his introduction of the Stoic conflagration on the ground that

it may allow Polybius to feel comforted by the uniformity of nature's justice, the universality of its law.

4.3.9. The Lamentations as Interruptions of the Consolatory Therapy

The second and third paragraphs are joined as two complaints that Seneca offers in order to associate himself with Polybius' plight. They are also joined to the preceding paragraph by Seneca's advancing a point that is "not least" helpful ("*non minimum*," 2.1), in quantitative contrast with what he has declared the "very great consolation" at 1.4. Now Seneca rejects grief as useless both to the living and to the dead, and adds that "one cannot wish that which is useless to be long-lasting" ("*noles enim longum esse quod inritum est*," 2.1). Again, Seneca's argument need not describe objective truth, but instead only must have subjective utility as the kind of thought that "will be helpful." Having already mentioned above that Seneca involves his own grief in Polybius' mourning at this passage,¹⁴⁰ it is more important here to consider instead the passage's placement: why has Seneca associated his own grief with Polybius' mourning at precisely this point? I mentioned above that, as Seneca declares the uselessness of grief, he also emphasizes his inability to share in further lamentation, since he is so distracted by his own misery. But immediately following this claim, he writes, "*Quid cessas? Conqueramur, atque adeo ipse hanc litem meam faciam.*" "What are you waiting for? Let

¹⁴⁰ Cf. fn. 125 and 126 in this chapter, above.

us make our complaint, and thus I will make this dispute my own” (2.2). It should be observed that, though lamentation or a section of a consolatory speech devoted to lamentation could be a formal element of Athenian rhetorical consolation in the funeral oration,¹⁴¹ Seneca introduces lamentation here having already rejected it. In other words, he undermines himself immediately before he begins the lamentation, so that his professed recognition of lamentation’s uselessness provokes the question why he offered lamentation at all. This reversal is not prefaced or explained in any way, but rather seems to come upon Seneca suddenly, as if he is overcome. His lamentation intrudes upon this text at the first mention of his own grief, as if the memory of his suffering reduces him to a lower level of philosophical consciousness than he possessed only a moment before, when he indicated the uselessness of grief.

If one recalls from above that Seneca has staged his consolation in such a way that his persona cannot be a reliable agent of consolation, then the presence of a lamentation in this text is not beyond explanation. Seneca can be understood to have included this lamentation because of his own persona’s incompetence in the task of consolation. To support my claim, it will also be helpful to examine the substance of Seneca’s complaint on behalf of Polybius.¹⁴² For, what he says there shades the way in

¹⁴¹ John E. Ziolkowski, *Thucydides and the Tradition of Funeral Speeches at Athens* (New York: Arno Press Inc., 1981): 138-63.

¹⁴² Cf. this lamentation and that at Sen. *Dial.* 11.3 with that at Lys. 2.69-76. Though philosophical consolations do not uniformly feature lamentation, and occasionally feature a strong condemnation of such mourning (e.g. Plut. *De Exil.* 1), they appear to have been a feature at least on some occasions included in the funeral oration. However, Thucydides’ Pericles’ also rejects lamentation at the beginning of his

which one may understand what I have just quoted from 2.2. The substance of Seneca's lament makes his claim at 2.2 ambiguous. On the one hand, Seneca may be saying that he will make himself party to Polybius' dispute with Fortuna, becoming a fellow sharer in his grief, as if by *oikeiōsis* he is extending his sense of self to identify with Polybius' position.¹⁴³ This is certainly one way in which one must understand the complaint that follows in paragraph 2. But Seneca may also be saying that he will appropriate Polybius' voice, take it over for himself, as an expression of *his own* grief, so that one must understand the force of the predicative possessive adjective "*meam*" somewhat differently. It is possible that Seneca has instead said, "*Conqueramur, atque adeo ipse hanc litem,*" "Let us make our complaint, and thus this complaint," "*meam faciam,*" "I will make it *mine*." The paragraph continues as follows:

iniquissima omnium iudicio Fortuna, adhuc videbaris sinu eum hominem continuisse, qui munere tuo tantam venerationem receperat, ut, quod raro ulli contigit, felicitas eius effugeret invidiam: ecce eum dolorem illi, quem salvo Caesare accipere maximum poterat, impressisti, et cum bene illum undique circuisses, intellexisti hac parte tantummodo patere ictibus tuis. Quid enim illi aliud faceres? Pecuniam eriperes? Numquam illi obnoxius fuit; nunc quoque, quantum potest, illam a se abigit et in tanta facilitate adquirendi nullum maiorem ex ea fructum quam contemptum eius petit. Eriperes illi amicos? Sciebas tam amabilem esse, ut facile in locum amissorum posset alios substituere; unum enim

consolation (Thuc. 2.44), so the prohibitive rejection of excessive mourning seems to have been not only philosophical, but also proper to the classical Athenian civic consolation. On this element of the funeral oration, see *ibid*.

¹⁴³ On *oikeiōsis* generally, see Engberg-Pedersen, *Oikeiōsis*; S. G. Pembroke, "Oikeiōsis," in *Problems in Stoicism*, ed. A.A. Long (London: Athlone, 1971): 114-59; Wayne M. Martin, "Stoic Transcendentalism and the Doctrine of Oikeiōsis," in *The Transcendental Turn*, ed. Sebastian Gardner and Matthew Grist (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Forthcoming).

hunc ex eis, quos in principali domo potentes vidi, cognovisse videor, quem omnibus amicum habere cum expediat, magis tamen etiam libet. Eriperes illi bonam opinionem? Solidior est haec apud eum, quam ut a te quoque ipsa concuti possit. Eriperes bonam valetudinem? Sciebas animum eius liberalibus disciplinis, quibus non innutritus tantum sed innatus est, sic esse fundatum, ut supra omnis corporis dolores emereret. Eriperes spiritum? Quantulum nocuisses! Longissimum illi ingeni aevum fama promisit; id egit ipse, ut meliore sui parte duraret et compositis eloquentiae praeclaris operibus a mortalitate se vindicaret. Quam diu fuerit ullus litteris honor, quam diu steterit aut Latinae linguae potentia aut Graecae gratia, vigeat cum maximis viris, quorum se ingeniis vel contulit vel, si hoc verecundia eius recusat, adplicuit. Hoc ergo unum excogitasti, quomodo maxime illi posses nocere; quo melior est enim quisque, hoc saepius ferre te consuevit sine ullo dilectu furentem et inter ipsa beneficia metuendam. Quantulum erat tibi immunem ab hac iniuria praestare eum hominem, in quem videbatur indulgentia tua ratione certa pervenisse et non ex tuo more temere incidisse! (2.2-7)

Fortuna, most unjust in the judgment of all men, thus far you seemed to have held this man close in your bosom, a man who had received so much respect from your favor, that--what happens infrequently to anyone—his prosperity escaped jealousy. But look! that grief you have inflicted upon that man, the greatest grief which, as long as Caesar is safe, he could have received, and you completely surrounded him from all sides, you understood that in this place alone he was open to your strikes. Truly, what else could you do to him? Would you take away his money? Never was he slavish to that; even now, as much as he is able, he drives that away from himself, and with so great a talent for acquiring it he seeks no fruit from money greater than his scorn for it. You would take his friends? You know that he is so amicable, that he could easily substitute others in place of those whom he lost. For, out of all those, whom I have seen holding a share of power in the first home [*in principali domo potentes*], I seem to have known this man as one whom it is advantageous for anyone to have as a friend, more even still, it is a delight. You would seize away the good opinion in which he is held? That is too firm in the case of this man, that it could be shaken by even one such as you. You would take away his good health? You know that his soul has been so immersed in liberal studies [*liberalibus disciplinis*], by which he has not been nourished only but for which he has an inborn ability, that he rises above all bodily pains [*omnis corporis dolores*]. You would take away his spirit? How little you would harm him! His fame has guaranteed the greatest longevity to his talent. He did this himself, so that he has been inured in the better part of himself and he has freed himself from mortality with works composed with brilliant eloquence. As long as there will be any esteem for literature, as long as either the power of the Latin language or the grace of

Greek will stand, he will thrive with the greatest men, to whose intellects he compared himself or, if his modesty refuses this, to which he applied himself. You have contrived this one thing, by which you could harm this man greatly: to the extent that one man is better, to the same extent he is more often accustomed to endure it, when you rage without any distinction and must be feared even as you grant favors. How little was it for you to keep safe from such harm this man, on whom your indulgence seemed to have fallen for obvious reasons and not, according to your habit, to have happened randomly!

On a first reading of this short speech, Seneca seems to complain of Fortuna's inconsistent, unjust treatment of Polybius, whose fine qualities this speech also offers Seneca the opportunity to praise. It should be emphasized that in this lament, Seneca first apostrophizes Fortuna and thus introduces her into the text ("Fortuna, most unjust in the judgment of all men..."). In other words, it is in the lament, the purest expression of abject grief, which affect transforms Seneca's discourse into a series of exclamations and rhetorical questions, where Fortuna makes her first appearance. Recalling from above that only those progressors who experience neither sagehood nor complete madness can encounter good or bad Fortuna, it is important that Seneca holds Fortuna responsible for Polybius' grief at a moment when he himself at least apparently lacks the intellectual clarity of the sage.¹⁴⁴ Fortuna is therefore the fantasy of a man not in the full possession of his rational faculties.¹⁴⁵

But everything that Seneca says of Polybius here could with equal right be said of Seneca himself. He first observes that Fortuna had nurtured "this man," and, just as the

¹⁴⁴ Cf. section 4.3.6.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. section 2.3.

freedman Polybius has risen in spite of his lowly status to esteem within the Imperial *domus*, so too had Seneca's career steadily brought him to so high a social position that he could be reasonably suspected of an affair with the emperor's sister. Each man's rise to power, though not exactly the same in their point of launch or final destination, may be described in the terms Seneca uses in this passage. Second, they have both now been struck by bad fortune in such a way that they would merit consolation: Polybius for his brother's death and Seneca for his own exile. Further, the rhetorical questions that follow list external goods or, more precisely according to the Stoic idiom, "indifferents," the loss of which Polybius and Seneca equally would have been bound to accept with equanimity (insofar as they aimed to conform to the philosophical ideal of the sage).¹⁴⁶ The first of these, money, deserves special mention, since Seneca possessed a well known and, indeed, most notorious aptitude for investing in profitable enterprises.¹⁴⁷ The rhetoric of this passage presupposes that Polybius must also have been a talented speculator, but it leaves open also the implication that the passage applies to the man speaking, since Seneca had this talent as well. The other external goods or "indifferents" include friends, reputation, health, and spirit, all of which Seneca equally possessed.¹⁴⁸ Above all, I

¹⁴⁶ See Ker's discussion of Seneca's *prosopopeia*, in which Socrates commits himself to the Stoic doctrine of preferred indifferents. James Ker, "Socrates Speaks in Seneca, *De Vita Beata* 24-28," in *Ancient Models of Mind: Studies in Human and Divine Rationality*, ed. Andrea Wilson Nightingale and David N. Sedley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 180-95.

¹⁴⁷ Dio Cass. 61.10.3.

¹⁴⁸ The one item on the list that could arguably not apply to Seneca would be health, since it is well known that as a young man the philosopher was plagued by poor health. Still, by this point in his life, when Seneca

emphasize how the potential loss of health and spirit are countered in this passage: Seneca claims that Polybius' literary reputation provides a security against these losses more certain than any other. How much more true would it be to say of Seneca, the outstanding literary figure of his generation, that "as long as there will be any esteem for literature, as long as either the power of the Latin language or the grace of Greek will stand, he will thrive among the greatest"? So with this paragraph, one may see how Seneca employs the shared lament of Polybius' loss in order to confuse his own mourning with that of Polybius. It is as if he makes Polybius' voice his own, so that consoler and consoled lament each other's sorrows for one another and for themselves at once.

A second lamentation appears at 3.4-5. In this second one, however, though Seneca continues to hold Fortuna responsible for the suffering of Polybius ("*...tam iniusta et tam violenta Fortuna*," 3.4), the explicit naming of Polybius at 3.5 rules out the kind of confusion of Seneca and Polybius' identities that manifest in the first lamentation.¹⁴⁹ Actually, this separation of the two personae is apparent from immediately after the first lamentation, where Seneca picks up with praise for Polybius' virtue and praise for his

had arrived at middle age, there is nothing to suggest that he had not arrived at a more stable condition. He could therefore reasonably claim good health for himself as an indifferent that he possessed.

¹⁴⁹ Kurth, *Senecas Trostschrift an Polybius, Dialog 11: ein Kommentar*, 59: 54-57.

brother's merits (3.1).¹⁵⁰ It is as if Seneca briefly allows one to glimpse a second purpose for the first lamentation, distinct from its simple recounting of Polybius' situation, but then he quickly forecloses the alternative reading of that first lamentation, in order to keep only Polybius' grief in the frame. This gesture of showing and then concealing an alternative meaning resembles that which I have already discussed, as Seneca first blames Claudius and then Fortuna as the agents of his downfall. His technique is the same here, only much more elusive and carried on at much greater length.

This technique can be read as a direct result of Seneca's ruined condition, as recalled at 2.1-2. As Seneca recalls his own misery, he deflects his consolatory project, progressing normally in the first paragraph, and turns to lamentation of Polybius' grief that curiously also gives vent to his own grief. As the text progresses, Seneca's grief recedes to the background and Polybius' loss of his brother comes back into focus as distinct from Seneca's loss. The progress of Seneca's consolation to Polybius depends upon this separation, since Seneca cannot proceed as a consoler if he remains crippled by his own grief. And yet, given that he writes from exile, that he attempts his consolatory task in conditions inappropriate to its proper execution, Seneca cannot help but recall his own misery alongside Polybius' loss. In Seneca's art of self-consolation, the act of consolation depends upon the identities of the *consolator* and the *consolandus* remaining separate, but his act of self-consolation presupposes the extension of his self into a wider

¹⁵⁰ See p. 354 fn. 143 above, for scholarship on Seneca and Stoic *oikeiōsis*.

circle of identification, so that the *consolator* and the *consolandus* share a common sense of selfhood. In the remainder of the text, these two tasks seem opposed and contradictory, so that a third term will have to intervene if Seneca hopes to hold up both ends of his discourse.

4.3.10. The Weaker Remedies Proper, Paragraphs 4-6

Coming to the fourth paragraph, Seneca returns explicitly to his project of consolation, rejecting lamentation for good. His tone has shifted radically; gone are the exclamations and rhetorical questions of the two laments. Seneca now writes in short, declarative sentences, and this shift in tone seems to indicate a return to rational self-control. He also no longer speaks of Polybius' fortune, but instead introduces the concept of fate, which would seem to indicate that Seneca is making "progress," in the Stoic sense, insofar as this substitution amounts to a clearer apprehension of the true cause of Polybius' grief:

Diutius accusare fata possumus, mutare non possumus. Stant dura et inexorabilia; nemo illa convicio, nemo fletu, nemo causa movet; nihil umquam ulli parcunt nec remittunt. Proinde parcamus lacrimis nihil proficientibus; facilius enim nos inferis dolor iste adiciet quam illos nobis reducet. (4.1)

We can make accusations against the fates for a longer time, but we cannot change them. They stand hard and inexorable; no one moves them with outcry, with weeping, with their case; never have they spared anything to anyone, nor have they reversed their position. Just so let us spare our tears profiting us in no way; more easily will that grief add us to the number of those having passed below than it will lead them back to us.

In this quotation, Seneca claims that he and Polybius had been accusing the fates in their lamentations, not Fortuna, and it is their inflexibility and immovability, not the whim of an allegedly tyrannical woman (cf. 2.2-3 and 4.1), that lead Seneca and Polybius to dejection and resignation. It should be observed that, apart from the two lamentations, which name Fortuna as the tormentor who has caused Seneca and Polybius' grief, everywhere else Seneca has spoken of the fate of Polybius' brother. At 3.2 he exclaims that the fates are "harsh" and "just to none of the virtues" ("*dura...nullis aequa virtutibus*"), and, as I explained above, at 1.2-4 the fates are associated with the law of nature that allows for no exceptions, and thus consoles through its universality. From a Stoic point of view, all of this represents a turn toward more salubrious ways of thinking, and the rejection of lamentation, of "tears profitting [them] in no way," comes together with a renewed emphasis on fate, reason, and the task of consolation.

From paragraph 4 down to the end of paragraph 6 Seneca provides consistent consolatory counsel. It is as if, following the lamentations, Seneca arrives at a dangerously suicidal precipice by 4.1, and thus withdraws from lament instinctively, so that he has the distance from his grief required to request that Polybius begin with him anew. So from 4-6 especially Seneca shares his weaker remedies with Polybius.¹⁵¹ This is most clear from 4.2, where Seneca invites Polybius to a shared *kataskopia* with an

¹⁵¹ Though they were of course not entirely absent from paragraphs 1-3. Paragraph 1 is clearly consolatory, as well as the beginning of paragraph 2. Paragraph 3 features consolation in the form of eulogy, or rather eulogy as a mode of consolation. See section 4.3.9 above.

imperative (“*omnis aegedum mortalis circumspice, larga ubique flendi et adsidua materia est.*” “Come and behold all things mortal, a cause for weeping that is vast and continuous.”). It is as if the attempt to get a complete view of the human condition resets the consolation following the two laments. But the question must be whether this attempt to look upon the whole as if from beyond it meets with any success. The conclusion at which Seneca arrives in this paragraph is simple enough: life is full with misery, he claims, so one must budget tears and not spend them all on one relatively unimpressive incident. But in arriving at this point, his comprehensive vision takes in the full variety of human forms of life, from the impoverished to the powerful, from the barren to the fruitful. Universally, misery clings to each, joining them as equally vain in spite of their difference through a reductive and anonymous application of anaphora (“*Alium...alium...alius...alium...alium...hic...hic...*” 4.2).¹⁵² Following this long sequence, he poses the question, “*Non vides, qualem nobis vitam rerum natura promiserit, quae primum nascentium hominum fletum esse voluit?*” “Do you not see what sort of life Nature has promised to us, she who has wished that the first thing for humans upon their birth should be weeping?” Explaining that this beginning (“*principium*”) determines the whole course (“*ordo*”) of life’s subsequent events, Seneca concludes, “*Sic vitam agimus, ideoque moderate id fieri debet a nobis, quod saepe faciendum est...*” “So we lead our

¹⁵² Kurth, *Senecas Trostschrift an Polybius, Dialog 11: ein Kommentar*, 59: 62-63.

lives, and therefore that which must be done often ought to be done by us with moderation...”

What then has been the result of this *kataskopia*, in which Seneca calls upon Polybius to take measure of the nature of human existence? Seneca’s view of human life is grimly pessimistic, estimating human life as more abundant in miseries than in emotional resources allowing even a pathetic response to them. This is not unusual for the trope under scrutiny—it is standard for the *kataskopos* to rate human life quite lowly.¹⁵³ The beginnings of this rhetoric among the Cynics, who chose exposure to the elements and the rejection of false civic customs in favor of the natural life, a simple life in accord with nature’s supply for only the most basic necessities, tends to shade later applications of the figure. But in context Seneca’s use of the *kataskopos* must be read symptomatically, as further indication of his persona’s unreliability. So biased an account of human life cannot be explained entirely by the early Stoics association with Cynic modes of ethical practice and the rhetoric they used to justify that practice. The consolation that Seneca employs in paragraph 4 returns from lamentation and the accusation of Fortuna’s tyrannical treatment of Polybius to the equitable and uniform economy of justice that Nature (whom Seneca associates with the law as the agent who arranges the law) established as a consolation in the first paragraph (1.4). In this way Seneca returns to a more philosophical horizon for the interpretation of his and Polybius’

¹⁵³ Relihan and Heise, *The Prisoner's Philosophy*: 58.

losses, but this does not necessarily bring him closer to understanding the true cause of his own grief. At least the accusation of Fortuna has the merit of keeping tyrannical political action in view. The exposure of Seneca in exile is not the same as the natural life to which he and all others are consigned at birth, and the tears of natural life are not his tears; rather, Seneca's misery and his poverty are the resourcelessness of bare life, the extraneous life that remains as the product of sovereign power's reducing and preserving action upon the qualified life of its subjects.¹⁵⁴ To the extent that Seneca moves away from the struggle between a tyrant, even a fictional one such as Fortuna, toward a conception that defines human misery as the lot to which Nature delivers humanity, his retreat to a philosophical conception cannot explain the true cause of his misery. To the same extent, the consolation of Polybius proceeds apart from the self-consolation that the first lament promised.

Paragraphs 5 and 6 only drive this separation between Polybius' and Seneca's situations further. He begins the fifth paragraph with the Socratic dilemma according to which Polybius' brother either does not desire that Polybius should be pained with mourning or he does not know that he is; in either case, Polybius' mourning is vain (5.1). But the real topic of the fifth and sixth paragraph is "duty" ("*officium*," 5.1) introduced in the second sentence. The question is whether there is any "*ratio*," any rationality in the felt duty to mourn, and Seneca, following a Chrysippean line of thought, rejects this in

¹⁵⁴ Cf. section 4.3.6.

either case, whether Polybius' brother can know of Polybius' mourning or not.¹⁵⁵ Either the deceased is incapable of awareness, and therefore Polybius' mourning is "*vacuus*," "vain" (5.1); or his brother is aware, and a second dilemma applies: either he is a good brother and cannot wish that his brother would torment himself with grief, or he is a bad brother and does not deserve to be mourned (5.3). Seneca politely insists upon Polybius' brother's goodness, and the first horn of this second dilemma.

This consolatory argument is Seneca at his most loyal to the Greek tradition of consolatory practice, but there is more to paragraph 5 than this. As he is developing his point about the displeasure that Polybius' grief would cause for Polybius' deceased brother, Seneca makes the more general point that in fact there is no one who would find Polybius' grief pleasing (5.2). As he writes this, he clearly indicates his dependence upon Greek precedents, presenting himself as a parrhesiast ("*...audacter dixerim...*" 5.2), but he is also setting up the point he will develop in paragraph 6, that, though Polybius has no duty to his deceased brother, he does possess a duty to the emperor and his subjects. He first makes the observation in passing that Polybius' brother would certainly not want that Polybius should be "carried away from his occupations, that is, from his studies and from Caesar" ("*...velit abducere ab occupationibus tuis, id est a studio et a Caesare?*" 5.2). This only raises the specter of imperial service in the background. Seneca moves

¹⁵⁵ Cic. *Tusc.* I.79ff; Plato, *Ap.*, 40c. Kurth, *Senecas Trostschrift an Polybius, Dialog 11: ein Kommentar*, 59: 67-68; T. Stork, "Nil igitur mors est ad nos. Der Schlußteil des dritten Lukrezbuches und sein Verhältnis zur Konsolationsliteratur" (Saarbrücken, 1970), 43-45.

away from this topic at 5.4, as he advises that Polybius ought to act the part of a courageous opponent of Fortuna's assaults, not allowing himself to be overcome. Comparing Polybius to "*duces magni*," "great leaders," who feign courage in order to inspire their soldiers (5.4), Seneca suggests the same strategy to Polybius: "*Et solacium debes esse illorum et consolator; non poteris autem horum maerori obstare, si tuo indulseris.*" "And you ought to be a comfort for [your brothers] and their *consolator*; but you will not be able to check their mourning, if you indulge your own." Seneca is thus suggesting that Polybius conform to Seneca's own discursive position, if not to his situation. By posing as an example of fortitude for his brothers, Polybius can console his brothers and heal their mourning, just as Seneca would console him.¹⁵⁶ A subtext of the laments in paragraphs 2 and 3 was that Seneca and Polybius share in common a number of male siblings, but here the a subtext of Seneca's proposal that Polybius should become a *consolator* introduces a further question: how Polybius' consolation to his brothers could potentially help Seneca in exile. By asking Polybius' to become a *consolator* even as he grieves, Seneca is tacitly acknowledging his own inaptitude in this task, his own need of a consolation, and it is as if he imagines that their two insufficient profiles for this activity would somehow add up to one complete consolation suitable for each of them. In this way, perhaps Polybius' attempts could restore him to the faculties that would in turn make him more useful to Polybius. But is the gap between their subjective experiences of

¹⁵⁶ Abel, *Bauformen*: 70-72.

dolor simply too wide, so that Polybius can do nothing for Seneca, even though Seneca by some stretch of his own literary powers may successfully console him?

Paragraph 6 answers this question. Returning to the point raised at 5.2, that Polybius' deceased brother would not wish Polybius to abandon his duties to the emperor, Seneca introduces at 6.1 the gaze of the multitude approaching him with consolation ("*omnis ista consolantium frequentia*," 6.1) and with hopes of consolation for themselves. Polybius' "*persona*" takes away from him all privacy, so that Seneca can declare to him, "*Observantur oculi tui*," "Your eyes are observed" (6.2). This paradoxical statement is clearly designed to reverse the poles on Polybius' apparent authority, so that his power shows forth as weakness. The expectation that Seneca's declaration subverts is that the eye of Polybius, the eye of a powerful official, watches and controls the subjects of sovereign power, so that they are kept in their proper order. The passive verb reverses this, leaving the agency of the verb undefined, so that Polybius is subject to an anonymous and uncontrolled observation precisely because he has received the obligation to observe others. In just this way, Seneca explains, Polybius is not free (6.2): "*Liberiora sunt omnia iis, quorum affectus tegi possunt; tibi nullum secretum liberum est*." "To those whose affects are able to be concealed everything is quite free; for you no secret is free." Similarly, when it comes to defining the agent who placed Polybius "*in multa luce*," "in this great light," Seneca is typically evasive about the emperor. At first, he explains that "Fortuna" deposited him there, but then he credits Polybius' promotion "*in altiore ordinem*," "to a higher rank" as the result of "*amor Caesaris*" and "*tua studia*,"

a hendiadys by which Seneca refers to Polybius' "love for Caesar," objective genitive, and his "devotion" to him, as well as Caesar's love for Polybius, subjective genitive, and the official secretarial role to which Claudius has assigned Polybius. The evasiveness is well considered, since one would not want to accuse Claudius of preferential treatment in a public document of this kind, but one would want to acknowledge it as a flattery to Polybius. Seneca has found a clever way to serve all of these ends. In the end, it is unclear exactly how Seneca understands Polybius' rise to prominence, but he plainly explains in paragraph 6 how Polybius' support for the emperor and the rewards that come with that authority both empower and limit Polybius' freedom to act, think, and feel as he would.

Up to this point, Caesar has only been a shadowy presence in this text, concealed behind the interaction between Seneca and Polybius, on the one side, and fate, nature and Fortuna on the other.¹⁵⁷ But as Seneca comes to the conclusion of the sixth paragraph, the emperor intrudes in yet another way. Although Polybius has no duty to his deceased brother, and his duty to the emperor and his subjects has been implied in a general way, at the conclusion of 6 Seneca defines that duty quite unambiguously:

Audienda sunt tot hominum milia, tot disponendi libelli; tantus rerum ex orbe toto coeuntium congestus, ut possit per ordinem suum principis maximi animo subici,

¹⁵⁷ Introducing the emperor in this way, Seneca repeats a gesture he has made several times already. I mentioned that, at 5.2, Seneca anticipated the point on duty that he would make in paragraph 6, but he had also already dropped the emperor into each of the laments, first indicating that, though Fortuna's assault on Polybius, taking his brother, was a heavy blow, this would not compare with the loss of Caesar (2.2), then that even Caesar could not completely check the arbitrary tyranny of Fortuna, and finally that Fortuna's action against Polybius' brother was designed to prove the finite power of Claudius (3.5).

exigendus est. Non licet tibi, inquam, flere, ut multos flentes audire possis, ut periclitantium et ad misericordiam mitissimi Caesaris pervenire cupientium lacrimas siccare, lacrimae tibi tuae adsiccandae sunt.

So many thousands of people must be heard, so many petitions must be settled [*disponendi*], so great an accumulation of affairs coming from the whole world must be examined, so that it can according to its arrangement be set before the mind of the greatest *princeps*. It is not allowed to you, I say, to weep, so that you can hear the weeping multitude; so that you may deliver those in danger to the pity of the most serene Caesar and you may dry the tears of those desiring your help, you must dry your tears. (6.5)

It is all too easy to see how Seneca can be read as warming Polybius up to the idea that he may deserve special treatment in the form of a recall from exile, that in this way Polybius could “console” Seneca's domestic troubles. But it is worth noting that, up to this point, Seneca has not made his position in exile out to be anything less miserable than Polybius’ position at court.¹⁵⁸ Recalling his role as *kataskopos* from the fourth paragraph, one must remember that all the varied modes of life are equally miserable on his view, and the position in which he finds himself has allowed him to survey human existence in a general way, so that he knows the life of the poor man in exile is no worse and no better than the life of the courtier on the rise. The expressed opinion that a return from exile would be desirable must wait until well into the greater remedies (13.2-4), where Seneca's own discourse will have had a fairly radical effect upon his own perspective. At this point, cut off from all social ties and the duties that these would imply, Seneca clings

¹⁵⁸ Kurth, *Senecas Trostschrift an Polybius, Dialog 11: ein Kommentar*, 59: 89.

to the Cynic project of making bare life itself into a field for the practice of virtue.¹⁵⁹ Part of this practice is the delivery of parrhesiastic discourse, designed to shock its audience into the adoption of that philosophical way of life, and, as I have argued, the consolation takes its basic impulse from this discursive formation. Seneca comes to the consolation of Polybius from this direction, aiming to accomplish the restoration of Polybius' rational faculties, as much for his own sake as for Polybius.

Having tried several strategies of consolation through the weaker remedies, Seneca concludes by emphasizing Polybius' role as an official recipient of petitions for the emperor's clemency.¹⁶⁰ It is as if he puts himself before Polybius here, suggesting that, though his own consolations may not be adequate to answer for the misery of natural existence, Polybius' has the duties proper to his *persona*. Seneca, however, has no such duty and no such persona, and remains beyond all consolation, save perhaps the one that Polybius in his official capacity may extend to him. Restored to proper social relations by a recall from exile, Seneca could acquire the duties that would also be a consolation to him. Still, he does not expressly request this consolation, even as he passes the role of *consolator* to Polybius. In the end, one must ask why bare life speaks in this text? Why does Seneca write? And even more by what power is he given to write in this voice separated from all traditional social ties and from all social roles? As I argued

¹⁵⁹ Cf. section 1.4.

¹⁶⁰ A. Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius: The Scholar and His Caesars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983): 83-88.

above, it was the peculiar character of the sovereign's decision upon Seneca's life, his surprising reduction of the Senate's sentence, that left Seneca some scrap of life, a condition upon which he could act, positing his exile as the presupposition for his own philosophical practice. It is to this sovereign that Seneca's discourse inevitably turns, and on whom he focuses in a much more emphatic way in the stronger remedies.

4.3.11. "Stronger Remedies:" Gaze and Voice in Chapters VII-XVI

As I observed above, at 7.1 Seneca introduces a distinction between that which he has already written, the "weaker remedies," and that which will follow, which he identifies at 14.1 as the "stronger remedies." The topic of paragraph 7 arises naturally out of paragraph 6. Seneca has been discussing Polybius' duties to the subjects of the emperor, the varied members of the *populus Romanus* appealing to the emperor for his aid, and now he turns his attention to Polybius' duties to the emperor. With powerful brevity, he captures in two words what will be the most important theme of the stronger remedies: "*Caesarem cogita.*" "Think of Caesar." As with Boethius, the turn to the stronger remedies requires a turn to a higher authority, a divine power, capable of challenging the limits imposed upon human nature by fate, nature herself, or natural law.¹⁶¹ Yet, unlike Boethius' god, Seneca's is no transcendent being, situated far beyond the world on an unreachable throne of glory. This god is the ruling emperor himself,

¹⁶¹ Cf. section 2.3.2.

seated at the rostra. It is to the supreme agent within the contemporary political conjuncture that Seneca turns in order to identify a third actor in the drama of this text: beyond the ineffectual *consolator* and the grieving *consolandus*, Seneca introduces the “*publicus parens*” as a *consolator* up to the task that neither he nor Polybius can successfully perform.¹⁶²

The “greater remedies” divide into three sections. Paragraphs 7 and 8 stand together, insofar as they define Claudius as the ultimate source of consolation and elaborate two ways in which this consolation may occur. In paragraphs 9-12, Seneca introduces a variety of consolatory arguments that digress from the introduction of Claudius in paragraphs 7-8, but, as I argue, there is a connection, since the introduction of literary activity raises the opportunity to entertain the possibility of a philosophical life independent of sovereign power. Finally, paragraphs 13-16 return to Claudius and there present him as the genuine article, a *consolator* whom, as the greater authority in matters consolatory even before this text was attempted, Seneca hopes has in fact already relieved the exile of his self-assigned duty to console (14.1). If this undermines Seneca’s consolatory discourse, rendering his own attempt superfluous, it is important to keep in mind that with this introduction there is at least a capable voice of consolation presented

¹⁶² Among the consolations that survive, this is an entirely unique resource of consolation that marks a significant difference from the tropes and commonplaces that typically govern such discourse. One may rightly wonder, though, whether Seneca has not learned from Theophrastus, whose consolation upon the death of Callisthenes may have involved similar reflections upon the supremacy of Alexander. On this text, see Stephen A. White, “Theophrastus and Callisthenes,” in *Influences on Peripatetic Rhetoric*, ed. David C. Mirhady (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

as an alternative to Seneca's incompetence in this text, a speaker who seals the meaning of his words with divine authority, and therefore stands a realistic chance of reaching the grieving Polybius. In such a way, at least, the voice of Seneca seems to promote the voice of Claudius. And yet there is something troubling about a city in which one man must take every task upon himself, in which there is so much misery that even the consolation of a grieving colleague must be mediated by the highest authority of public office.¹⁶³

4.3.12. Paragraphs 7 and 8: The Sovereign's Gaze

If Polybius' recollection of his duty to serve those appealing to sovereign power can only help him a little, as Seneca suggests in paragraph 6, the freedman's sense of obligation to Caesar is presented as much stronger and much more therapeutic in paragraphs 7 and 8. What Seneca writes in these two paragraphs shows how much Polybius owes to the emperor, but it also shows how much Polybius' psychology depends upon his presence. At the same time, that it is Seneca writing this shows to what extent Seneca also remains dependent on the emperor in spite of his exile. More than anything, these paragraphs demonstrate how deeply the emperor's image has intruded into the domestic spaces of Roman subjects such as Seneca and Polybius.

¹⁶³ Osgood puts this well: "To understand the role of the emperor in the Roman world, one has to recognize that in the eyes of many of his subjects, the emperor might *be* many things that he did not actually *do*. So focused is Millar on the workings of "government," he neglects the tremendous range of symbolic roles the emperor had to fill, not least the role of god. That is, for many of his subjects, the emperor was more a symbol, almost a fiction, but a powerful fiction—one that could inspire individuals to modify their behavior." Osgood, *Claudius Caesar*: 26.

The two subjects' dependence upon the emperor is evident from the first sentence of paragraph 7. There Seneca holds out to Polybius the opportunity "to be forgetful of all [his] troubles," "*omnium rerum oblivisci*," if only he follows the command, "*Caesarem cogita*." The precise way that Seneca puts this merits emphasis. For he does not say if you want to be completely healed, "think of Caesar;" Caesar can offer forgetfulness of one's misery, not healing. Forgetting and healing are not the same, and in the continuation of this paragraph and in the next paragraph Seneca will stress the difference. But all the same, Seneca's saying this demonstrates how Claudius stands as a powerful presence in the psychology of his subjects, since Seneca feels confident enough in the therapy to recommend it and he cannot have had an entirely unrealistic estimate of how this recommendation would register with his addressee. The comparisons to Atlas (7.1) and to the revolving planets (7.2) only reveal this subservience in Seneca and Polybius more clearly, as do the series of contrasting parallels at 7.2, emphasizing Caesar's "*vigilia*," his "*labor*," his "*industria*," and his "*occupatio*."¹⁶⁴ All of this serves to put distance between the divine sovereign, who is perhaps "such a one" as those of whom "fables are told" ("*si quis modo est fabulis traditus*" 7.1), and his idle subjects.

Polybius' subjective dependence upon the emperor is also manifest in the "*industria*" that Polybius, as Seneca says, owes to the emperor in return for the favor shown to Polybius (7.1). Polybius' debt to Caesar in fact conforms him to Caesar, who is

¹⁶⁴ "*Omnium somnos illius vigilia defendit, omnium otium illius labor, omnium delicias illius industria, omnium vacationem illius occupatio.*"

completely deprived of his subjectivity by his efforts. Seneca says of the emperor, “*Ex quo se Caesar orbi terrarum dedicavit, sibi eripuit...*” “From the time when Caesar dedicated himself to the whole world, he robbed himself of himself...” (7.2) Similarly, at 7.3, Seneca writes of Polybius, “*Caesare orbem terrarum possidente impertire te nec voluptati nec dolori nec ulli alii rei potes; totum te Caesari debes.*” “While Caesar possess the whole world, you can allow yourself neither pleasure nor pain, nor anything else besides; you owe your whole self to Caesar” (7.3). These reflexives are used in these sentences to show how, first, Caesar dispossesses himself of his self in order to take possession of the whole world, and then, second, how this act of dispossession equally empties the subjects of Caesar’s power of their selves. An economy is established wherein the self-dedication of the imperial sovereign to the world can only be met by his subjects’ equally self-effacing dedication to their sovereign. In this exchange, there is no space left for Polybius to possess anything apart from what Caesar has given him, so there can be no space left in which Polybius’ brother may be felt absent. Polybius’ loss vanishes into an infinite obligation to Caesar, so that Seneca can simply say, “*nihil perdidisti,*” “you have lost nothing,” so long as Caesar is safe (7.4). This is the forgetting that the greater remedies offer, a sense of duty so immensely overwhelming that all traces of a personal and domestic life apart from the imperial family recede into the background. The grief for a brother weighs so little in comparison with the debt to the “*publicus parens.*”

In paragraph 8, Seneca draws in close to the domestic space of Polybius, offering a consolation, “*non quidem firmitus...sed familiarius,*” that is, a consolation “not really more constant...but more domestic” (8.1). While Polybius can trust that his grief will subside so long as he is occupied on the Palatine with fulfilling his obligations to Caesar, Seneca fears that the freedman is most at risk when he leaves that space and returns home.¹⁶⁵ This is because the controlling gaze of Caesar is such that “*tristitia,*” sadness, and all other similar affects, cannot afflict those upon whom the emperor casts his gaze.¹⁶⁶ Seneca declares, “*Nam quam diu numen tuum intueberis, nullum illa ad te inveniet accessum, omnia in te Caesar tenebit...*” “For as long as you will look upon your divinity, [*tristitia*] will have no access to you, Caesar will take hold of all things in you...” In saying this, Seneca inverts the displacement of domestic space that the establishment of the principate effected in public life. Where the Julians displaced public space for the sake of their *domus*'s advancement,¹⁶⁷ Seneca’s ideological text enhances the effect of the imperial family’s possession of public space by pushing their presence even into the domestic spaces of the first family’s subjects. In this way, Claudius can colonize

¹⁶⁵ “*Si quando te domum receperis, tunc erit tibi metuenda tristitia.*”

¹⁶⁶ Žižek explains that Lacan identified two partial objects (the voice and the gaze) in addition to those three (the breast, the feces, and the phallus) that Freud had theorized. Slavoj Žižek, “I Hear You With My Eyes”; or, The Invisible Master,” in *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*, ed. Renata Saleci and Slavoj Žižek (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996): 90-127.

¹⁶⁷ On this topic, see Kristina Milnor, *Gender, Domesticity and the Age of Augustus: Inventing Private Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Beth Severy, *Augustus and the Family at the Birth of the Roman Empire* (London: Routledge, 2004): 213-149; Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, trans. H. Allen Shapiro, Thomas Spencer Jerome Lectures (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990).

Polybius' home, and further the very internal recesses of his soul, with imperial ideology, so profoundly overcoming the private life of Polybius that there will be no time at which Polybius is vulnerable to remembering his brother and exposing himself to grief.¹⁶⁸

He introduces literary activity to effect this conquest of Polybius' soul, a decisive move for the meaning of the *Ad Polybium*. Since Polybius was not only secretary *a libellis*, as 6.5 of this text defines him, but also secretary *a studiis*, Polybius' self-application to literary achievement must also be understood as the effort to fulfill his *officium* to the emperor in this area.¹⁶⁹ The specific literary tasks that Seneca recommends to Polybius deserve comment as well. First, he suggests returning to Homer and Virgil, in this way complimenting Polybius' previous achievement of having translated each into the other's language (8.2). But as for new projects, he emphatically endorses composing an account of the "*Caesaris tui opera*," "the deeds of your Caesar," for which he emperor will supply not just the "*res gestas*," "his accomplishments," as the "*materia*" of the account, but also he provides an "*exemplum*" of how best Polybius may compose such a history (8.2). Seneca refers to Claudius' well known accomplishments as a historian, with

¹⁶⁸ On the distinction between public and private space in Rome, see Shelley Hales, *The Roman House and Social Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Eleanor Winsor Leach, *The Rhetoric of Space: Literary and Artistic Representations of Landscape in Republican and Augustan Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); A. Wallace-Hadrill, "The Social Structure of the Roman House," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 56 (1988): 43-97.

¹⁶⁹ Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius: The Scholar and His Caesars*: 83-88. On the imperial library staff, see further George W. Houston, "The Slave and Freedman Personnel of Public Libraries in Ancient Rome," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 132, no. 1-2 (2002). Cf. Ovid's use of Fabius Maximus in the early poems of the *Epistulae ex Ponto*, and of Salanus as his intermediary to Germanicus in *Pont.* 2.5 and Suillius in *Pont.* 4.8. Fantham, "Dialogues of Displacement," 187.

which literary efforts he occupied his early adult years, when it seemed he was the most unlikely candidate for holding the principate.¹⁷⁰ Seneca's recommendation of Claudius' literary works as a model for constructing an account of Claudius' imperial deeds, if adopted as a plan by Polybius, would so thoroughly occupy Polybius' mind with reflection on his Caesar's impressive record of achievements that the freedman would hardly have a waking moment when he would not be concerned with Caesar. His time on the Palatine, fulfilling his office, would fill half of the day, the half spent beyond his own doors, and his time at home, the other half, would be completely consumed with documenting the day's actions, how Caesar carried himself and the country through one event after another. The complete occupation of Polybius' mind holds out the possibility of a complete distraction from grief, a complete forgetting, which, again, is not the same as a complete healing.

One may contrast this suggestion with the kind of writing from which Seneca dissuades Polybius. At 8.3, he steers Polybius away from "*fabellas quoque et Aesopeos logos*," "from fables and Aesop's tales," observing that it would be difficult for a distressed mind to perform fittingly in the rendering of such "exuberant studies" ("*hilariora studia*," 8.3). More serious topics suit a serious comportment, and Polybius may pass to more trivial and jovial ones after he has recovered from his grief (8.4). It has

¹⁷⁰ Suet. *Claud.* 41-42. Hijmans sees this passage as evidence that Seneca was likely familiar with Claudius' writings, and tries to build a case for Seneca's imitation of Claudius' prose style in light of this. B. L. Hijmans, "Stylistic Splendor, Failure to Persuade," in *Sénèque et la Prose Latine*, ed. Pierre Grimal (Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 1991). It is more important, however, to understand the function of this suggestion within the consolatory therapy that Seneca is developing for Polybius.

not been observed that, by mentioning Aesop in the context of Polybius' grief, Seneca is evoking the Platonic *Phaedo*, and the representation there of Socrates' literary hobby, taken up only after he was condemned to drink the hemlock. In that text, Socrates, a supreme example to the Stoics of a sage who had recovered from all human illness,¹⁷¹ guided by the Apolline command to make music, tried himself with setting Aesop's fables into various meters.¹⁷² Why would Seneca include this prohibition to follow Plato's Socrates in his consolation? What is this paragraph doing here? Could Seneca not have simply suggested what Polybius should do, continue his work on Virgil and Homer, and begin a history on the emperor's accomplishments, and leave aside the prohibition that Polybius contend with Aesop?

Seneca includes this analogy to Socrates' literary efforts in order to mark a transition. While paragraphs 7 and 8 have been entirely concerned up to this point with the importance of the emperor to Polybius' recovery, the first emphasizing Polybius' daily duties to the ruler, and the second emphasizing the larger literary projects that Polybius may devote to the emperor and his subjects, paragraphs 9-12 move in an entirely different direction, so that the emperor almost entirely vanishes from the text. This is a surprising turn, since the emperor's presence has haunted the subtext from the

¹⁷¹ As Sellars observes, "Indeed, one might say that Stoic philosophy literally began with Zeno's admiration for the life of Socrates." Sellars goes on to explain that the sage acts as a kind of "ego-ideal" for the Stoics, and he observes that Socrates and Cato the Younger were most frequently employed as historical examples of this ideal. John Sellars, *Stoicism*, Ancient Philosophies (Chesham: Acumen, 2006): 40. See also Sen. *Dial.* 1.7.1.

¹⁷² Pl. *Phd.* 60b-61b.

second paragraph, when Seneca begins the first lament, and he is nearly identified with the greater remedies at 7.1 and from paragraphs 13 onwards. It is as if the recollection of Socrates' sagehood returns Seneca to the philosophical subjectivity that grounds his text's production, so that the consolation may proceed, at least for a time, as a consolation quite simply, with no secondary self-consolatory motive overriding the primary discourse featured in the text.

4.3.13. Fortune, Nature, and Fate in the Greater Remedies

From paragraph 9, there is an important shift in Seneca's discourse. He moves from detailing the emperor's consolatory role to a more straightforward consolatory rhetoric, closer in substance and style to chapters 4-6 of the weaker remedies or to the many consolatory texts that come from such varied authors as Musonius Rufus, Dio Chrysostom, or Plutarch.¹⁷³ In other words, from paragraph 9 down to paragraph 12.2, Seneca seems to succeed in offering a traditional consolation to Polybius, this in spite of his debilitating exile. However, as I will show, by paragraph 12, the self-consolatory purpose that motivates the secondary discourse of this text, Seneca's panegyric for the emperor, completely overtakes Seneca's consolation to the notable freedman.

¹⁷³ Cf. Muson. IX; Dio. Chrys. XIII; Plut. *De exil.* On this topic, see Gareth D. Williams, "States of Exile, States of Mind," in *Seeing Seneca Whole: Perspectives on Philosophy, Poetry, and Politics*, ed. Katharina Volk and Gareth D. Williams (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006): 147-73.

The Socratic orientation of Seneca's discourse continues from 9.1, where Seneca introduces another Socratic dilemma that, this time, he commands Polybius to pose to himself. The main difference between the greater remedies and the lesser remedies is not the kind of advice that Seneca dispenses, but rather depends upon this deeper differentiation of Seneca and Polybius' positions. While in the lament, Seneca and Polybius were indistinct, two perfectly blended voices indifferent to one another in their grief, in the lesser remedies the positions of the *consolator* and the *consolandus* were at least differentiated, even if they could be exchanged. In the greater remedies, Seneca, acting as *consolator*, invites Polybius as *consolandus* to become his own *consolator* by internalizing certain therapeutic strategies that Seneca develops. The Socratic dilemma posed at 9.1, that Polybius should ask himself whether he grieves for his own sake or for the sake of his dead brother, is dispatched by two hypothetical arguments in 9.1 and 9.2: if for himself, then it is dishonorable to Polybius' brother that Polybius should exploit his death for the sake of Polybius' self-indulgence (9.1); if for his brother's sake, then there are two further options (9.2). Polybius' brother then either feels no pain since the dead are incapable of sensation and awareness, in which case grieving is absurd to the extent that it mourns the absence of suffering in the dead, or else the dead do preserve their awareness, but Polybius' brother will doubtless have ascended to a high place among the immortals, "as if he escaped from this long-lived prison," and enjoys an everlasting

vision that clarifies all things human and divine (“...velut ex diutino carcere emissus...” 9.3).¹⁷⁴ All of this Seneca presents as a long self-address that Polybius may adopt for himself, transforming himself into his own *consolator*. At this point, Seneca trusts Polybius with himself, having applied the weaker remedies already so that Polybius has some base upon which to build. This is the lease of consolation that the arrival of Socratic writing has purchased for Seneca and Polybius. The brief recollection of the *Phaedo* at 8.3-4 is followed immediately by a more extended recollection of the *Apology of Socrates*, from which text all of Seneca’s arguments from 9.1-9.3 are ultimately derived (Pl. *Ap.* 40c-41c).

The consolation that develops through paragraphs 9-12 proves that there are resources belonging to the philosophical tradition that nourish the intelligence of those afflicted by grief, and that, however limited they may prove in the end, they stand independent of the emperor and the duties that he commands. But to the extent that consolation has become a possibility, that is, to the extent that Seneca can employ remedies that he can trust Polybius to apply to himself as he begins to console himself, the causes of Seneca’s own grief have receded almost entirely from view, save one reference to Caesar and his “*proles*,” his “progeny,” at 9.7. The *Ad Polybium* may well

¹⁷⁴ Kurth, *Senecas Trostschrift an Polybius, Dialog 11: ein Kommentar*, 59: 111-13; Mireille Armisen-Marchetti, *Sapientiae facies: études sur les images de Sénèque*, vol. 58, Collection d'études anciennes (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1989): 154f; Anna Lydia Motto, *Guide to the Thought of Lucius Annaeus Seneca. In the Extant Prose Works: Epist. Moral., The Dial., De Ben., De Clem., and Quaest. Nat.* (Amsterdam: A.M. Hakkert, 1970): 41 n. 2; D. Steyns, *Études sur les métaphores et les comparaisons dans les oeuvres en prose de Sénèque le philosophe* (Gand: Librairie Scientifique E. van Goethem, 1906): 137, 63.

provide the resources to facilitate a Polybius' self-consolation, but the self-consolation for Seneca that their shared lament promised remains out of view, so long as the emperor remains out of view.

But in paragraph twelve Seneca's text returns to discussion of the emperor and comments upon him at greater length and in more surprising terms than at any prior point in the text. If at 7-8 the emperor could plausibly be introduced into the text as a consoling presence for Polybius, the pitch to which the panegyric ascends from 12.3 onwards can hardly be justified by this purpose alone.¹⁷⁵ The question that necessarily arises is what occurred in the course of the consolation at paragraph 12 that recalled the emperor from the background, so that Seneca's consolation was derailed once again. Following the line of argument from paragraph 9 through paragraph 12 at a distance, it is possible to see how this happens. Each paragraph of these stronger remedies is devoted to one of the three cosmic forces that appeared in the weaker remedies, so that paragraph 9 reintroduces Fortuna (9.4-9.5 and 9.7), who has not been discussed since the weaker remedies, paragraph 10 returns to Nature (10.4-6), and paragraph 11 speaks of Polybius' loss in terms of fate (11.1, 11.3-4).¹⁷⁶ If one keeps in mind the perspective of orthodox Stoicism, that attributing causes to fortune is at best an inevitable illusion of the ailing mind, that attributing them to nature and its law represents a higher understanding of

¹⁷⁵ Though Fantham has observed that irony is out of place in a *consolatio*, one may just as certainly declare that panegyric, unless it is for the deceased and he or she was especially virtuous, is equally out of place. Fantham, "Dialogues of Displacement," 185-86.

¹⁷⁶ Kurth, *Senecas Trostschrift an Polybius, Dialog 11: ein Kommentar*, 59: 132-40.

causality, and that recognizing the series of fate in its completion is the wise comprehension of the sage, then each paragraph stands as a deepening of Seneca's security in his philosophical position, from its inception with the appearance of Socratic precedent up to its culmination in the identification of the law of mortality as the cause of Polybius' brother's death at 11.4.

In paragraph 12, however, Seneca recommends that Polybius turn himself toward those on whom he may depend for consolation not only because of their relation to him, but also because they remain with him: his son, his wife, and his brothers (12.1). Then Seneca declares, "*pro omnium horum salute hac tecum portione fortuna decedit.*" "Fortuna has settled with you for this portion"—Polybius' deceased brother—"in exchange for the health of all these others." The economy of debt and payment in which Seneca situates the death of Polybius' brother was accounted for in terms of natural law in paragraph 10, but in paragraph 12 Fortuna is the creditor with whom Polybius as debtor must negotiate.¹⁷⁷ The use of Fortuna in this paragraph must be recognized as a regression from Seneca's philosophical self-certainty in paragraph 11. To the extent that Fortuna displaces fate as the explanation for Polybius' loss, the consolation recedes into the background and Seneca's fixation upon Claudius' sovereign power finds a way to slip back into the text. If for a moment Seneca seemed up to the task of consolation, acting as an able parrhesiast for Polybius, there ultimately remains this fundamental weakness in

¹⁷⁷ Fantham, "Dialogues of Displacement," 190-91.

his position that cannot be overcome.¹⁷⁸ Without a self-consolation for Seneca, there can be no consolation for Polybius.

4.3.14. Claudius as Consolation and the Meaning of Seneca's Panegyric

The last of Seneca's greater remedies for Polybius returns to the emperor Claudius himself. It is difficult to communicate the depth of Seneca's adulation for the emperor in paragraphs 12-13 in any other way than quoting extensively from the text. But the effect of this adulation on the reader is what one must appreciate in order to understand how problematic Seneca's panegyric for Claudius is.¹⁷⁹ I argue that the panegyric must be read in two ways: first, formally, the extent and the degree of adulation present in the *Ad Polybium* indicates that the secondary discourse unfolding throughout this text, Seneca's lamentation and consolation of his own predicament, or his self-consolation, has now fully overtaken the primary, consolatory discourse addressed to Polybius; as a secondary effect of this displacement of the consolation Seneca "overidentifies" with the imperial ideology promoting Claudius' occupation of the principate. In other words, the self-consolatory discourse that intrudes upon Seneca's consolatory purpose positions Seneca, even in exile, as one of the true believers in

¹⁷⁸ This anticipates the material in 17-18 where Seneca will reject the sage as unable to appreciate certain types of grief, to understand how profoundly they undermine one's rational faculties.

¹⁷⁹ For, if Fantham may say with justice that irony is out of place in a consolation, it is even more true that eulogy, unless it is devoted to the deceased, does not possess any right to appear among a *consolator's* precepts and examples. The proper question is why this adulation would occur within the *Ad Polybium* at all. Fantham, "Dialogues of Displacement," 185.

Claudius' cause; however, this very identification with Claudius and his cause, when made from the abject position that Seneca occupies, exposes that ideology's perverse, excessive dimensions. Seneca's overidentification does not conceal a hidden meaning of the speaker's discourse, yet it is not for that reason strictly sincere. Rather, Seneca seeks to expose in his text's audience the insincerity that permits the subjects of Claudius' power to support his regime in spite of their guilty conscience.

It is symptomatic of Seneca's condition as bare life that he latches onto the sovereign as the most powerful source of consolation. At 12.3, Seneca identifies Claudius' good rule over the empire as "*satis praesidi, solaci,*" or "sufficient protection and consolation," for Polybius, and at 12.5 he goes so far as to say that even the very thought of Caesar provides the "*maximum solacium tibi,*" "the greatest consolation to you." This identification marks a change in Seneca's position from paragraphs 7-8, where Polybius' duty to the emperor, and especially writing history that valorizes the emperor's deeds, held some potential to console Polybius. Here, by contrast, the arrival of Claudius' reign, which is positively compared with his predecessor's tyranny,¹⁸⁰ and the benevolent manner in which he exercises his power, console Polybius as much as is needed. Seneca also introduces a third aspect of the gaze at this point as well.¹⁸¹ If at 6.1-2 it was the gaze of the public that fixed Polybius in his duty, and at 8.1 it was Claudius' gaze upon

¹⁸⁰ This is apparent from the very beginning of the panegyric, where Seneca praises Claudius for "preserving the empire more with favors than with arms" ("*quanto melius beneficiis imperium custodiatur quam armis,*" 12.3). Degl'Innocenti Pierini, *Tra Ovidio e Seneca*: 112-20.

¹⁸¹ See section 4.3.12.

Polybius that suppressed any memory of Polybius' pain, now it is Polybius' gaze that Seneca commands to look upon Claudius: "however often tears well up in your eyes, so often direct them to Caesar; they will be dried at the sight of the greatest and brightest divinity" ("*...quotiens lacrimae suboriuntur oculis tuis, totiens illos in Caesarem derige; siccabuntur maximi et clarissimi conspectu numinis,*" 12.3). Only by fixing his awareness entirely upon Caesar does Polybius have any hope of finding a consoler powerful enough to heal him.

This line of argument comes to its culmination as Seneca insists that Polybius "must call upon [Claudius]" in his struggle "against Fortuna" ("*...hic contra fortunam advocandus,*" 12.4). The emperor's power and his good will blend in such a way that Polybius would be foolish not to depend upon him. A subtext of this is that Seneca's own attempt at consolation becomes superfluous. If Polybius can turn to the emperor for consolation, then why would he need Seneca's meager attempt at this performance? Seneca underlines this in two places. First, at 12.4, he says, "*Nec dubito, cum tantaque indulgentia, quin iam multis solaciis tuum istud vulnus obduxerit, iam multa, quae dolori obstarent tuo, congesserit.*" "I do not doubt, since his fondness [for you] is so great, but that he will have covered that wound of yours with many consolations, that already he has supplied the many remedies, which stand against your grief." And again at 14.1:

Hic itaque princeps, qui publicum omnium hominum solacium est, aut me omnia fallunt aut iam recreavit animum tuum et tam magno vulnere maiora adhibuit remedia. Iam te omni confirmavit modo, iam omnia exempla, quibus ad animi aequitatem compellereris, tenacissima memoria rettulit, iam omnium praecepta

sapientum assueta sibi facundia explicuit. Nullus itaque melius has adloquendi partes occupaverit.

And so this Prince, who is the public consolation of all people, either all things deceive me or he has already remade your spirit and applied the stronger remedies to so great a wound. Already he has strengthened you in every manner, already he has repeated from the finest memory all the examples by which you have been delivered to tranquillity of spirit, already his usual eloquence has unfolded all the sages' precepts.

In this important passage, several points are made at once. First, one can glimpse just how flattering this text is. Comparing Claudius to the Stoic sage, praising his style and his memory, and crediting him with a generous application of consolatory methods, Seneca paints a very positive picture of Claudius. But at the same time, this passage, just as the sentence at 12.4, provokes the question, just what is the value of Seneca's consolation, if Claudius has applied a consolation both more timely and more successful? As Seneca himself says in the continuation at 14.2, "*Nullus itaque melius has adloquendi partes occupaverit.*" "No one has taken up these topics of discourse more successfully." Especially Seneca's consolation is placed in doubt, since he goes to such lengths to make out its weakness. This is related to the final point. In this passage, and indeed gradually from 12 up to this point, Seneca shifts the point of reception for Claudius' consolation from Polybius to "all people," so that the possibility of Claudius consoling Seneca, rather than Polybius, is introduced. If Claudius' consolation can reach all people, then it can also reach any one of his subjects. The singularity of Polybius' grief and Seneca's ill-performed consolation are gradually being pushed to the background by the universality of Claudius' reach, as Seneca describes it in paragraphs 12-14.

But this brings Seneca's discourse down to a point at which he has not yet arrived by paragraph 12. For Polybius' grief to fall to the background and Seneca's to move into the foreground, Seneca must once reconfigure his discourse, and he does so at 12.5 as he launches into full panegyric for the emperor. He cries out exhorting the gods and goddesses to grant Claudius a long stay on the earth, that he may rival the accomplishments of the divine Augustus, and that he may outnumber Augustus in years. He even speaks of the dynastic expectations invested in Britannicus, Claudius' son by Messalina, as the longing for a "*consors patris*," "a colleague of his father," rather than a "*successor*" (12.5). Since the fulfillment of these pleas is well beyond Polybius' power, it is clear that Seneca is not addressing them to the freedman. In fact, he does not seem to be thinking of Polybius at all at this point. At 13.1, Seneca apostrophizes Fortuna, commanding her not to use her "*potentia*," that is, her "tyrannical power" with hostility to oppose Claudius. He suggests that she should rather act only in a way that may profit him. He further demands passivity on Fortuna's part, that she allow Claudius' consolatory action to rectify the sickness of Gaius' reign:

Patere illum generi humano iam diu aegro et affecto mederi, patere quicquid prioris principis furor concussit in suum locum restituere ac reponere! (13.1)

Allow him to heal the human race now long suffering with illness and disorder [*affecto*], allow him to restore and reset in their proper places whatever the madness of the former princeps dislodged.

Seneca's use of anaphora in this quotation to join two ideas that do not obviously belong together, namely recovery from illness and a happy succession of rulers, epitomizes one

of the dominant conceits of the entire text. But it is more important to observe that, before Seneca comes to this general statement of Claudius' consolatory function for the whole human race, he has once again changed the focus of his discourse. He first digresses to beseech Fortuna's allowances for Claudius at 12.5, and then only formally identifies her belatedly at 13.1. This apostrophe has effectively overcome Seneca, who cannot contain his urge to beg of Fortuna that she allow only the best for Claudius. In the continuation, Seneca calls down triumphs for future conquest in Britain and Germany, and declares his hope that, with greater mercy extended to him, he too may enjoy the spectacle when the time comes (13.2). This praise may do some good for Claudius, and mercy would very likely improve Seneca's situation, but in the meantime Seneca seems to have lost sight of the fact that mercy can in no way change Polybius' relationship with his loss.

This brings my analysis of this text back around to Seneca's account of his trial. It is crucial to understand the context in which that trial comes up. For he does so through the veil of a complimentary account of the emperor's virtues. His trial only comes up in this text to prove just how clement Claudius truly is. The context surrounding the passage at 13.2-4 dedicated to Seneca's trial establishes Seneca as a devoted and unfailing supporter of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, inaugurated with Claudius' accession, over against the remnants of a strictly Julian claim to inheritance. Praising Claudius for his mercy (13.2), which gives those in exile hope for their cases' reconsideration, Seneca concludes this paragraph with the following gnomic statement: "*Scias licet ea demum fulmina esse iustissima, quae etiam percussi colunt.*" "You may know that those very

thunderbolts are the most just, which even those struck by them worship” (13.4). In other words, Claudius is compared to Jupiter Optimus Maximus, whose punishing thunderbolts do not obstruct humans from practicing cult for him.¹⁸² Though this is certainly a compliment to Claudius’ power, authority, and majesty, it also shows that Seneca presents himself as honoring the very man who has punished him. Seneca’s voice in the text, then, has transformed from that of a *consolator* of dubious ability to that of a loyal subject, eager to support his sovereign. It is as if, unable to bear the reality of Claudius’ immense power over him, Seneca divides the virtual dimensions governing Claudius’ actual power into two fantasies of his power: one that represents all that is good in Claudius’ godlike beneficence, defined by the image of Claudius developed in this text, and another to whom all of his excessive, violent, and dangerous aspects may be attracted, and is associated with Fortuna and with Gaius as he is shown in this text.¹⁸³

This division of Claudius’ persona is the condition for the possibility, but not the necessity, of Seneca’s consolation. As the consolation to Polybius has become a distant memory through paragraph 13, mere background to the discussion of Claudius’ British campaigns and Seneca’s admiration for his achievements, self-consolation comes fully into view. This does not happen right away, because Seneca’s relationship with Claudius

¹⁸² Nearly contemporary with this text is a full-length statue of Claudius in the guise of Jupiter, dating to 42-43. It may have been originally located in the basilica at Lanuvium. It is currently on display in the Vatican Museums, Rome. Diana E. E. Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992): 131-33.

¹⁸³ For more on this duplicity of the ruler, with two distinct fantasies of power, see Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London and New York: Verso, 1999): 313-92.

is problematized from two directions. First of all, the potentially consoling effect that Claudius' reign has for all of his subjects does not equate to the necessity that Seneca should be consoled by Claudius' reign. In fact, Seneca's exile may well remain a meaningful grievance, preventing him from finding consolation in Claudius' difference from Gaius. The major consolation that Claudius could provide to Seneca is tangentially identified at 13.3, when Seneca plainly raises the possibility of his recall from exile.¹⁸⁴ I have already discussed this passage above in connection with the role of Fortuna in this text, so it is not necessary to go into this at length. The important point is that, going into paragraph 14, Seneca has lost sight of Polybius' need of consolation, so that the best he can do is direct Polybius and, even more, himself to the emperor, in whose abilities Seneca has placed all of his confidence.

4.3.15. Overidentification, I: Setting up the *Deus ex machina*

The culminating passage of the *Ad Polybium* is the prosopopoeia, in which Seneca speaks through the voice of the emperor Claudius himself (14.2-16.3). This has always been understood as the most important passage of the text.¹⁸⁵ Atkinson has emphasized the strangeness of Seneca's so-called "consolation within a consolation,"¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ "*Ipse autem optime nouit tempus quo cuique debeat succurrere;*" "But he himself knows best the time at which he ought to come to each man's rescue;" Rita Degl'Innocenti Pierini, "A proposito di Anthologia Latina 236 R2 e degli epigrammi attribuiti a Seneca," *Prometheus* 13, no. 1 (1987): 23-27.

¹⁸⁵ Kurth, *Senecas Trostschrift an Polybius, Dialog 11: ein Kommentar*, 59: 167-95.

¹⁸⁶ Wilson, "Seneca the Consoler," 95-97.

the speech of Claudius at *Ad Polybium*, 14-16: “The attribution to the reigning emperor...of an extended speech within this consolation is an obvious example of a peculiarity which sets the ‘ad Polybium’ apart from other surviving consolations...”¹⁸⁷ In my reading, I stress that Seneca merges his own voice, the apparently weak voice of bare life, and Claudius’ voice, the voice of sovereign power. This decisive juxtaposition thus enacts the most extreme degree of overidentification, insofar as Seneca identifies entirely with the punishing sovereign. This passage therefore also defines the relationship between the two discourses that unfold in the text, the consolation to Polybius and the self-consolatory panegyric, which raises the possibility of Seneca's recall from exile. Having introduced Claudius as a third actor beyond the *consolator* Seneca and the *consolandus* Polybius, for the first and only time in this text both Seneca and Polybius can be situated as fellow *consolandi* before a *consolator* external to their exchange. Surprisingly, Claudius’ consolation, though imagined into existence by Seneca at least as much for his own needs as for Polybius’, effectively reaches the mourning Polybius, but does not speak to Seneca's predicament.

The placement of this speech is significant. Seneca’s description of his trial shades the epiphany of Claudius’ divine voice, so that the reader knows that Seneca praises the ruler who exiled him for his clemency. The uncertain meaning of that event therefore informs the meaning of this speech. In that light, it is important that Seneca

¹⁸⁷ Atkinson, "ad Polybium," 875.

refers to “this *princeps*” as the “*publicum omnium hominum solacium*,” the “public consolation of all people,” because, coming away from Seneca's description of his trial and keeping in mind the interchangeability of Polybius’ position with Seneca’s, the universality of Claudius’ consolation directs that consolation toward not Polybius alone, but also toward Seneca. For he who is the consolation of all must strive to console both of these figures. Claudius, who created the need for Seneca's consolation, may also be expected to supply it for him. Though the same cannot be said for Polybius, it is important that Claudius’ consolation act as both cause of and cure for the grievance that Seneca constructs as his own broken and inefficacious voice.

Seneca then declares that Claudius “has already remade [Polybius’] spirit and applied stronger remedies to so great a wound” (“*...iam recreavit animum tuum et tam magno vulneri maiora adhibuit remedia*,” 14.1). By doing so, Seneca curiously undercuts his own attempted consolation, which he disparages in the last paragraph of this text as the unreliable counsel of a strained mind.¹⁸⁸ In this way, Seneca establishes Claudius’ consolation as the more effective remedy for Polybius’ grief, and denigrates his own efforts as a superfluous attempt to construct a coherent consolation for one to whom a more felicitous consolation has already been applied. This is reinforced by the force of Claudius’ speech. At 14.2 Claudius’ consolation, unlike Seneca’s, is delivered with “divine authority:” “*aliud habebunt hoc dicente pondus verba velut ab oraculo missa*;

¹⁸⁸ Wilson, "Seneca the Consoler," 93-94; Atkinson, "ad Polybium," 875.

omnem vim doloris tui divina eius contundet auctoritas.” “When he speaks, his words, delivered as if from some oracle, will have an impressive weight; his divine authority will beat the entire force of your grief.” Seneca's consolation is therefore not only superfluous, but it is rather lacking in that crucial imperial quality that defines the power of the *princeps*, his *divina auctoritas*. Claudius' consolation carries a gravity that Seneca could never have achieved, even if his exile had not undermined his eloquence. For none can rival the *auctoritas* of the reigning emperor. Just as in Seneca's trial, the voice of the *princeps* has the ultimate verdict in the case of Polybius' grief as well.

But the participial phrase expanding “*verba*” above, “delivered as if from some oracle,” complicates this straightforward reading of the emperor's sovereign authority. Oracles in antiquity are indeed a source of divine knowledge, but they often take the form of duplicitous utterance, as in the well-known episode in Herodotus' history, where Croesus brings about the fall of his Lydian kingdom because he misunderstands the oracles.¹⁸⁹ By using this phrase, Seneca invites his readers to consider that Claudius' words, though delivered with such “divine authority,” may be equally duplicitous, and therefore require careful interpretation. This duplicity accounts for one of the peculiarities of Claudius' consolation. At 14.2, Seneca divides the consolation that, as he assumes, Claudius must have already provided into “*omnia exempla*” and “*omnium*

¹⁸⁹ Hdt. 1.6-94; Robert Parker, “Greek States and Greek Oracles,” in *Oxford Readings in Greek Religion*, ed. Richard Buxton (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000): 76-108; Michael Arnush, “Pilgrimage to the Oracle of Apollo at Delphi: Patterns of Public and Private Consultation,” in *Pilgrimage in Graeco-Roman and Early Christian Antiquity: Seeing the Gods*, ed. Jaś Elsner and Ian Rutherford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010): 97-110.

praecepta sapientum,” “all the examples” and “the precepts of all the sages,” so that Claudius’ speech, which Seneca will introduce within a few sentences, breaks down into a complete consolatory discourse. However, despite Seneca’s suggestion that the emperor’s consolation would consist of both precepts and examples, the speech is nearly void of the former and consists almost entirely of the latter. This further raises the suspicion of duplicity, since the crucial interpretant of Claudius’ examples, the precepts that the *consolator* uses to account for the significance of his examples, do not appear in this consolation within a consolation.¹⁹⁰

4.3.16. Overidentification, II: Claudius and Seneca’s Extimate Voices

Analysis of Claudius’ speech itself, therefore, is the best way toward an understanding of what Claudius’ examples are doing. Three points emerge from the reading of these examples: first, that it is Claudius, and not Seneca, who introduces Fortuna into the consolatory discourse underway as the cause of loss in the homes of Seneca, Polybius, and Claudius; second, that Seneca has his Claudius reveal more than the emperor may intend about the imperial family’s violent past; and third, that, though Claudius’ losses relate readily to Polybius’ loss of his brother, they do not speak to Seneca’s cause for grief over his exile.

¹⁹⁰ Abel, *Bauformen*: 70-84; Wilson, “Seneca the Consoler,” 93-94; Degl’Innocenti Pierini, *Tra Ovidio e Seneca*: 112-20.

Passing over the “*exempla...vulgaria*,” Claudius retells the woes of nearly every dynast to appear on the grand stage of Roman politics from the end of the Punic Wars.¹⁹¹ It is as if Seneca, using the voice of Claudius, writes the exemplary history of the principate in which he encouraged Polybius to employ his talents at paragraph 8.¹⁹² The apparent purpose of this catalog is to prove through the introduction of increasingly dramatic examples the proposition that Claudius advances at the beginning of his speech. He claims, “*nulla domus in toto orbe terrarum aut est aut fuit sine aliqua comploratione.*” That is, “There is no estate in the entire world that either is or was without any cause for weeping.” This may be the only consolatory precept that Claudius’ examples adduce. Even still, Claudius does not pose this point in the affirmative, asserting that the universality of misery and suffering proves that Polybius’ case, since it is not unique, ought not to be mourned in any special or extreme degree. His negative claim does, however, apply both to the loss that Polybius and his brothers have experienced as well as to the loss that currently afflicts Seneca and his brothers. For at 14.3, Claudius clarifies his thesis with the following words: “*...nemo non ex istis in*

¹⁹¹ Characterizing the examples in a general way, first of all, the “vulgar examples” described as less important and yet numberless, but the “faces” of Roman history, whose “*imagines*” hang in the “*Caesarum atrium*,” “the hall of the Caesars.” They combine to form a historical narrative, drawn, as he says, from the *Fasti* and the *Annales* (14.2), recounting the growth and expansion of sovereign authority and the untimely deaths that check that history. For a structural analysis of the *Ad Polybium* that relies in part on the *exempla*, see Abel, *Bauformen*: 70-84.

¹⁹² At least two scholars, Dahlmann and Hijmans, have tried to detect deliberate echoes of Claudius’ historiographical voice in Seneca’s miniature consolation within the consolation. Dahlmann, “Zu Senecas Trostschrift.”; Hijmans, “Stylistic Splendor.” For my argument, it is not essential that Claudius’ voice actually comes through in this text, but rather that Seneca has appropriated his *persona* for his own purposes.

ornamentum saeculorum refulgentibus viris aut desiderio suorum tortus est aut a suis cum maximo animi cruciatu desideratus est.” “There is not anyone among these men, shining with the distinction of the ages, who has not been tortured with longing for loved ones (*suorum*) or who has not been missed by them with the greatest torment of the soul.” In no place here does death stand apart as the only torture to or from loved ones that one may experience; exile may equally cause such suffering.

But coming to the examples themselves, it is clear that the deaths of beloved siblings take priority over exiles in Claudius’ history of bereavement among the privileged. First, Scipio Africanus and his brother Scipio Asiaticus, who, on Seneca’s account, died while Africanus was in exile, are introduced (14.4). Then Claudius praises Scipio Aemilianus’ fortitude following his father’s death and the deaths of his two brothers (14.5). He passes from there to the two brothers Luculli (15.1), and finally to Sextus Pompey (15.1).¹⁹³ These exhaust the republican examples that Claudius discusses, and he closes his reflections on this history by saying,

Innumerabilia undique exempla separatorum morte fratrum succurrunt, immo contra vix ulla umquam horum paria conspecta sunt una senescentia. Sed

¹⁹³ Two historical errors have received some attention in the secondary scholarship. First, Livy 38.59 provides an alternative account of Scipio Africanus’ death, indicating that Africanus did not outlive Asiaticus, as Seneca claims (14.4). However, Atkinson cites Ceccarini’s observation that Seneca may depend upon another historian’s account, and that even Livy hesitates in deciding between the varying historical sources he had available to him (58.56). Atkinson, “ad Polybium,” 877. Second, Seneca seems to confuse the sister of Sextus Pompey with Julia, Sextus Pompey’s own stepmother. Abel, also cited in Atkinson, suggests that Seneca’s second error may not be an error at all. Abel, *Bauformen*: 376-77. In this case, Claudius is understood to refer at 15.1 to the stepsister of Sextus Pompey, also named Julia, and not to his biological sibling. Atkinson points out that this considerably credits Claudius with a weak argument, though, since Julia was only a half-sister and died in infancy. Atkinson, “ad Polybium,” 877.

contentus nostrae domus exemplis ero; nemo enim tam expers erit sensus ac sanitatis, ut fortunam ulli queratur luctum intulisse, quam sciet etiam Caesarum lacrimas concupisse. (15.2)

From all sides countless examples of brothers parted by death rush up, and indeed hardly ever have any of these pairs been observed growing old together. But I will be satisfied with examples from my own lineage [*domus*]; for no one could be so lacking in sensitivity and good sense that he would complain that Fortuna has brought some grief upon him, once he will know that she desires even the tears of Caesars.

The purely quantitative accumulation of losses can compare in no way with the qualitative losses among the imperial family. Claudius' point is that, though he could amass even greater quantities of examples from elsewhere, no examples will be as forceful or as universal as the losses among the *domus* to which Claudius himself belongs. They are simply worth more.

Reminding Polybius that Fortuna's assaults reach even into the doors of the imperial palace, Claudius expects to prove that loss is truly universal, with no one having been spared, and therefore that nothing special has happened in the case of Polybius and his brother. He continues, identifying among the imperial family first "*divus Augustus*," who lost Octavia and her son Marcellus, his sons-in-law, his children, and his grandchildren (15.3). Claudius identifies so many deceased relatives that he is led to proclaim of Augustus, "*...nemo magis ex omnibus mortalibus hominem esse se, dum inter homines erat, sensit.*" "No one of all mortals more than he sensed that he was a man, as

long as he was among men.”¹⁹⁴ The *gravitas* of the example outweighs its questionable application in this case. Augustus may not have had any brothers that Claudius can bring up for Polybius’ sake, but he did have losses and he is after all Caesar Augustus. Searching for a more apt example, Claudius comes next to Gaius, Augustus’ grandson and Claudius’ great-uncle, who lost his brother Lucius (15.4).¹⁹⁵ Next he introduces Tiberius as the consoler of the Roman army at the time of the death of Drusus Germanicus, Claudius’ father (15.5). With these two examples, Claudius is able to connect his own family history and Augustus’ struggles to find an appropriate heir to his position within the imperial family in such a way that he makes the examples relevant to Polybius’ suffering, since with Gaius and Lucius, with Tiberius and Drusus, he has been able to identify imperial brothers who lost their brothers, just as Polybius lost his own brother.

At 16.1 Claudius introduces Mark Antony as his own grandfather (“*avus meus*”). This relationship and indeed the entire paragraph describing Claudius’ ancestor is crucial, because, historically, even apart from this text, Mark Antony’s reputation underwent a major rehabilitation during the early years of Claudius’ reign, so that his image would seem more majestic, regal, and imperial, in keeping with the historical Claudius’ claim to

¹⁹⁴ The insertion of the qualifying clause from “*dum*” onward shows the kind of irony that Seneca himself is alleged to have employed. If Seneca is employing irony, then so is his Claudius.

¹⁹⁵ For more on Gaius and Lucius Caesar, see J. Pollini, *The Portraiture of Gaius and Lucius Caesar* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1987); Erich S. Gruen, “Augustus and the Making of the Principate,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus*, ed. Karl Galinsky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 33-52.

possess merit as a dynastic successor.¹⁹⁶ In this light, putting this paragraph on Antony in Claudius' mouth can be seen as an important Senecan comment upon that rehabilitation and therefore upon Claudius' ideological program. Where the early emperors in the Julio-Claudian dynasty receive basically flattering treatments in this speech, Antony's portrayal is a disturbingly tyrannical image.¹⁹⁷ The troubling aspects of his image only emerge gradually. At first he is simply a great man, "second to none," save Augustus, the man "by whom he was conquered" ("*nullo minor nisi eo a quo victus est.*"). Then he is "arranging the constitution of the Republic" at the time when—and this is the important detail for the consolation—he hears that his brother has died. Claudius adds as another superfluous but telling detail, that, because of Antony's "triumviral power," at that time he "saw no man as above him" ("*...cum rem publicam constitueret et triumvirali potestate praeditus nihil supra se videret...*"). Then Claudius corrects himself and says that rather he "perceived that he was above all others, save his two colleagues" ("*...exceptis vero duobus collegis omnia infra se cerneret*"). In this way, the pride of a sovereign can be discerned in Claudius' clarification of Antony's perception. By the end of the paragraph, the truly tyrannical dimensions of Antony's power emerge for all to see, as Claudius

¹⁹⁶ Osgood, *Claudius Caesar*: 29-46.

¹⁹⁷ Atkinson, "ad Polybium," 877-88; W. H. Alexander, "Julius Caesar in the Pages of Seneca the Philosopher," *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada* 35, no. 2 (1941): 15-28; K. Kraft, "Der politische Hintergrund von Senecas Apocolocyntosis," *Historia* 15 (1966): 100-09. Cf. *de beneficiis* V.16.6; *de clementia* I.9.1; and *ep.* 83.25, where Marc Antony is described as a *magnum virum et ingenii nobilis*, despite the passage's focus on his degradation and brutalization.

declares that Antony, in order to avenge his brother's death, poured "the blood of twenty legions" ("*...et hoc fuit eius lugere viginti legionum sanguine fratri parentare,*" 16.2).¹⁹⁸

Along the way, Seneca's Claudius calls out to Fortuna at 16.2, much as Seneca has in the laments of paragraphs 2 and 3 and again during the panegyric at 13.1, saying, "*Fortuna impotens, quales ex humanis malis tibi ipsa ludos facis!*" "Impotent Fortuna, what sort of games do you make for yourself from human misery!" This exclamation anticipates the paradox that Claudius then highlights: just when Antony sat as "*civium suorum vitae...mortisque arbiter,*" as the "arbiter of life and death over all of his own fellow citizens," his own brother was sent to his execution. Claudius does not identify Augustus as the executioner, but the paradox in which one triumvir decides on the life of the brother of another is precisely what Claudius' exclamation is designed to both highlight and obscure. For, just as Seneca introduces Fortuna everywhere that he cannot comprehend the true causes of his own suffering, in order to clear Claudius' role in his exile, Claudius clears Augustus by pinning Lucius Antonius' death onto Fortuna. But in Seneca's case his confused psychology, caused by his exile, stand as an excuse for this misrecognition of the cause. In Claudius' case, there is no such excuse. Why he would then conceal Augustus' role as *arbiter* of the life of Lucius Antonius, even as he exposes his own grandfather, Mark Antony, as a tyrannical potentate, cannot be clearly explained,

¹⁹⁸ Claudius manipulates the timeline here, so that it is not clear to which twenty legions he refers. They may possibly be the legions of Brutus and Cassius, but the battle of Philippi occurred before Lucius Antonius died, so this cannot be the case. Alternatively, if Claudius refers to the order issued by Augustus to execute Lucius, then he may refer to the destruction of naval forces at the battle of Actium as his revenge. The problem is that Seneca's testimony is the only source that discusses Lucius' death.

except perhaps as calculated euphemism, a more fully conscious obscuring of the facts, in order to make them analogous to Polybius' own loss.

The conclusion of Claudius' speech supports this claim. As Claudius comes to his last words on this subject, he discusses his immediate family and his own siblings in particular. This is an apt comparison to Polybius' situation, as Claudius is made to seem Polybius' equal in at least this one way. For he too, even in spite of his high status, has not been able to avoid the losses that afflict each and all. But he is strangely elusive in his presentation of these losses, introducing this paragraph with two examples of *praeteritio*, first "passing over all the other examples" and then "remaining silent...about the other funerals" ("*Sed ut omnia alia exempla praeteream, un in me quoque ipso alia taceam funera...*" 16.3). No indication is given of who these examples are, of whose funerals Claudius refuses to discuss. These omissions suggest that Claudius' rhetoric may parade as brevity, only for the sake of leaving out uncomfortable details about the principate's history. He has, for example, made no mention of Gaius, his immediate predecessor, and instead passes directly from Tiberius to himself.¹⁹⁹ When he mentions that "Fortuna has twice attacked [him] with fraternal mourning," he only describes one sibling for whom he has mourned ("*bis me fraterno luctu aggressa fortuna est*"). Germanicus, as it turns out, is worthy of mentioning by name and Claudius details his attention to Germanicus' funeral rites. In the last clauses of his consolation, Claudius declares that, for

¹⁹⁹ With this neglect, it thus falls to Seneca at 17.3-5 to bring up Gaius and discuss the "inhuman consolations" he sought when his sister died.

Germanicus, he “so ruled over [his] affects, that [he] neither left anything undone, which ought to be done by a good brother, nor did [he] do anything which could be held inappropriate to a *princeps*.”²⁰⁰ But Claudius’ sister, Livilla, only comes up in this anonymous way, as the other sibling for whom Claudius once had to mourn. It is possible that Claudius has not named her simply because he is consoling Polybius for the loss of a brother. But then at this critical moment of transition in the imperial regime, his sister’s name, Livilla, would have brought forth unhappy associations with a certain niece, Julia Livilla named after this sibling of the emperor and recently sent into exile for an alleged affair.²⁰¹ So there may be more to his quick evasion of this second sibling.

At this point, Claudius’ speech breaks off, and the “consolation within a consolation” comes to its close. Seneca begins his address to Polybius again, and he comments briefly upon Claudius’ consolation. He commands Polybius to recognize these examples as the ones that Claudius must have raised, thus treating this speech as the princeps’ own words, but also, and at greater length, to see that “he shows how nothing is sacred and inviolable to Fortuna, who has dared to lead funerals out from the same hearths, out of which she was about to seek gods” (“...*eundem ostendere, quam nihil sacrum intactumque fortunae, quae ex penatibus ausa est funera ducere, ex quibus erat*

²⁰⁰ “*sic tamen adfectum meum rexi ut nec relinquerem quicquam quod exigi deberet a bono fratre, nec facerem quod reprehendi posset in principe.*”

²⁰¹ It should be recalled from above that Seneca was exiled in connection with her removal and eventual forced starvation.

deos petitura." 16.4). Through 16.5, Seneca continues to pour scorn upon Fortuna's injustices, and at 16.6 he writes,

Hoc unum obtineamus ab illa votis ac precibus publicis, si nondum illi genus humanum placuit consumere, si Romanum adhuc nomen propitia respicit: hunc principem lapsis hominum rebus datum, sicut omnibus mortalibus, sibi esse sacratum velit! Discat ab illo clementiam fiatque mitissimo omnium principum mitis!

Let us secure this one thing from her with vows and public prayers, if she has not yet been pleased to destroy the entire human race, if she still looks upon the name of Rome with favor: may she wish that this *princeps*, handed over to the ruined affairs of humanity, be set aside as sacred for her, just as he is for all mortals! Let her learn clemency from him and let her become gentle to the most gentle of all Princes!²⁰²

Appropriate to recall here is Agamben's thesis, that sacred life emerges from the decision that forcefully divides natural life from the qualified life of the citizen, leaving a remainder left over from this division that clings to the person of the sovereign. Seneca's exclamations at 16.6, in which he, the very example of bare life exposed by his sovereign to the inclusive exclusion of relegation,²⁰³ calls out for Fortuna's recognition that Claudius is sacred life resound in a particularly uncanny register.²⁰⁴

It is clear by this point that Seneca does not only apparently support the public ideology of Claudius' regime from a position of ironic detachment. Nor does he represent

²⁰² Kurth, *Senecas Trostschrift an Polybius, Dialog 11: ein Kommentar*, 59: 199-200; Rita Degl'Innocenti Pierini, "Seneca emulo di Ovidio nella rappresentazione del diluvio universale (Nat. Quaest. 3.27.13)," *A&R* 29 (1984): 153; Giancarlo Mazzoli, "Seneca e la poesia," in *Sénèque et la prose latine, Entretiens sur l'Antiquité classique*, ed. Pierre Grimal 36 (Vandœuvres-Genève: Fondation Hardt, 1991): 177-218; Aldo Setaioli, *Teorie artistiche e letterarie di L. Anneo Seneca* (Bologna: Riccardo Patron, 1971): 166-70; J. Dingel, "Seneca und die Dichtung" (Heidelberg, 1974), 27.

²⁰³ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*: 21-22.

²⁰⁴ Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*: 105-24.

himself as a critic of the regime. Rather, he shows himself as so ardent an enthusiast for Claudius' cause that one cannot help but regard his adulation with a measure of repulsion. It is as if he is the only listener to Claudius' speech who cannot hear the subtext of violence running through Claudius' history of the imperial family—a subtext that surfaces quite plainly in the case of Claudius' grandfather Mark Antony. This violent undercurrent has culminated most recently in the exile of Julia Livilla, and Seneca himself fell victim to this intrigue. But in his consolation Seneca identifies so fully with the imperial regime, going so far as to identify with the voice of the sovereign himself, that he misses the subtext and hears only Claudius' official history of these events, holding that Fortuna is to blame. This unflagging devotion to Claudius in one of the victims of Claudius' power rouses perhaps feelings of pity for Seneca, but even more it provokes a kind of disgust: Seneca does not just identify with ruler, he identifies with the ruler *too much*. This is the meaning of what Žižek calls overidentification: Seneca places his voice and the voice of the sovereign, his bare life and the sacred life of the *princeps*, in immediate proximity, so that their mutual implication in one another can become apparent. Asserting in this way the speculative identity of their voices, Seneca not only imagines into existence his potential consoler, thus enacting a complex variety of self-consolation via the imaginary other (or via the externalized self), he also reveals that his own predicament, governing the disconnect between what Seneca says and that it is Seneca who says this, constitutes the truth of Claudius' sovereign power.

4.3.17. Seneca's Closing Remarks: On the Poverty of Philosophy

As I mentioned above, paragraphs 17 and 18 are added onto the *Ad Polybium's* design in such a way that their function within the text is not immediately clear. In these paragraphs, Seneca moves from topic to topic, with no apparent sense of continuity governing the order or the arrangement of his thoughts. First, he holds up the Caesars as examples for Polybius to imitate, but then he places their divinity in doubt. Then he pours scorn upon Gaius Caesar, Caligula, Claudius' predecessor and the last of the strictly Julian members of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. By paragraph 18, Seneca returns his attention to Polybius, and recommends once again writing as the right remedy for Polybius, only now he holds up a memoir of his brother as the best thing, not a history of the emperor's accomplishments. This allows him some space to criticize monumental funerary practices, and from this he transitions to a surprising praise of Fortuna. Finally, in direct contradiction of his Stoic peers, Seneca suggests that Polybius should take a moderate position on his grief, neither expecting complete extirpation of his affects nor indulging his grief without any restraint. There is no obvious direction to Seneca's discourse at this point, so that the final paragraphs read as almost entirely random suggestions to Polybius, rooted in no sequential logic at all.

This last section begins with an exhortation to Polybius, that he ought to imitate the fortitude of the Caesars who endure their fortunes, at least to the extent that a mere mortal may imitate the godlike (17.1). He calls upon Polybius to fix his entranced gaze upon "all those accepted into the heavens, or those nearest to them," the deified and still

living Caesars (“*omnes...aut adscitos caelo aut proximos*” 17.1), so that he may learn how to endure fortune. In 17.2, Seneca introduces a concessive clause within his recommendation of the Caesar’s exemplary strength, suggesting that the Caesars conceive of themselves in a way precisely opposite to those whom, in paragraph 1, he had chided for their boldness in defying the law of mortality. He writes,

Optime certe illos imitaberis, qui cum indignari possent non esse ipsos exsortes huius mali, tamen in hoc uno se ceteris exaequari hominibus non iniuriam sed ius mortalitatis iudicaverunt tuleruntque nec nimis acerbe et aspere, quod acciderat, nec molliter et effeminate; nam et non sentire mala sua non est hominis et non ferre non est viri.

Doubtless you will do best to imitate those who, although they could be resentful that they were not excluded from this evil, nevertheless in this one thing they judged that no injustice, but rather the law of mortality made them equal to the rest of humanity, and they bore what had chanced to happen neither too bitterly nor harshly, but still showing neither softness nor effeminacy; for it is proper for a man to feel the evils that assail him, but also to endure them.

Seneca here references the sovereign exception, the peculiar character of the sovereign’s position that, in addition to the natural life that he shares with all other humans, a remainder of sacred life accrues to his person, so that he is both human and superhuman, godlike, “nearest” to the heavens. But the justice of those whom Seneca’s Claudius lists in his brief history of Roman dynastic struggle was such that they did not attempt to transgress the natural law imposing death upon them. Their merit is that, within the law of nature, they did not insist upon an exceptional position. And yet for this they are rewarded with immortality by the very nature of things.

From 17.3-17.6, Seneca recalls the example of Gaius, the former emperor, whom the historical Claudius replaced and of whom Seneca's Claudius failed to make any mention. Seneca's devotion to Claudius' version of history is once again evident in this passage. For, to the extent that he villainizes Gaius, treating him as a freak of nature (17.3) and an unrestrained, licentious ruler, given to gaming (17.4), inattention to his appearance (17.5), and fits of uncontrolled and unpredictable emotions (17.5), he ties everything that is excessive and violent in sovereign power to the relative by whom Livilla or Messalina and their respective husbands maintained some claim to the principate. At the same time, this recollection of a figure whom Seneca's Claudius chose to pass over in silence is perhaps inconvenient. It would be best for Claudius that all of this simply be forgotten, that everyone move on from these dynastic disputes and the struggle over the question of who belongs on the throne. In spite of Seneca's apparently limitless enthusiasm for the virtues of Claudius' reign and his forbidding that anyone consider Gaius' pursuit of "inhuman consolation" ("*minime humanum solacium*," 17.6) as exemplary, his portrait of Gaius, a tyrannical ruler "never sure enough whether he wished for his sister to be mourned" as a mere mortal "or to be worshipped" as a goddess, demonstrates that as long as there are actors in Roman life eager to position themselves above the law of mortality, there will be danger for the subjects who must decide how to act with respect to those human divinities ("*...numquam satis certus, utrum luberi vellet an coli sororem...*" 17.5).

Coming now to the last paragraph, Seneca leaves off discussion of the imperial family, and he returns his ever flitting attention to Polybius, acknowledging that there is

no reason to worry that Polybius would turn to such vile consolations as Gaius pursued, since the freedman has shown his predilection for literary study, “the greatest ornaments to a man and his greatest comforts” (“...*et ornamenta maxima homini...et solacia.*” 18.1). Now Seneca changes his advice to Polybius, recommending that he write not a history of the emperor’s accomplishments, plunging his psychology ever deeper into its dependence upon Claudius, but rather a memorial for his brother.²⁰⁵ He contrasts this manner of memorialization with monumental burial practices, “the construction of stones and the marble blocks or earthen heaps built up into a great height” (“...*constructionem lapidum et marmoreas moles aut terrenos tumulos in magnam eductos altitudinem...*” 18.2). The former hold the power to grant an immortal memory, while the latter cannot. In the end, he advises Polybius in this way: “*melius illum duraturo semper consecrabis ingenio quam irrita dolore lugebis.*” “You will consecrate [your brother] better with your everlasting genius than you will mourn him with unresolved grief.” The invincibility of literary celebration, according to Seneca’s account, outlasts monumental graves, no matter how lavish they may be. This is a strange twist for Seneca. He has been celebrating the immense power of Claudius and more generally the exclusive excellence of the imperial family, greater even than the dynasts that Seneca’s Claudius includes in his speech, but, at the same time, the very practice of memorialization most associated at Rome with the Caesars Seneca now dismisses as short-lived. Though it is true that

²⁰⁵ “*Fratris quoque tui produc memoriam aliquo scriptorum monumento tuorum...*” “Bring forth a memorial for your brother, made from some monument of your writings...” (18.2)

Seneca, Claudius, and Polybius all share a fascination and proclivity for the written word, Seneca's preference of literature to the practice of grand funerary memorialization cannot indicate a high estimation of the imperial adoption of the latter practice.

This minor critique of imperial funerary practices anticipates the turn in Seneca's text at 18.3, where he suggests that he could, but will not, argue on Fortuna's behalf against Polybius' bad opinion of her.²⁰⁶ Polybius' loss of one of her gifts has biased him, Seneca says, against Fortuna, so that he cannot appreciate her other gifts to him. This redemption of Fortuna's character comes as a surprise, because up to this point Seneca has consistently faulted her for her fickle whimsy and her tyrannical treatment of Polybius, himself, and the imperial family. At 16.2 even Seneca's Claudius exclaimed that Fortuna was the cause of Antony's misery, and in this way he seems to have faulted her for the injustice against Antony that, in reality, Augustus committed.²⁰⁷ Now, in the last paragraph of this text, Seneca allows that in time very likely he will be able to convince Polybius of Fortuna's merits. This change of perspective on Fortuna seems to register an awareness at some level of Seneca's discourse that this "key euphemism," in Rudich's terms, introduced to conceal Claudius' role in Seneca's own exile, just as it conceals Augustus' role in Lucius Antonius' execution, cannot really be responsible for Seneca's misery. It is as if Seneca momentarily takes the sage's perspective on fortune

²⁰⁶ Fantham, "Dialogues of Displacement," 190-91.

²⁰⁷ At least in Seneca's version of events. There is no historical evidence, beyond this passage, that connects Lucius Antonius' death to the triumviral power of Augustus. See fn 198, p. 402 above.

and sees the chain of events leading to his exile without any ideological cipher, with a clear apprehension of Fortuna's only apparent existence.

But just as quickly as he adopted this perspective, he abandons it. If Polybius is not ready to hear Seneca argue on behalf of Fortuna, it is just as likely that Seneca, still fixated on his own grief, is not ready for his part to make that case. In the remainder of paragraph 18, Seneca rejects the sage's point of view on suffering in unambiguous terms. It has been remarked that, in this paragraph, against the Stoic view, Seneca adopts the moderate position on grief and the affects associated with mourning.²⁰⁸ He writes:

Et scio inveniri quosdam durae magis quam fortis prudentiae viros, qui negent doliturum esse sapientem. Hi non videntur mihi umquam in eiusmodi casum incidisse, alioquin excussisset illis fortuna superbam sapientiam et ad confessionem eos veri etiam invitos compulsisset. (18.5)

And I know that certain men, more hard-hearted than brave in their calculation [*prudentia*], can be found, who will deny that the sage would feel grief. These men seem to me to have never fallen into serious hardship [*in eiusmodi casum*]; otherwise, Fortuna would have beaten that arrogant wisdom out of them and she would would have compelled them, even unwilling, to a confession of the truth.

In this passage the sage's false wisdom comes crashing down in a confrontation with Fortuna, who is illustrated as a torturer exacting confession from a prisoner. In the long-standing debate concerning whether the sage could preserve his serenity even on the rack, Seneca thus falls squarely on the side of those who opposed the Stoics' hard-line position. Faced with the loss of a brother or, at least just as much if not even more,

²⁰⁸ C. E. Manning, "The Consolatory Tradition and Seneca's Attitude to the Emotions," *Greece & Rome, Second Series* 21, no. 1 (Apr., 1974): 77, 79-81.

undergoing arrest, trial, and exile for a real or alleged crime and knowing all too well that it will not matter at all what one actually did, these hardships would expose the falseness of the sage's posture. Only those who have never suffered such misery would hold fast to the Stoic argument. In the end, Seneca recommends to Polybius that he strive only to moderate his grief, not that he will ever be able to suppress it entirely (18.6-7).

In these two paragraphs, then, Seneca tracks a course through a range of topics, first, the Caesars refusal of their sovereign exception to the natural law of mortality, a gesture that, in the end, only secures their exception all the more: to the extent they show humility and measure themselves as human, they deserve immortality all the more. This raises the exception to the exception: Gaius' uncertainty of his sister's immortality stands as an example not of humility, but rather of unsurety and unsteadiness. He is exactly what Claudius is not, a ruler with no sense of moderation and with no strength to console himself. Polybius, by contrast, should raise no temples and monuments of the kind that Gaius raised for his now human, now divine sister, but instead he should write something that would memorialize his brother. After this piece of advice, Seneca suggests that he could argue a case for Fortuna's merits, but that he will save this for a time when Polybius would be more willing to hear it. For a moment, it is as if Seneca can see beyond his apparent "fortune," the basic obstacle to his recognizing Claudius' oppression as the cause of his suffering, but at least he abandons the philosophical perspective that would dissolve his fascination with Fortuna. He finally concludes his consolation by endorsing the moderate position on the passions more characteristic of the Academy or

the Peripatetics than of Stoics. In sum, he moves through a range of topics that, though there are concepts or images from topic to topic that link them in a loose way, seem otherwise to have no obvious sequence governing their delivery. In other words, Seneca's discourse seems to wander through these last paragraphs, offering conclusions that can be read in such a way that they contradict claims he has made in other parts of his consolation. The many diversions and inconsistencies of the final paragraphs prove once again Seneca's inadequacy to his self-appointed task.

4.3.18. Final Thoughts on the *Ad Polybium*

This brings the analysis full circle, back to the very last words of this text, which I already discussed above: Seneca's meek pleas that his *consolandus* will forgive his poor performance as a *consolator*. The goal of this section-by-section commentary has been to establish the relationships between the different levels of Seneca's discourse, how his attempt at the consolation of Polybius generates a parasitic attempt at self-consolation for Seneca himself, and now it remains to connect those levels to the voice that articulates them. Seneca's last utterance is not only a mark of his incompetence as Polybius' *consolator*, it is also the confirmation that, in the end, Seneca's grievance remains unresolved and he remains unconsoled. This is the only explanation for the pathetic words that close this text: at its end, Seneca's voice is shown to have been unreliable from beginning to end, so that he undermines his competence as a *consolator* even as he shows his expectation of a consolation from his fictional Claudius to have been vain. In

the end, Seneca's grief is never addressed; he can only hold onto the hope that the real Claudius will rescue him from the miserable circumstances into which he has sent Seneca.

The anticipation of a recall from his relegation shows that the Seneca writing this text, in contrast with the Seneca of the *Ad Marciam* or the *Ad Helviam matrem*, finally puts his best hopes for the future fully in politics, not philosophy. In Cicero's letters, it is clear that Romans of the Republic could imagine consolation coming from either politics or domestic life, and they sought compensation for troubles in one sphere by investing themselves in the other. By the time the principate had become a solid reality in Roman life, the two spaces no longer appeared so distinct, and, indeed, even in Cicero's letters it is clear that the barrier between the two spaces was breaking down. As I will argue in the next chapter, Cicero introduced to his Roman colleagues a philosophical mode of consolation to meet the new conditions into which Roman had transformed, and there are indications in Seneca's texts that he followed Cicero at least in his literary aims for the *consolatio*, if not in philosophical dogma. The recommendations to take up writing at paragraphs 8 and 18 indicate that Seneca was at least curious to experiment with a fully philosophical mode of consolation. Perhaps with the passage of time the imitation of Socrates' light poetic translations would be possible, or a consolatory memorial to Polybius' deceased brother could offer a contemplative activity apart from the mercy of Caesar that consoles with equal force. But in this text Seneca finally rejects the Claudius' sage-like advice as inadequate to the suffering that he and Polybius have endured, too

proud to represent anything more than inexperience.²⁰⁹ The only consolation for Seneca, it would seem, is the escape from exile that he fantasizes at 13.2 and 13.4. In the end, his relegation clings to him as the inescapable condition for the production of his discourse. Only Claudius' decision on his life gives him the leisure to write his consolation to Polybius, and that same decision undermines his potential to act, insofar as the grief he feels about that very decision sidelines his attempt at Polybius' consolation.

And yet even though Seneca's attempt to produce a Claudian consolation worthy of both his own and Polybius' grief fails, it nevertheless communicates an important truth. That Seneca's identification with Claudius fails to produce a consolation for Seneca's exile, in addition to addressing Polybius' loss, is also the failure of Seneca's self-consolation, since it is *his* version of Claudius that speaks here, the Claudius with whom he identifies. That Claudius has never known the misery that Seneca experiences, exile from the sovereign's majesty. He can therefore only hold up examples of the misery that he shares in common with Polybius, taking comfort in the universality of Fortuna's injustice to all who have suffered the loss of siblings. He has nothing to say on the subject of exile. Therefore Seneca's self-consolation, just as I will argue those attempted by Cicero and Boethius, ultimately fails to deliver consolation to their afflicted selves. Only the real Claudius can console Seneca, if he will conform to the image that Seneca imagines in the *Ad Polybium*.

²⁰⁹ Cf. 14.2 and 18.5.

4.4. Conclusion: Provincial Virtus and Political Romanticism in Seneca's Ad Helviam

In the *Ad Helviam matrem*, the last consolation that Seneca wrote sometime shortly after he published the *Ad Polybium*, Seneca shows himself to have recovered fully from the crippling condition into which his exile to Corsica rendered him.²¹⁰ Exile had been a cause for weeping in the *Ad Polybium*, and, as I have shown, Seneca only expected his condition to deteriorate as long as he remained in exile. At 1.1 of this consolation to his mother, by contrast, Seneca explains that, prior to tending to her grief, he first had to overcome his own misery, and he then claims, “Besides, I was afraid that Fortuna, since she had been conquered by me, would conquer someone among my relatives” (“...praeterea timebam, ne a me victa fortuna aliquem meorum vinceret.” 1.1). True to Seneca's observation at 1.2-3, the *Ad Helviam matrem* is indeed entirely unique among the extant consolations as the only discourse in which the *consolator*, having himself gone into exile, addresses one of his own relatives.²¹¹ But more important for my

²¹⁰ Rita Degl'Innocenti Pierini, “«Ritratto di Famiglia». Seneca e i suoi nella *Consolatio ad Helviam*,” in *Gli Anni: una famiglia nella storia e nella cultura di Roma imperiale: Atti del Convegno internazionale di Milano - Pavia 2-6 maggio 2000*, ed. Isabella Gualandri and Giancarlo Mazzoli (Como: Edizioni New Press, 2003): 339-56; Wilson, “Seneca the Consoler,” 95.

²¹¹ Vacillating between his felt obligation to speak and his prudent reticence to do so, he reasons that he should hesitate to console his mother: “*cum omnia clarissimorum ingeniorum monumenta ad compescendos moderandosque luctus composita evolverem, non inveniebam exemplum eius qui consolatus suos esset, cum ipse ab illis comploraretur.*” (1.2) “As [he] went through all the classic texts (“*monumenta*”) composed by the most brilliant intellects for the sake of repressing and checking mourning (“*luctus*”), [he] did not discover any example of a man who had consoled his own family (“*suos*”), when he was himself the cause of their weeping.” This expression of concern betrays another impulse, though; for, behind his expression of concern that he may be taking incautious, “revolutionary” behavior (“*in re nova haesitabam*”), there is also revealed an excitement at the possibility of literary discovery, of breaking new ground on an old and well-worn topic.

purposes is that he boasts to have “conquered Fortuna,” to have overcome this adversary on his own. In the empty time between Seneca’s first consolation from exile, the *Ad Polybium*, and his second one, the *Ad Helviam matrem*, in some inexplicable way Seneca seems to have accomplished the self-consolation that the first of these two texts explored and attempted, but did not achieve.

As the last paragraph of the *Ad Helviam* reveals, Seneca now clings to a completely philosophical perspective on his exile, so that, rather than a punishment for a real or alleged crime, a dismissal that the emperor arranged, according to Seneca, for the philosopher’s own good, exile now appears to be an opportunity to be liberated from an unnatural attachment to the local and familiar, an opportunity to explore a more cosmic horizon. He explains to his mother:

...qualem me cogites accipe: laetum et alacrem velut optimis rebus. Sunt enim optima, quoniam animus omnis occupationis expertus operibus suis vacat et modo se levioribus studiis oblectat, modo ad considerandam suam universique naturam veri avidus insurgit. Terras primum situmque earum quaerit, deinde condicionem circumfusi maris cursusque eius alternos et recursus. Tunc quidquid inter caelum terrasque plenum formidinis interiacet perspicit et hoc tonitribus, fulminibus, ventorum flatibus ac nimborum nivisque et grandinis iactu tumultuosum spatium. Tum peragratis humilioribus ad summa perumpit et pulcherrimo divinatorum spectaculo fruitur, aeternitatis suae memor in omne quod fuit futurumque est vadit omnibus saeculis. (20.1-2)

...Hear how you must think of me: that I am happy and carefree as in the best circumstances. For they are the best, because the soul, freed from all preoccupation, has leisure for its own tasks and now enjoys itself with more subtle studies, now excited it rises up to speculate on its own nature and the true nature of the universe. It explores above all lands and the situation of them, then the condition of the surrounding sea and its tides rising and falling. Then it examines whatever lies between the heavens and the earth--full of awe--and this space bustling with thunderclaps, lightning strikes, blasts of winds, and with the strike

of heavy rains, snow, and hail. And then, once the more lowly regions have been traversed, it breaks through to the summit and it enjoys the most beautiful vision of divine things, and, mindful of its own eternity, it proceeds to all that was and is and will be in all the ages.

Earlier in this text, but from a no less philosophical perspective, Seneca explains that he must first show his mother that, not only is he “not wretched,” but even that “it is not possible that he should become unhappy” (“...ipse tibi...indico me non esse miserum. *Adiciam, quo securior sis, ne fieri quidem me posse miserum.*” 4.3); by this, he means to prove that his exile is a point of indifference, and further that nothing bad can happen to those who take a sage’s view of things. In other words, the very point of view that he rejects at the end of the *Ad Polybium* at 18.5-6 Seneca finds himself necessarily adopting in the *Ad Helviam*. The conceit that he uses to explain this is, as elsewhere in the *Ad Helviam*, an analogy between military affairs and the practice of virtue in exile. He explains that, though he can hardly boast of being a “*sapiens*,” he has nevertheless “handed himself over to the wise men and, being not yet strong enough to protect [him]self, he has fled into another's camp” (“...sapientibus me viris dedi et nondum in *auxilium mei validus in aliena castra confugi...*” 5.2).²¹² Once again, therefore, he has presented himself as a progressor rather than a sage, but Seneca’s position is decidedly more philosophical, closer to the sage’s point of view, than his self-presentation in the *Ad Polybium*.

²¹² Cf. section 2.4.

The cosmic vista to which Seneca ascends with newfound serenity and from which he looks down upon human affairs casts his own experience in a somewhat different light. First, in direct contradiction to what Seneca announces in the *kataskopia* at *Ad Polybium* paragraph 4, that life is governed by an economy of misery, requiring a careful budgeting of tears, he argues that humanity is born into conditions of plenitude, and would know so if only it did not spoil its appetite for the truly good and simple things in life (5.1-6). More specific to his own predicament, the arguments introduced from paragraphs 6 through 13 aim to prove that exile is an indifferent condition, having no bearing upon the virtue of the sage, who depends entirely upon himself.²¹³ Along the way of proving this point, as Gareth Williams has convincingly argued, Seneca allows himself space to look down upon the “*immensa urbs*,” “the big city,” Rome (6.1).²¹⁴ Williams observes that, in paragraph 6, Seneca destabilizes the identity through time of the Roman capital, so that, through the passing centuries, the city preserves nothing of its original character and the permanence of Roman *imperium* can no longer be assumed. A consequence of Seneca’s discussion of Roman power in paragraphs 6 and 7, again, as Williams rightly concludes, is that “the authority that sent [Seneca] to Corsica is itself, from an enlightened cosmic point of view, based on a fiction; secular dictates *now* pale into insignificance when set against the liberation of thought [...]”²¹⁵ Seneca would seem,

²¹³ Wilson, "Seneca the Consoler," 94-97.

²¹⁴ Williams, "States of Exile," 149-57.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 173.

then, to have lost all interest in the politics of Rome, to have achieved a more universal horizon of understanding in which the fate of one political community no longer concerns him. This requires, furthermore, the recognition that there is, after all, no god at Rome who can reach down to save him.

But there are suggestions that Seneca has not completely lost interest in Roman affairs, though. For in the examples that Seneca sometimes chooses, such as the extended treatment of Marcellus at 9.4-8 or the comparison of Socrates and Cato at 13.4-6, there is a lingering fixation on the relationship between Roman *virtus* and Caesar's exemplary power. Keeping Williams' argument in mind, that Roman identity is destabilized in Seneca's text, so that, as more and more provincial peoples have contributed to the imperial cause, they may no longer claim exclusive possession of the *virtus* that once brought those foreign peoples under Roman rule, it is important that in Seneca's last consolation the outstanding exemplars of traditionally Roman military *virtus* are Seneca's own mother and his maternal aunt.²¹⁶ So again, a contrast with the *Ad Polybium* is apparent: while that text focused upon the "*publicus parens*" and his impressive display of imperial virtues, clemency above all, father figures are almost entirely absent from the *Ad Helviam*. Seneca's own Roman father comes into criticism for his disinclination to philosophy and his refusal to allow Helvia these higher studies (17.4). As it turns out, his

²¹⁶ Wilcox's argument for the significance of female figures' possession of *virtus* in this text has been crucial for my argument. Wilcox, "Exemplary Grief," 73-100. She focuses, however, on the effect upon the male audience of discovering women who possess the kind of *virtus* that they ought to possess. I am concerned to understand the political significance of crediting these equestrian women with possession of Roman *virtus*.

mother deserves credit for providing his aptitude in philosophical reflection. If Seneca's first two consolations try to preserve political affiliations or to secure them, as I have argued, the *Ad Helviam* retreats from that strategy into the posture of self-assured equestrian *virtus*. If the senatorial elite and the imperial family would not look out for Seneca and his family, it seems that Seneca did not need them after all. Between philosophy and his family, Seneca has two sources of *virtus* that Rome can no longer promise.

Seneca's last word in the consolations, then, is a retreat into political romanticism, a self-aggrandizing posture as the intellectual above the fray. But the question that remains unanswered throughout the *Ad Helviam matrem* is precisely how Seneca arrived at his self-consolation. There is no clear explanation for how he transformed himself in the time between his composition of the *Ad Polybium* and the *Ad Helviam matrem*, only the self-presentation that assures he did indeed succeed in letting go of his attachments to the capital city and the imperial family who ruled from there. His eagerness to expose the city's impermanence though, his enthusiasm for his own philosophical advancement, his certainty of his family's possession of that which Rome would prize most, and above all his return to political activity in 48 CE all betray another truth though: the lingering sense of injustice that all of Seneca's philosophy never did address. Perhaps it is best, then, to conclude that the *Ad Polybium* gives a more honest picture of Seneca's attempt at self-consolation after all.

Chapter Five: Roman Republican Epistolary Consolation, Cicero's Mourning, and the Formation of Self-Consolation

5.1. Introduction: "...omnem consolationem vincit dolor"¹

Dio's *Roman History* features a long passage, in which a Cynic philosopher named Philiscus meets the famous Roman philosopher, orator, and statesman Marcus Tullius Cicero in Macedonia. There, Philiscus offers Cicero a consolation upon his exile.² When this Philiscus confronts Cicero, the Cynic begins by asking him why, despite his impressive education, Cicero persists in pitying himself "in the manner of a woman" ("γυναικείως," 39.18.1). The great Roman should have known better than to debase himself in this way. Cicero replies by observing,

ἀλλ' οὐδέν τοι ὁμοίον ἐστίν, ὦ Φιλίσκε, ὑπὲρ ἄλλων τέ τινα λέγειν καὶ ἑαυτῷ συμβουλεύειν. τὰ μὲν γὰρ ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀλλοτριῶν λεγόμενα, ἀπὸ ὀρθῆς καὶ ἀδιαφθόρου τῆς γνώμης προϊόντα, καιρὸν ἐς τὰ μάλιστα λαμβάνει· ὅταν δὲ δὴ πάθημά τι τὴν ψυχὴν καταλάβῃ, θολοῦται καὶ σκοτοῦται καὶ οὐδὲν δύναται καιρῖον ἐννοῆσαι. ὅθεν πού πάνυ καλῶς εἴρηται ὅτι ῥᾶον παραινέσαι ἑτέροις ἐστὶν ἢ αὐτὸν παθόντα καρτερεῆσαι. (*Dio Cass.* 39.18.2)

But it is not at all the same thing, O Philiscus, to say something for the sake of others and to offer counsel to oneself. For those things one says for others, proceeding from a right and uncorrupted judgment, seize the moment most aptly. But whenever some affliction seizes the soul, it is made turbid, it is darkened, and it is impossible to think of anything appropriate to the event. And from this, doubtless, it is well said that it is easier to advise others than to be patient oneself while suffering.

¹ Cic. *Att.* 12.4.3.

² Dio Cass. 38.18-29. On this passage, see also Jo-Marie Claassen, "Dio's Cicero and the Consolatory Tradition," in *Papers of the Leeds International Latin Seminar*, ed. Francis Cairns and Malcolm Heath 9 (Leeds: Francis Cairns (Publications) Ltd, 1996). There she shows that a worried relation to Cicero's womanly grief is a commonplace in the reception of Cicero's works.

Dio's Cicero responds, in other words, by emphasizing that consolation directed towards others presupposes a certain ethical clarity that, in the case of one's own grieving, shame, or alienation, one cannot be expected to possess.³ I cannot say whether Dio has here problematized the question of self-consolation as veiled critique of Cicero or as an attempt at explaining away the unusual and bathetic performance of Cicero's grieving for his daughter, a great embarrassment to many of his readers over the centuries. However, it can be said that this passage testifies to the impressive distinction of Cicero's innovative strategy of consolation. Before him, no author had ever attempted to perform a literary act of self-consolation.⁴ In fact, even by his own admission, self-consolation, in which he who offers consolation also requires consolation for himself, ought to have been impossible.⁵

Cicero was aware of the unparalleled novelty of his project. In a letter to Atticus, he comments on his unprecedented approach. After reminding his Epicurean friend,

³ For this point, see my discussion of Foucault in the Introduction, pp. 40-48, as well as section 4.2.

⁴ A point made by van Wageningen as early as 1916 Jacobus van Wageningen, *De Ciceronis Libro Consolationis* (Groningen: P. Noordhoff, 1916): 2. He, however, restricts self-consolation to Cicero's *Consolatio*, just as Baltussen, who considers Cicero unique at least among ancient writers Baltussen, "A grief observed," 368.

⁵ Consider his admission to Marcellus in *Fam.* 4.8.1: "*nam si ea quae acciderunt ita fers ut audio, gratulari magis virtuti debeo quam consolari dolorem tuum; sin te tanta mala rei publicae frangunt, non ita abundo ingenio ut te consoler, cum ipse me non possim.*" "For, if you so endure those things which have happened as I hear, I ought more to acknowledge your manliness than to console your grief; but if the republic's many woes break you, I am not so gifted in my abilities that I could console you, when I cannot console myself." Cicero's inability to console himself precludes his offering consolation to Marcellus. His grief for the republic undermines his authority as an orator in two directions: he cannot console himself, because he is not stable enough to offer a consolation, and he cannot console Marcellus for the very same reason.

Atticus, that they both know how little good all previous consolation literature has done Cicero, since he had read it all at Atticus' library, he continues by boasting,

quin etiam feci quod profecto ante me nemo ut ipse me per litteras consolaretur. quem librum ad te mittam, si descripserint librarii. Adfirmo tibi nullam consolationem esse talem. (Att. 12.14.3)⁶

But still I have done what no one before me has done: I myself (*ipse*) console myself through my writing (*per litteras*). I will send this book to you, once my scribes will have made copies. I assure you there exists no such consolation.

Cicero does not emphasize the importance of translating Greek thought into Latin-speaking contexts, as he does so often, but rather highlights that “no one before” wrote in such a way that he consoled himself “through writing.” This last cryptic remark of this quotation receives no further explanation, so it remains unclear in what Cicero imagined the incomparable character of his self-consolation to consist. However, its reflexivity alone would be enough to justify Cicero's claim. By writing a consolation to himself, Cicero performed a gesture of self-writing unlike anything the Greek consolers of the Hellenistic schools had ever attempted.⁷ It is because he developed this innovative

⁶ In general, I have trusted Shackleton Bailey's authority when handling the letters of Cicero. I have taken the dating of the letters from his Loeb edition of the letters *ad Familiares* and *ad Atticum*. Wherever I have depended upon his commentary and critical edition, I have indicated as much in my footnotes.

⁷ Jerome's consolatory letter to Heliodorus, *Ep.* 60.5.2, which Scourfield believes must depend upon Cicero's *Consolatio*, makes reference to consolations by Plato, Diogenes, Clitomachus, Carneades, and Posidonius Scourfield, "Introduction," 13, 115-16. Cicero was at least also familiar with Crantor's consolation to Hippocles, Theophrastus' consolation upon the death of Callisthenes, and perhaps Aristotle's *Eudemus* as well. On these works, see H.J. Mette, "Zwei Akademiker heute: Krantor und Arkesilaos," *Lustrum* 26 (1984); White, "Theophrastus and Callisthenes."; Olof Gigon, "Prolegomena to an edition of the *Eudemus*," in *Aristotle and Plato in the Mid-Fourth Century: Papers of the Symposium Aristotelicum held at Oxford in August, 1957*, ed. I Düring and G.E.L. Owen, *Studia Graeca et Latina Gothoburgensia* (Göteborg: Elanders Boktryckeri Aktiebolag, 1960).

strategy, which, as I have argued, was decisive for both Seneca and Boethius as they wrote their consolations, that he falls within the scope of this investigation.

Unfortunately, Cicero's *Consolatio*⁸ survives antiquity as only thirteen collected testimonia and twenty-three fragments scattered through his later works and the writings of readers who quoted him for their own purposes.⁹ These fragments are not without value, though, and it is possible to make meaningful sense of the text, allowing for some uncertainty in one's results.¹⁰ In this light, one may rightly hope that the fragmentary state

⁸ The title of the work has even come into doubt. This, however, should not be. Philippson has shown that in every passage in which Cicero mentions this work, he refers to it as simply his *Consolatio*. Baltussen, following Plasberg, titles this work the *Consolatio ad se*, which does much to enhance the interest of Cicero's composition, but distorts the facts considerably Otto Plasberg, *Cicero in seinen Werken und Briefen* (Leipzig: Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1926): 158; Baltussen, "Cicero's *Consolatio ad se*."

⁹ The fragmentary state of the text has created conditions in which the *Consolatio* is usually regarded as lost, rather than simply fragmentary. As Baltussen has observed, the text is therefore undeservedly neglected in handbooks' accounts of Cicero's writings. Baltussen, "Cicero's *Consolatio ad se*," 84 n. 2. The same is true of recent general introductions to Cicero. See, for example, *The Cambridge Companion to Cicero*, which only mentions the *Consolatio* in one place as lost in Anthony Corbeill, "Cicero and the intellectual milieu of the late Republic," in *The Cambridge Companion to Cicero*, ed. Catherine Steel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 22. Steel also only mentions the work in her chronological appendix in Catherine Steel, *Reading Cicero: Genre and Performance in Late Republican Rome* (London: Duckworth, 2005): 164.

¹⁰ Baiter and Kayser are the earliest modern edition of the fragments J.G. Baiter and C.L. Kayser, eds., *M. Tullii Ciceronis opera quae supersunt omnia*, vol. XI (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1869): 71-75. They, like Mueller, only collected the fragments, attempting no reasoned arrangement of them in their editions, so van Wageningen's was the first attempted reconstruction C.F.W. Mueller, "IX. Consolatio," in *M. Tullii Ciceronis Scripta quae Manserunt Omnia, Partis IV* Vol. III (Leipzig: Teubner, 1879); Wageningen, *De Ciceronis Libro Consolationis*. Philippson's arguments, along with those of Kumaniecki, show that reconstruction to have been established on unreliable principles R. Philippson, "censura ad Iacobi van Wageningen commentationem," *Berliner Philologische Wochenschrift* 37 (1917); R. Philippson, "M. Tullius Cicero," *RE* VII A 1 (1917); K. Kumaniecki, "Die Verlorene "Consolatio" des Cicero," *Acta Classica Univ. Scient. Debrecen*. IV (1968). Kumaniecki provides a more careful, if still somewhat speculative, partial reconstruction. Finally, Vitelli's edition depends mostly upon the arguments of Philippson and Kumaniecki, avoids the flaws of van Wageningen's attempt, and depends upon more recent scholarship to supplement Philippson and Kumaniecki's claims. Vitelli, *M. Tullii Ciceronis Consolationis Fragmenta*. I have therefore relied upon Vitelli's edition in my discussion of the fragments. Most recently, Baltussen has situated the fragments within a temporal sequence of staged grieving that begins with relevant letters written before the consolation and ends with the *Tusculanae Disputationes*

of the evidence will not hinder meaningful debate about the *Consolatio*'s importance within Cicero's corpus. In this chapter, I argue from these fragments that the self-consolation which Cicero composed introduced the discursive possibility of occupying both of the positions that must be occupied for a consolation to exist, that is, he introduced a division between one self, acting as *consolator* and speaker, and another self, receptive of that discourse as a passive *consolandus*. Furthermore, and perhaps somewhat paradoxically, I argue that Cicero's philosophical project following his self-consolation did not resolve his grief, but rather the very inadequacy of philosophical discourse to that grief required that Cicero employ his philosophical consolation as a discursive legitimation of equally innovative cult practice, leaving his text open, so that only the singular act of dedicating a shrine to his deified daughter would bring closure to his text's meaning (but would in no way bring closure to his mourning). His failure to establish this cult led him further into his melancholia, and thus deeper into the labyrinthine arguments of philosophy, in search of the words and thoughts that would do justice to his loss. Contrary to his professions in the *Tusculanae disputationes* and the *De*

composed not long after, so that there is a richer context for these fragments than we have for most ancient literature. However, he sometimes neglects the timeline of the letters' composition, so that his presentation can distort the facts of Cicero's process of grieving. For a concordance comparison of Mueller, Kumaniecki, and Vitelli, see p. 83 of Baltussen, "Cicero's *Consolatio ad se*."

divinatione,¹¹ his late philosophical project is supported and nurtured by his grief, not isolated to the period after he had recovered.¹²

5.2. Friendship, Duty, and Politics in the Consolatory Epistles

Though Cicero's self-consolation was in fact the first philosophical consolation in Latin literature, that does not mean that he brought it into existence without any precedents. The context for his composition comes from two discursive formations, both of which pre-exist and continue to develop alongside his construction of the self-consolation. On the one side, there is the Greek philosophical παραμυθητικὸς λόγος, with which Cicero claims a complete familiarity (*Att.* 12.14.3). On the other, there is the social practice of epistolary consolation, in which active Roman men wrote to one another at times of misfortune, in order to maintain and reinforce their networks of political affiliation. I will refer to the Greek tradition where appropriate in my analysis of the fragments of Cicero's *consolatio*, but in this section, I work through the surviving

¹¹ In the *De divinatione*, at II.1.3, Cicero says of his *Consolatio* that, “*quae mihi quidem ipsi sane aliquantum medetur; ceteris item multam profuturam puto*,” or “that [work] has been for me clearly to some extent a relief; for others, in the same way, I think that will be beneficial.” It is possible that he does not even mean to claim his *Consolatio* did bring him any relief. The use of “*aliquantum*” at least suggests a moderating of the force of “*medetur*,” and may even be taken ironically with “*sane*” to indicate the opposite—that it is not clear at all that the *Consolatio* helped Cicero—so that the “*item*” in the second clause would then also be ironic. The letters to Atticus, which I discuss below, do not indicate that his readers would have recognized Cicero's *Consolatio* as obviously curative.

The *Tusculanae Disputationes* are a more complicated case, which I expect to deal with more fully elsewhere, but see the conclusion to this chapter in reference to this point.

¹² Plasberg puts this well: “Ihren [i.e., his philosophical writings’] Beginn setzt er selbst öfters mit einem der schmerzlichsten, richtiger wohl dem schmerzlichsten Erlebnis in Verbindung, das er je gehabt hat, dem Tode seiner Tochter Tullia.” Plasberg, *Cicero in seine Werken*: 157.

letters, isolating those examples in which Cicero and his colleagues are trafficking in consolation in a more precise, ethical sense from those letters that feature varied usages of verb forms defined by *consolor*, *consolari*, *consolatus*. By reviewing these letters, one may understand the personal, political, and literary concerns to which Cicero intended his *Consolatio* to respond.

It is important then to isolate the formal, consolatory epistle among the surviving letters. Some form of *consolor* or *consolatio* is employed in nearly a hundred of Cicero's letters, and Cicero several times mentions consolatory letters that do not survive, so this sample cannot be taken as exhaustive of what was Cicero's practice toward consolation.¹³ Still, there are enough letters that mention consolation that one may reasonably make general conclusions about Cicero's attitude toward consolation from what does survive. By far the most common expression of consolation in Cicero's letters is what one may call the everyday or ordinary language use of this term. In numerous examples of this type, Cicero expresses himself in the exaggerated manner that permeates the ordinary language of nearly any speaker, describing how, for example, he cannot receive any other

¹³ These letters that discuss the consolation of others, either instances of Cicero having previously offered consolation or someone else having consoled Cicero's immediate addressee in another letter, include: *Fam.* 6.10b, in which Cicero suggests to one Trebianus that he will attempt to write in consoling tones in another letter, if the strength comes to him; *Fam.* 6.20, in which Cicero begins by explaining his strategy in a previous letter as having been to console Toranius, in the current one as intending to offer advice; *Att.* 1.3, in which Cicero mentions a consolation upon the death of Atticus' grandmother written by another; *Att.* 11.17 and 17a in which Cicero mentions a consolatory letter from Atticus to which Cicero had responded; *Att.* 12.7 and 12.14.3 describes the inefficacy of a consolation from Brutus; *Att.* 12.29 mentions an anticipated letter of consolation from Brutus; and finally *Att.* 13.20 mentions a consolatory letter from Caesar to Cicero.

“consolation” than that his term as provincial governor will not be extended (*Att.* 5.2.3), or how, if he has not succeeded in reassuring a friend who regretted missing the games at Rome, he is “consoled” by the knowledge that his failure may motivate the friend to visit Cicero (*Fam.* 7.1.6).¹⁴ He is therefore not involved in some philosophical act of consolation or even a social formality of the sort that a strict etiquette governs.¹⁵ The crucial point to be made about these uses of consolatory language are that they establish a non-philosophical usage of *consolatio* and *consolor*, and that, from the time that Cicero and his associates begin to adapt Greek philosophical discourse into Latin, this usage is the condition that constitutes *consolatio* as the appropriate translation of the Greek παραμυθία.

But beyond this everyday use of *consolatio* and its cognates, there is a usage that indicates a more well defined mode of address, known in the scholarship as a consolatory epistle or consolatory letter.¹⁶ Beyond using the language of consolation in this general

¹⁴ It will be neither possible nor necessary for my argument to analyze these idiomatic usages in detail. However, a complete analysis of Cicero's consolatory practice would need to deal with each use, since they are only approximately similar. Comparison with other terms for consolation, e.g. *levatio*, *solacia*, and the like, would also need to be taken into consideration.

Examples of such uses of *consolatio* are featured in the following letters: *Fam.* 1.6, 1.8, 3.2, 4.4, 4.14, 6.2, 6.21, 7.1, 7.3, 7.10, 7.11, 11.11, 12.18, 13.15, 13.47, 15.21, 16.8; *Att.* 1.16, 1.17, 2.16, 5.2, 5.11, 5.21, 7.4, 8.11, 9.13, 11.2, 11.3, 11.6, 11.15, 11.16, 11.24, 11.25, 15.27, 16.3, 16.7.

¹⁵ The criterion for these uses is that the writer or the addressee finds himself in circumstances where he feels some small cause for anxiety, worry, or doubt. Beyond that, the specific circumstances may be quite diverse, everything from the widespread and perennial concern that an illness may be more or less serious (*Fam.* 16.8), to the death of one's physician (*Att.* 15.1), to his quite singular worry over Caesar's rise to power and his assurance that, though Caesar has come into supreme power, he will not act in such a way that he would jeopardize that power (*Att.* 7.4).

¹⁶ On this specific mode of epistolary address, see G. O. Hutchinson, "Consolation," in *Cicero's Correspondence: A Literary Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Amanda Wilcox, "Consolation and

way that I have characterized above, these letters show the author of the letter attempting to intervene in the experience of their addressee's loss. The most typical conditions that bring forth consolation from one's social peers and superiors are mourning and exile, and Cicero's received consolations cluster around his experience of exile and the loss of his daughter. Since these letters define a consolatory act by performing this knowledge, it will be helpful to focus the discussion through analysis of a paradigmatic representative. It will be convenient to narrow in on a letter that comes from the period of Cicero's mourning for Tullia, at which time he introduced the philosophical consolation to Latin literature and with the same innovation invented the self-consolation.

In the following sections on Cicero's letters, I show the following points. First, it should be appreciated that the Roman aristocratic men with whom Cicero shared letters of consolation among many other kinds of correspondence, regarded consolation as available from two opposed areas, and only from those two areas. On the one side, there was the private *domus* with its comforts, and a man facing trials in his public life could easily withdraw to that estate in order to find respite from his public troubles there. On the other, if his domestic life presented difficulties, he could seek consolation in deepening his involvement in the public affairs of the *res publica*. Though it may seem surprising, Cicero and his associates seem to have regarded each mode of consolation as

Competition," in *The Gift of Correspondence in Classical Rome* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012).

equally viable, and expected one space to offer effective consolation in the absence of security in the other. Within either of these spaces, Cicero and his peers regarded consolation as involving duties (*officia*), both that consolation was to be offered to family members and social peers facing public or domestic troubles and, on the other side, that it was to be received from them as well.

But there are the social duties one must perform, and then there is how one feels about them. Cicero reveals in his reactions to consolatory discourse, not only at the time of his daughter's premature death but also throughout his life, that he had reservations about consolation of both the private and the public varieties. At the time of his mourning for Tullia, Cicero went further and adamantly refused consolation, as it would apply both to himself and to those whom he would customarily be presumed to console, denying that the discourse had any efficacy at all. Given his refusal of consolation, his *Consolatio* must represent a different purpose than simply consoling himself for his loss. I show that the letters suggest what that purpose likely was, that he wanted to perform publicly his duty toward himself and others, exonerating himself of the obligation that he be consoled, and at the same time to employ Platonic metaphysics in order to redefine what it means to console those in mourning for their loss within the new horizon of post-Republican life.

5.3. Sulpicius Rufus' Letter of Consolation to Cicero (Fam. 4.5)

The most well-known and admired example of this kind of letter, Sulpicius Rufus' letter of consolation from March 45 BCE (*Fam.* 4.5), happens to have been written shortly after the death of Tullia, at the onset of Cicero's profound grief.¹⁷ From Athens, Sulpicius Rufus addressed his letter to Cicero, at that time staying at Astura. With this letter, one glimpses how letters of condolence operated within the culture of mutual obligation in which elite gentlemen of the Roman republic participated; indeed, it is the very paradigm of this mode of discourse. In order to understand Cicero's opposition to and adaptation of this social practice of consolation, which I will discuss in the next section, it is necessary first to examine the operation a standard letter of consolation was supposed to perform. The letter proves that consolation proceeds as a friend's duty to a friend at a time of private loss, but it also shows that Rufus expected political action to rectify the city's troubles to act as a potential source of consolation.

Rufus begins with an expression of sympathy for Cicero's loss. He explains that, upon hearing of Tullia's death, he was "bound" to regard this loss as a "shared disaster" ("*sane quam pro eo [obitu] ac debui...communemque eam calamitatem existimavi.*" *Ad Fam.* IV.5.1). From the first sentence, Rufus emphasizes that he responds to Tullia's death with grief as a duty to the dead and her family, to whom he is tied by bonds of

¹⁷ Kassel, *Untersuchungen zur Konsolationsliteratur*: 98-103; Shackleton Bailey, ed. *Cicero: Epistulae ad Familiares*, vol. II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977): 415-18; Hutchinson, "Consolation," 65-77; Wilcox, "Consolation and Competition," 51-58.

mutual affection. One private loss is felt to be a private loss for another; though Rufus and Cicero are not related, their friendship is such that Rufus must reach out to Cicero. He continues, claiming that, “if I had been present in the place, I would not have been apart from you, and in your presence [*coramque*] I would have shown my grief to you.” Perhaps it goes without saying that spatial separation of considerable distance is among the conditions for the possibility of this discourse: one does not write a letter of consolation to someone who lives so nearby that one could mourn with them in person.¹⁸ But Rufus’ felt need to express this principle, that he would not be away from Cicero, if he were not already displaced to Athens, shows again his concern to fulfill his duty to his friend. A more basic duty to share in mourning conditions Rufus’ obligation to write to Cicero, which is at best a kind of substitute for face-to-face communication.

This distance is also, though, the condition that allows Rufus to perform a more useful task as consoler.¹⁹ He explains that sharing one’s grief in the company of loved ones is a “wretched and painful kind of consolation [*consolationis*],” because one’s “relatives and friends...are affected with an equal distress...so that they seem themselves more to require consolation from others than to be able to accomplish their duty [*officium*] to others.”²⁰ In this way, Rufus points to the danger inherent not only in self-consolation, but also in consolation shared between those who are mutually afflicted by a

¹⁸ White, for example, has emphasized that the preference for face-to-face exchange over epistolary correspondence is a regular feature of Roman epistolary practice. Peter White, *Cicero in Letters: Epistolary Relations of the Late Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010): 18-21.

¹⁹ Baltussen, "Cicero's *Consolatio ad se*," 79.

²⁰ Bailey, *ad Familiares*, 415.

loss: those who share in grief with too great a proximity to the loss invariably require consolation themselves, so that they cannot accomplish the service to which duty obliges them. He continues, explaining that he is writing to Cicero (“*decrevi brevi ad te perscribere*”), then, because Cicero’s grief is bound to have disarmed his capacity to see his situation clearly. He concludes the opening paragraph by observing that he writes to Cicero in order to communicate “what comes into [his] awareness [*in praesentia in mentem mihi venerunt*],” “not because [he] thinks that [Cicero] has abandoned those principles, but because [Cicero], undermined by his grief [*dolore*], may perhaps see them less clearly.” The unstated assumption of Rufus’ position is that his own remoteness in the province distances him from the immediacy of loss, so that his perspective can preserve a rational clarity that Cicero’s immersion in the immediacy of emotional distress cannot allow.²¹

From this point, given what the philosophical consolation tends to do, one would expect Rufus to offer standard topics of consolation. He does nothing of this sort. Rather, his letter focuses relentlessly on the political situation at Rome, emphasizing that Cicero’s private grief for his lost daughter can mean nothing by comparison with the public loss of the republic. From IV.5.2, he begins by asking Cicero why “*suus dolor intestinus*,” “[his] inward grief,” agitates him so greatly. “*Intestinus*” here draws a distinction between a grief that is proper to Cicero’s most private thoughts, feelings, and

²¹ Baltussen, “Cicero’s *Consolatio ad se*,” 79.

affections. This inwardness of private concerns contrasts with those recently threatened public goods that Rufus holds “ought to be no less dear to men than their children: their country, respectability, social position [*dignitatem*], and all public honors.” With this, Rufus has transitioned as quickly as possible from talking about Cicero’s private loss to comparing that loss with the threat to their public affairs. This reversal is complete within a few sentences, as Rufus observes that it may well have been better for Tullia to have died. At IV.5.3, he proclaims that both he and Cicero have often arrived at the thought that “in these times things have come to pass not in the worst way for those to whom it has been allowed to exchange without pain their life for death.”²² In other words, far from a rhetorical commonplace upon which Rufus simply drew from the received tradition, this attempt at consolation focuses upon the absolutely singular circumstances of Cicero’s grieving, that he mourns in a time of extreme civic peril. He proceeds from there with a series of rhetorical questions, suggesting possible reasons why Cicero may lament Tullia’s early death and rejecting these on account of the political crisis undermining those reasons. First, he suggests that Cicero may imagine that a hoped for marriage may have been taken away by her premature death. For Tullia had divorced Dolabella shortly before her death, and Cicero would potentially have been thinking of marriage for her again, if her health had not declined. But Rufus dismisses this, observing that Cicero

²² “...*hisce temporibus non pessime cum iis esse actum quibus sine dolore licitum est mortem cum vita commutare!*” (*Fam.* 4.5.3). And indeed, in many places Cicero did express himself with such a sentiment: e.g., *Fam.* 4.3, 4.4, 6.1, and *Att.* 4.6.

would not likely “to select” a suitable young man to take care of her “from among the youth of this generation.”²³ Suggesting that she may have wished to see her children brought up herself, again Rufus destroys this prospect by reminding Cicero that her children will not “retain the inheritance for themselves, pursue the honors of office, or employ their freedom in the affairs of their friends;” rather, all of that has been “taken away.”²⁴ The rise of a tyrant among the ruined republican order has already destroyed the context in which it would make sense for a man of Cicero’s character to have expectations for his children’s children. From Rufus’ remote perspective, Tullia has lost nothing by exiting from life at just this time. The political order under which private life unfolds determines the value of that private life, in his view, so that no one may hope for a happy life, a life worth living, as long as the political order has been so profoundly altered.²⁵

In the next paragraph, Rufus shares some reflections that have brought him “no meager consolation” (“*non mediocrem consolationem,*” *Fam.* 4.5.4). In this famous passage, Rufus tells of his sea voyage “from Asia,” meditating specifically on the

²³ *Fam.* 4.5.3, “*licitum est tibi, credo, pro tua dignitate ex hac iuventute generum deligere cuius fidei liberos tuos te tuto committere putares.*”

²⁴ *Fam.* 4.5.3 “*An ut ea liberos ex sese pareret quos cum florentis videret laetaretur, qui rem a parente traditam per se tenere possent, honores ordinatim petituri essent, in re publica, in amicorum negotiis libertate sua usuri? quid horum fuit quod non prius quam datum est ademptum sit?*”

²⁵ Here one may see the short-sightedness of Rufus. Though he fully understands that the security of domestic space has been undermined by the Caesar’s dictatorship, he does not see that political participation, also, has been undermined. Under Caesar’s dictatorship, the rules of Republican governance had been suspended, so that in the same way that one cannot expect a patrimony for one’s children to inherit, one cannot expect action on behalf of the *populus Romanus* to have any enduring meaning.

moment when he came “from Aegina towards Megara.”²⁶ At that point, he could see Aegina, Megara, the Athenian Piraeus, and Corinth. He says, “*quae oppida quodam tempore florentissima fuerunt, nunc prostrata et diruta ante oculos iacent,*” or “those towns, at one time were greatly flourishing, now lay toppled and overthrown before my eyes.”²⁷ He then exclaims, “*Hem!* We puny little humans [*homunculi*] are outraged if any of us dies or is killed, we for whom life must be quite brief, when the corpses of so many towns lie in one place?”²⁸ With this recognition, Rufus reminds himself that he ought not to weep for a mortal. He then points out to Cicero that he has been greatly relieved by this thought. The strategy here is to diminish human life (“*homunculi*”) to a scale so small that it is ultimately insignificant in comparison to these great cities. If even they cannot persist, how can a mere human be surprised at his finitude? The lesson translates well to the recent civil wars at Rome, which Rufus brings up next. In comparison with that struggle, in which “so many great men died at the same time” and the “Empire” together with all “its provinces were shaken,” Rufus asserts, the “*unius mulierculae animula,*” that is, the “vitality of one little lady” cannot count for much.²⁹ The diminutives *muliercula* and *animula* here reflect that one used above in Rufus’ exclamation, *homunculus*, and indicate something important about Rufus’ general strategy. While he is devaluing

²⁶ Bailey suggests that Sulpicius Rufus was at this point returning to Rome in the autumn of 47 BCE. Bailey, *ad Familiares*, 416.

²⁷ References and explanation of the historical events that condition Rufus’ observation of these ruins are discussed by *ibid.*, 416-17.

²⁸ “*hem! nos homunculi indignamur si quis nostrum interiit aut occisus est, quorum vita brevior esse debet, cum uno loco tot oppidum cadavera proiecta iacent?*” *Fam.* 4.5.4.

²⁹ *Fam.* 4.5.4.

individual human life in order to alleviate Cicero's mourning for Tullia, he is also doing so in order to draw as strong a contrast as possible between the greatness of cities such as Corinth or Athens and the particular individuals that pass through them.³⁰ The aim is not, then, to remove completely Cicero's feelings of grief, but more to redirect that sense of loss toward the universal loss of the Roman empire—first to civil war and now to a tyrant. It is again Rufus' position away from Rome that allows him to see this most clearly: writing from Athens, among the remains of what all of Cicero's peers agree was formerly the greatest city of all, Rufus can appreciate the difference between a city and one of its pitiful inhabitants.

At this point, Rufus transitions to more typical consolatory arguments. First, he emphasizes that Cicero has in the past provided similar counsel to others, and he should not want to seem a hypocrite; unlike bad physicians, Cicero should take his own medicine (4.5.5). Second, though time will inevitably bring mourning to its close, Cicero should make haste to put aside his mourning. It would do his character dishonor to act otherwise (4.5.6). And, third, his daughter would certainly not want him to mourn, "if any awareness belongs to those below" ("*si qui etiam inferis sensus est*"). But even here Rufus brings his consolation back round to the country:

³⁰ Can we not see here in this doubly diminutive description of a "little lady's little soul" another signature of what Agamben has identified as bare life? Within Rufus' presentation, the decline of the entire city, Rome, and the agents who competed in the civil war merit some esteem, but puny Tullia's death is simply not worthy of attention. The parties in the war competed for sovereign power, but Tullia has no such dignifying action, according to Rufus' account.

Da hoc illi mortuae, da ceteris amicis ac familiaribus, qui tuo dolore maerent, da patriae, ut, si qua in re opus sit, opera et consilio tuo uti possit. Denique, quoniam in eam fortunam devenimus ut etiam huic rei nobis serviendum est, noli committere ut quispiam te putet non tam filiam quam rei publicae tempora et aliorum victoriam lugere.

Grant this for the sake of the deceased girl, grant it for the rest of your friends and associates, who mourn for your grief, grant it for your country, that, if there should be some need in the city (*in re*), she can employ your efforts and your counsel. Finally, because we have come upon this fortune, that for the state we must be of service, do not allow that anyone think that you mourn for your daughter not in the same way as the state of the times in the republic and the victory of others.

At this emphatic statement of the supremacy of the needs of the Republic, Rufus stops his consolation. With a *recusatio*, he confesses that saying more to Cicero would perhaps be a point of shame for himself, an offense against his friend.³¹ He requests that Cicero show himself publicly as capable of withstanding good and bad fortune alike, and ends his letter by indicating that he intends to update his friend on the condition of the province as soon as he hears that Cicero has calmed himself. With this gesture he indicates that his consolation should be effective. It is presumed that Cicero will, very soon, be returned to a state in which he may once again take up his duties to his friends and country, and that he will not prioritize the mischances of his private affairs over the empire's demands.

Supicius Rufus' letter, then, shows that epistolary consolation is immediately a private duty of one friend or associate to another, and that that aim itself acts as a means

³¹ Hall treats the importance of saving "face" in epistolary exchange, and the resources with which Romans negotiated the difficulties involved in this social dynamic, in the Introduction to Jon Hall, *Politeness and Politics in Cicero's Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): 3-27.

toward the end of serving public duties.³² Many other letters testify to this important aspect of Roman consolatory practice,³³ but scrutiny of this particularly fine example also brings into view just how difficult Rufus and his colleagues' demands upon Cicero were: they expected nothing short of a complete suppression of private mourning in favor of public duty. The singularity of Cicero's daughter is disparaged for the sake of the universality of the Republic and its empire. In spite of the great cultural difference and historical change that separates contemporary readers from Cicero and his milieu, it is difficult to conceive how such words would not have been deeply disturbing to a bereaved father. Indeed, it seems that Brutus' comparable consolatory epistle did provoke a particularly disturbing response in Cicero, who writes to Atticus upon having received it, "the letter, though written in a friendly and sensible manner still cost me many tears" (*"Bruti litterae scriptae et prudenter et amice multas mihi tamen lacrimas attulerunt."* *Att.* 12.13.1). As it happens, though, the survival of Cicero's response allows a unique case in which both the *consolator's* attempt and the response of the *consolandus* may be compared.

³² Cf. *Tusc.* III.55, and 73-79; *ND* II.148. See also Jacques-Emmanuel Bernard, *La sociabilité épistolaire chez Cicéron* (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2013): 78-79 (section 2.2.3).

³³ E.g. *Att.* 13.12, or *Fam.* 6.13.

5.4. The Unavailability of Public and Private Consolations (Fam. 4.6)

It is perhaps surprising that Cicero, who, as Rufus reminds him, had sometimes written consolatory counsel himself,³⁴ emphatically refuses Rufus' admonitions. In this way, Cicero is rejecting his private duty to accept consolation, evading that responsibility for the very same reasons that Rufus emphasizes the importance of putting aside mourning. Cicero argues that the arrival of one-man rule at Rome excuses his grief, and in fact shows the very counsel that Rufus' provides to be inappropriate to these new conditions. With Caesar's establishment of a permanent dictatorship, the public space to which Cicero formerly held obligations no longer exists, so that in circumstances in

³⁴ Examples of Cicero's own surviving epistolary consolations reinforce the point made with respect to Rufus' letter, that consolation is above all a duty owed toward friends and associates on occasions of personal loss. In *Fam.* 5.16.1, for example, he indicates that he "cannot remain silent" ("*non tacere*"), but must offer a consolation, which is at least potentially affronting at a time of mourning, because of his "good will" ("*benevolentia*") toward one Titius, to whom the letter is addressed. He also speaks of consolation as the "*officium benevolentissimi viri atque amicissimi*," "the duty of a man of the greatest good-will and the most friendly disposition" at 5.16.6. It is perhaps Cicero's relative unfamiliarity with this figure that allows him to maintain the position of fulfilling this duty, where with closer friends, such as Atticus, he always avoids this task as unnatural to him. In one of his replies to Atticus from the period of Cicero's own exile (*Att.* 3.8.3), he indicates that he understands Atticus' attempted consolation as an empty formality, only a polite gesture that offers nothing substantial. This suggests that Cicero himself was at least capable of recognizing such a purely formal gesture, performed out of socially imposed necessity, if not that Cicero would have occasionally had to perform such a gesture himself. There are two more surviving consolations from Cicero the same book of the letters. *Fam.* 5.17 is a consolation written to Publius Sittius, with whom Cicero was not so friendly (despite his claim of a long-standing friendship at *Sul.* 58) that he could not go for a very long time without writing him (*Fam.* 5.17.1) And there is also *Fam.* 5.18, addressed to the *novus homo* Titus Fadius Gallus, who had helped Cicero during his own exile. Both show Cicero consoling those less closely attached to him, and so agree with this explanation.

It also deserves mention that Cicero not infrequently refused to offer consolation together. Consider three letters from 46 BCE collected in Book 6 of the *ad Familiares*: in 6.6.12, he lists some possible sources of consolation, but then ultimately sends them away as unnecessary; in 6.13, he explains that he had avoided writing to Ligarius, since he had no words with which to console him, but stopped doing so once he had heard some restoration of his rights may be available; and in 6.22, he excuses himself from offering any consolation to Ahenobarbus, since he quite simply has no counsel to offer for Ahenobarbus' circumstances. For another view on this topic, see Hutchinson, "Consolation," 50-62. He emphasizes Cicero's tact, and the careful handling of each addressee in the consolatory epistles.

which the private *domus* has become the center of public life he can no longer seek consolation in public *officium*.

Cicero's response is complicated by his tact and politeness toward Rufus. It is helpful to understand the letter as composed of three parts. In the first, he shows a mild sense of gratitude to Rufus (*Fam.* 4.6.1). Cicero seems to recognize that he owes it to Rufus to receive at least the intent of consoling him as a gesture of good will. This initial response thus moderates the second part of the letter, in which Cicero dismisses Rufus' attempted consolation as inappropriate to his own case. So he begins by acknowledging Rufus' professed desire to have been present with Cicero, admitting that he would have preferred this also. But in the third sentence of this opening, he is remarkable for his evasiveness. He says, "*nam et ea scripsisti quae levare luctum possent...*" "For you have written those words which could lighten my pain..." In this clause, Cicero stresses that the words Rufus wrote "could" console him, but not that they actually have done so. The distinction is subtle but significant for the direction he is going. He concludes this paragraph by observing that Rufus' son has come to Cicero at this time of loss, reporting this as much to remark to the young man's father upon his son's dutiful propriety as to make known to Rufus how grateful he is.

The second paragraph begins with the most affirmative statement on Rufus' consolation in the letter, as Cicero claims that not just Rufus' "*oratio*," his words, and his "*societas paene aegritudinis*" or "companionship in misery" console him, but his "*auctoritas*" does as well ("*me autem non oratio tua solum et societas paene aegritudinis*

sed etiam auctoritas consolatur.” *Fam.* 4.6.1). Cicero at this point has thus fulfilled his obligation to receive consolation, so that he does not offend against the good will of Rufus.³⁵ However, rhetoric and language can bend in ways that logic does not, so even as Cicero receives this consolation he finds a way to escape it. Following this affirmation, the tone and intent change meaningfully. He continues by observing that even he believes that he is at fault, insofar as he fails “to endure [his] misfortune as [Rufus], a man distinguished for such wisdom, thinks it ought to be endured.”³⁶ He then excuses himself in the very next sentence, observing that sometimes “[he] hardly resists grief, because [he] is cut off from comforts that were not lacking to others, whose examples” he considers.³⁷ He then names Quintus Fabius Maximus, Lucius Aemilius Paullus, Gaius Sulpicius Galus, and Marcus Cato as the exemplary figures subject to similar losses to whom he may compare himself, and describes the circumstances attending their mourning for their children. He contrasts his position with theirs, explaining,

iis temporibus fuerunt ut eorum luctum ipsorum dignitas consolaretur, ea quam ex re publica consequebantur. Mihi autem, amissis ornamentis iis quae ipse commemoras quaeque eram maximis laboribus adeptus, unum manebat illud solacium quod ereptum est. Non amicorum negotiis, non rei publicae procuratione impediabantur cogitationes meae, nihil in foro agere libebat, aspicere curiam non poteram, existimabam, id quod erat, omnis me et industriae meae fructus et fortunae perdidisse. Sed cum cogitarem haec mihi tecum et cum quibusdam esse communia et cum frangerem iam ipse me et cogere illa ferre

³⁵ See section 5.3 above.

³⁶ “*turpe enim esse existimo me non ita ferre casum meum ut tu tali sapientia praeditus ferendum putas.*” *Fam.* 4.6.1

³⁷ “...vix resisto dolori, quod ea me solacia deficiunt quae ceteris, quorum mihi exempla propono, simili in fortuna non defuerent.”

toleranter, habebam, quo confugerem, ubi conquiescerem, cuius in sermone et suavitate omnes curas doloresque deponerem. nunc autem hoc tam gravi vulnere etiam illa, quae consanuisse videbantur, recrudescent. non enim, ut tum me a re publica maestum domus excipiebat, quae levaret, sic nunc domo maerens ad rem publicam confugere possum, ut in eius bonis acquiescam. Itaque et domo absum et foro, quod nec eum dolorem quem ad re publica capio domus iam consolari potest nec domesticum res publica.

In those times, they were [men of the sort] that their worthiness could console their distress--I mean that worthiness which was obtained from the *res publica*. But to me, since those distinctions have been lost, which you recall yourself and which I had obtained with the greatest struggles, just one remained, that comfort which has been snatched away. My thoughts were hindered neither by the occupations of friends, nor by the administration of the *res publica*, it was no pleasure to do anything in the forum, I could not even look upon the Curia, I was thinking, that which was the case, that I had lost all the fruit of my industry and fortune. But as I thought these things for me were common with you and with certain others, and as I subdued myself at that time and I was forcing that these things be endured with patience, I had her in whom I could take refuge, where I could find some respite, in whose speech and sweet ways I could put down all my cares and pains.

But now because of this wound so grave even those wounds, which seemed to have healed, are torn open again. For, as then my home had removed me from my sadness for the *res publica*, so now mourning at home I cannot find refuge in the *res publica*, so that I may find respite in its goods. And so I avoid home and the forum, since neither can my home console that grief, which I receive from the *res publica*, nor can the *res publica* console my domestic grief.

The relevant difference between these great men and Cicero, he claims, is that they had access to a vibrant political community, in which they could find consolation. Where a contemporary sensibility may find it inauthentic to seek comfort in public activity or at best a worrying avoidance of one's grief, this letter makes clear that the elite Roman men with whom Cicero exchanged letters tend to understand public activity as a promising source of comfort for private loss, just as private stability may offer relief from trying

political affairs.³⁸ For a politician as accomplished as Cicero, the loss of the republican governing body not only shut him out from the exercise of the highest political virtues, an activity he recognized as good in itself, but also rendered the political victories over would be usurpers such as Catiline, accomplishments that he considered the greatest of his life, null after all. As this passage makes clear, Cicero had come to rely fully on the tranquility of his domestic space, because he had lost not just his political rights, but

³⁸ Formerly, Cicero, in a letter written to Atticus in April or May 59 BCE (*Fam.* 2.17) explains his attitude of Stoic “indifference” to public turmoil as a source of consolation, indicating a parallelism between political affairs and private affairs that appears regularly in the Latin usage of *consolatio*. Cicero had also written, during the Civil War between Pompey’s senatorial faction and Caesar’s supporters, “*nulla est res publica quae delectet, in qua acquiescem.*” “There is no republic which may delight me, in which I may take relief.” In that same letter, he explains that, in absence of the state, he may take comfort in his private affairs. “*privata modo et domestica delectent, miram securitatem videbis...*” “You will see me surprisingly secure, provided that private and domestic matters may bring delight...” (*Att.* 4.18.2). Similarly, *Att.* 4.6.1-2, for example, discusses the death of Lentulus, for whose loss Cicero receives a consolation “poor enough” in kind, but still “a consolation all the same” (“*malo solacio sed nonnullo consolamur*”), in knowing that so great a patriot as Lentulus will not have lived to see the ruin of his country. This could only act as a consolation for Cicero if public catastrophe could be a greater cause for grief than death. Cicero calls this a “*beneficium deorum,*” or a “favor of the gods,” so that his use of consolation here can be understood as more than an everyday use of this idiomatic expression. Instead, one must recognize this almost as a theological argument for diminishing Atticus and Cicero’s sense of grief for Lentulus.

Other consolations for the loss of the republic come from October, 46 BCE, such as that at *Fam.* 4.3, in which Cicero wrote to Rufus, mentioning that he is consoled by the recollection of the rightness of his own and Rufus’ policies (4.3.1-2), suggesting that Rufus may, as he has himself, consider studying philosophy as an alternative arena in which to exercise his virtues (4.3.3); or that at *Fam.* 4.4.2, in which Cicero refers to his hoped for retirement as the one remaining “consolation,” and laments that he may have sacrificed this consolation by delivering the *Pro Marcello* on behalf of Caesar’s “*magnitudo animi*”; and that at *Fam.* 9.16—this one from July, 46—in which Cicero explains how he plans to accommodate himself to the new regime’s removal of freedom and consoles himself with his past “*conscientia*” and his present “*moderatio,*” comparing his own attempt to preserve “a certain kind of freedom” to Athenians and Syracusans who similarly survived despotism.

At least three more examples survive (*Fam.* 6.1, 6.3, and 6.4), but only *Fam.* 6.4 adds anything to this picture that my argument especially demands: at *Fam.* 6.4.3, Cicero indicates that the “*litterae quibus semper studui,*” the literature he has always studied, has not consoled him as much as the “*longinquitas temporis,*” the “length of time” having passed. This is a bold refusal of the classic consolatory topic that time should not prove stronger than virtue in its power over grief.

even more, the space in which those rights were intelligible in the first place. Retreat to the home was his only alternative, and upon Tullia's death, he had nowhere left to turn.³⁹

The third part of Cicero's letter begins by requesting that Rufus make himself available to visit Cicero as soon as possible, since there could be "no greater relief" ("maior...levtatio...nulla") than his company.⁴⁰ He next emphasizes one reason in particular why he would like to see Rufus "quam primum," "as soon as possible:" the two of them must consult with one another how best they should spend their days during Caesar's dictatorship. Cicero states this very carefully, since, after all, his letter could easily have made it into the hands of a Caesarian and thus invited suspicion of Cicero's motives. So Cicero writes,

qua ratione nobis traducendum sit hoc tempus, quod est totum ad unius voluntatem accommodandum et prudentis et liberalis et, ut perspexisse videor, nec a me alieni et tibi amicissimi. quod cum ita sit, magnae tamen est deliberationis, quae ratio sit ineunda nobis non agendi aliquid, sed illius concessu et beneficio quiescendi. vale.

In which manner we must conduct ourselves through this time, which is entirely to be adapted to the will of one man, both sensible and generous, and, as I trust that I have seen this clearly, by no means estranged from me and most friendly to you. Although this is the case, there is much need of deliberation, what plan we

³⁹ At another point in his career, Cicero's exile comes to him as such a crushing blow, because at that time also he found himself inconsolable from either direction: both his private persona and his public privileges were unavailable to him. *Att.* 3.11, 3.15, and 3.16 all deal with consolation at the time of Cicero's exile. In each of them, he dismisses attempts to console, even going so far as to suggest that this is a mere formality, blocking what would really help, accurate reports on the state of his affairs. If Cicero rejects consolation in the new circumstances of Caesar's dictatorship, it is because they invite comparison with Cicero's exile from earlier in his career.

⁴⁰ In general, Cicero does tend to recognize the importance of company, the well-meant intention to console, and the friendship that leads his colleagues to console him (e.g., *Att.* 11.7).

must form not for taking some action, but for seeking retirement with the consent and blessing of him. Farewell.

Cicero writes from Atticus' villa at Nomentum, just outside of Rome, and from his position of much greater proximity to the heart of the struggle, Cicero can confidently explain to Rufus that both his own and Rufus' opinions on the new affairs at Rome will simply not matter. All things must be "adapted to the will of one man," he asserts, and that one man was not Cicero. Against Rufus' certainty that Cicero must return to his sanity, so that he may return to his duties as a statesman of high authority, Cicero contends that there are no duties any longer to which to return. The Republic is finished, and Cicero will do everything he can to arrange with Caesar for his retirement from public life. There is thus no urgency to Rufus' appeals on behalf of civic duties, and Cicero is therefore free to spend the rest of his days in mourning, if he finds no comfort in his home. Though he never articulates this openly—for he must maintain decorum at every turn—the subtext of his letter means one thing: he refuses to receive Sulpicius' consolation.⁴¹

⁴¹ Similarly, he also dismisses Caesar's and Brutus' epistolary consolations. See *Att.* 12.13.1, 12.14.4, 13.20, and, finally, *ad Brut.* 1.9, in which Cicero returns an unwelcome favor to Brutus upon the death of his wife, not by writing him a consolation, but by suggesting that now Brutus may feel how little the arguments of consolatory discourse truly speak to the depths of grief. It is worth noting as well his rejection of Luceius' consolatory advice in *Fam.* 5.13. There he politely points out to Luceius that they see the condition of the republic differently: where Luceius finds temporary difficulties, Cicero sees total ruin. Therefore his jesting suggestion that Cicero may possess boldness even beyond the courage of Luceius sounds more like ridicule of Luceius' shortsightedness than praise of his virtue.

So Cicero's reply shows that the interconnected system of public and private obligations that governed the practice of epistolary consolation in the period of the Republic's decline had lost its meaning. Only in that brief moment between Caesar's assassination in March 44 BCE and the formation of the second triumvirate in October 43 BCE was Cicero able to entertain civic consolation once again. Five letters to Atticus from April and May 44 feature what must be reckoned the most outstanding of Cicero's usages of "*consolatio*:" in each of them, he refers to the Ides of March – that is, by metonymy, Caesar's assassination – as a consolation.⁴² Once it became clear that this would not lead to the restoration of Republican *libertas*, Cicero no longer spoke of consolation in civic affairs. It is as if the experience of exile, the civil war, and the collapse of republican government under Caesar's dictatorship so ripped up the fabric of Republican social relations that these events and novel institutions finally brought Roman

⁴² On April 10, 44, he writes to Atticus from Lanuvium to express his concern that "what has never happened in any city," that "the Republic has not been retrieved at once with liberty," has nevertheless happened at Rome; he explains that, though he has many reasons to be concerned and much must be done to retrieve civic order from anarchy, nevertheless "the Ides of March console me" ("*equidem doleo, quod numquam in ulla civitate accidit, non una cum libertate rem publicam recuperatam...omnia licet concurrant, Idus Martiae consolantur.*" Att. 14.4.1). There Brutus, Cassius, and the other conspirators are named as "ἥρωες" (14.4.2), and, on the 21st of April, they are again called not just "*heroes*" but even "*di futuri*," "future gods," whose "awareness of their very great and most brilliant deeds" will be "a great consolation" for the "derision and danger" in which they will live ("*...non sine invidia, ne sine periculo quidem. verum magna consolatio conscientia maximi et clarissimi facti.*" Att. 14.11.1). Here again, he emphasizes his difference from these conspirators, observing that though "the king is slain, I am not free" ("*nobis quae, qui rege interfecto liberi non sumus?*"). While the conspirators had freed themselves actively through their deed, Cicero remained objectively subject to the memory of Caesar's dictatorship, having no space to exercise his freedom. By May 24, 44, Cicero's tone in the letters has changed; he now wishes that the conspirators had taken out Antony as well, saying, "the Ides of March do not console me as much as before. They have one great flaw..." ("*itaque me Idus Martiae non tam consolantur quam antea. magnum enim mendum continent...*" Att. 14.22.2). Following this, the language of consolation, used with respect to civic affairs, fades entirely from Cicero's correspondence. For the remaining two letters, see Att. 14.13 and 15.4.

social relations into a zone of indetermination, a state of exception, in which it was no longer clear whether exile, such as that Marcellus' experienced, was preferable to remaining in the city, whether one should seek comfort at home or in the forum, and what authorities one could reliably take as examples. Along with this revolution in social relations, the consolatory practice of the Roman elite inevitably lost its function in society. In this context, Cicero found himself obliged to seek new resources for his own consolation. His colleagues' advice struck him as a poor fit for the new conditions of his life, so he turned to that which seems immune to all social upheaval: philosophical truth.

5.5. Cicero's Doubts about Philosophical Consolation

Before I come to Cicero's *Consolatio*, the first major philosophical statement on consolation among Cicero's writings, it is important to establish that Cicero also regarded the philosophical consolation as at least potentially inadequate to loss, before, during, and after the writing of his *Consolatio*. That he held this position would be astonishing, if it were not already questionable whether self-consolation, which presupposes both the ethical stability from which consolation comes forth as well as the fragile condition which calls for consolation, actually was a discursive possibility. That Cicero did attempt it indicates, however, at least some confidence that the writing of a self-consolation may serve some purpose. But then Cicero's letters repeatedly dismiss the practice of

philosophical consolation, sometimes simply disparaging it, but at other times even ridiculing it.

Particularly significant are three letters from 46 BCE, though it should be noted that Cicero expressed his doubts about consolation even before the Roman civil war.⁴³ In the first of these three, which is possibly from 47, he writes to Varro that a visit from his learned friend would be greeted as a “*solacium*,” but then he ridicules himself, saying that in these times “no relief” (“*nullam levationem*”) could be expected except by “the greatest fool” (“*stultissimus*”).⁴⁴ He concludes by saying that, in absence of friends, he has sought companionship in literature once again. In his next letter to Varro from April 18, invoking the classic analogy of philosophy to medicine, he indicates that he can now feel the salutary effects of letters,⁴⁵ but nowhere in this correspondence does he speak of consolation literature in particular.⁴⁶ Besides, later in that same year, when he is writing to Manius Curius, he explains that, after his morning visitors depart, he is writing a great deal now and spending the whole day in the library, despite his gloominess and

⁴³ In one letter to Atticus from the period of the civil war, Cicero begins by asking Atticus for consolation, but admits a god could hardly help now (*Att.* 9.6.5). This would indicate that Cicero hardly expects to receive consolation from Atticus. In a letter from the same period he seems to take comfort in the philosophical position that only virtue, and not one's power and reputation, serves to distinguish political actors, but the vehemence with which he asserts this point betrays a lurking doubt (*Att.* 10.4.4-5). Once again, it seems consolation was hardly found in this sentiment. When he requests consolation for his brother later in the same letter, he even requests specifically factual information on political circumstances—not philosophical arguments (*Att.* 10.4.6).

⁴⁴ *Att.* 9.1.1-2.

⁴⁵ “...*tamen artes nostrae nescio quo modo nunc uberiores fructus ferre videntur quam olim ferebant, sive quia nulla nunc in re alia acquiescimus sive quod gravitas morbi facit ut medicinae egeamus eaque nunc appareat, cuius vim non sentiebamus cum valebamus.*” *Att.* 9.3.2.

⁴⁶ *Fam.* 9.1 and 9.3.

hopelessness for the Republic's downfall.⁴⁷ He continues, admitting that "although not only reason, which ought to weigh most heavily with anyone, but also time, which heals even fools, consoles [him], still [he] grieves that the commonwealth has so deteriorated..." ("*quamquam non ratio solum consolatur, quae plurimum debet valere, sed etiam dies, quae stultis quoque mederi solet, doleo ita rem communem esse dilapsam...*" *Fam.* 7.28.3). In *Fam.* 4.13, also, a letter addressed to P. Nigidius Figulus in exile, Cicero writes that he cannot offer a letter of consolation, calling that "kind of letter...sad, pitiful, and fitting for times like these" ("*triste quoddam et miserum et his temporibus consentaneum genus litterarum*" *Fam.* 4.13.1). He arrives at consolation in the fourth paragraph, but there dismisses the topic, since, as he says, Figulus would be more capable than anyone of consoling himself or another and therefore needs nothing that Cicero could offer, politely excusing himself of this duty through praise.⁴⁸ This does not mean that Cicero believes self-consolation is actually possible or desirable – it only offers Cicero the pretext by which he may escape his unpleasant duty.

Even more remarkable and less ambiguous rejections of philosophical consolation's efficacy come from the period right around the composition of Cicero's *Consolatio*. In January 45, just two months before the composition of that work, Cicero writes to A. Torquatus, in order to fulfill an obligation to console him on the miserable condition of the Republic, which faces two factions, neither of which looks like it is fit

⁴⁷ *Fam.* 7.28.2.

⁴⁸ *Fam.* 4.13.4.

for rule of a free people. In the second paragraph, he admits the consolation of knowing that one's good intentions free him of guilt, but refuses to console Torquatus for the common loss of the republic, saying he has no consolation to offer for this. He comes in the fourth paragraph to literature, and there confesses, "Not so much literature, which I have always studied, as the passing of time assuages me, your consoler" ("*Etsi me ipsum consolatorem tuum non tantum litterae, quibus semper studui, quantum longinquitas temporis mitigavit.*" *Fam.* 6.4.4). Such pitiful admissions continue well into the time after Cicero's writing of his consolation, as *Fam.* 5.15 attests. There he writes to Lucceius, who had on May 9, 45 addressed a letter to Cicero that strongly urged him to put aside his mourning as inappropriate to his character,⁴⁹ and asks him what consolation, either at home or beyond that space, could remain to him. He answers his own question, saying,

litterae, credo. quibus utor adsidue; quid enim aliud facere possum? sed nescio quo modo ipsae illae excludere me a portu et perfugio videntur et quasi exprobrare quod in ea vita maneam in qua nihil insit nisi propagatio miserrimi temporis. (Fam. 5.15.3)

Literature, to be sure. And I apply myself to that constantly; for what else can I do? But, though I know not how, writing itself seems to exclude me from harbor and refuge, and to reproach that I remain in this life, in which there is nothing left, other than the extension of a most miserable time.

He concludes this line of thought by explaining that, instead of going to the senate house, which would be pointless, he returns again and again to writing, hoping for a brief time to "forget his pain," but expecting "no lasting medicine" ("*sic litteris utor, in quibus*

⁴⁹ *Fam.* 5.14. See Hutchinson, "Consolation," 62-64.

consumo onme tempus, non ut ab iis medicinam perpetuam sed ut exiguam oblivionem doloris petam.” Fam. 5.15.4).⁵⁰

Finally, two last letters from the aftermath of Caesar’s assassination should be mentioned. I already observed that Caesar’s assassination curiously appears to Cicero as a profound source of consolation, and this macabre usage appears in five letters to Atticus. In two of them, though, he expressly contrasts the consolations that philosophical literature offers with the winning consolation of an apparent tyrant’s brutal slaying. The first of these two letters, *Att. 14.13*, shows Cicero suggesting that the assassination makes neutrality an impossibility, that he and Atticus will have to side either with the Caesarians, who will likely butcher their opponents now, or with the leaders of the opposition. Allowing that “*ratio*” has no authority in such affairs as these, he advises Atticus that they must leave their fates to chance (“*fors*”—not *fortuna*), but attend to that which lies within their power. He observes that they should suffer what may come with bravery and wisdom and recall that they are only human, and then he says, “and just as literature consoles us much, not least the Ides of March console as well.” (“*...nosque cum multum litterae tum non minimum Idus quoque Martiae consolentur.” Att. 14.13.3*). The litotes here ought not to mislead: Cicero means to emphasize not literature but the assassination as that which provides the most powerful consolation. The understatement

⁵⁰ This letter shows that Cicero was still profoundly affected by his grief as late as May 45, and would continue to be for some time. His grief persists into the summer of 45, and, as this letter shows, writing itself only enhanced his agony, taking him deeper into his melancholia and his writing as if in a deadly spiral. Baltussen has pointed out that we cannot identify a point of “recovery” for Cicero, though he identifies June as potentially the right place to situate it. Baltussen, “A grief observed,” 358.

of “*non minimum*” magnifies this consolation, so that the “*litterae*” seem to offer a rather paltry consolation.

Similarly, in *Att.* 15.4, learning from philosophical literature is discussed as a potential alternative for the consolation that Cicero had received on the Ides of March, but he treats this literature not as consolation but rather as strategy. By May 24, 44, when this letter was written, the initial enthusiasm at the death of a tyrant had given way to anxiety about what would happen now that the situation had changed, with Antony having emerged as a potentially more ruthless tyrant and civil war having become a virtual certainty again. Atticus has now written to him asking what they should do, and Cicero writes back with an honest response. First, he explains that only a fool would now take consolation in the Ides of March, since the conspirators have only removed a tyrant and not the impulse toward tyranny, which seems now to be spreading even more aggressively among the Caesarians. In response to this problematic, Cicero declares, “*redeamus igitur, quod saepe usurpas, ad Tusculanas Disputationes.*” “Let us return, therefore, as you often observe, to the *Tusculan Disputations.*” The sentiment that these words suggest, and that Cicero credits to Atticus, is that the version of Stoicism for which Cicero advocated in the *Tusculan Disputations* had a strong political value, either as a bulwark of resistance or perhaps even as a point of opposition to the tyrannical policies of the Caesarians. But then as he continues in his letter, he refuses the various courses of action that Atticus had suggested to him in their previous correspondence. Cicero then goes on to say, acknowledging that Atticus will likely disapprove, that he “takes no

delight in the Ides of March” with affairs on their current course, and that he now allies himself with the Epicurean Saufeius, apparently introduced as a critic of Cicero's own *Tusculan Disputations*, confessing that he would not have “run away” from a “master” of such good will as he imagines Caesar to have been, since a good master is preferable to the circumstances that are now unfolding. Such timidity before the politicized Stoicism he advanced in his *Tusculan Disputations* is understandable, in the circumstances, if it is not admirable, but it also indicates that there was some other purpose for the *Tusculan Disputations* than consolation, plain and simple. Cicero does not say that, with the consolation he thought he had received from the Ides of March having now turned out to be cold comfort, he resorts to the philosophical literature he wrote in order to receive domestic or otherworldly consolation there. Instead, he treats this work as a political manifesto of sorts, and nevertheless withdraws from it as too bold for his own present ambitions. Whatever the ultimate meaning of this work may be, it is clear that Cicero was not recommending it as an alternative philosophical consolation to the now defunct consolation of the Ides of March.

5.6. Introduction to the Fragments of Cicero's Self-Consolation

This brings us to Cicero's writing of the *Consolatio*. Once he had rejected the consolatory advice that Brutus,⁵¹ Rufus,⁵² and others sent to him,⁵³ he could have simply withdrawn into his despair and isolation, abandoning his duties along with the ties he had to friends beyond his *domus*. Instead, as I have shown in the introduction to this chapter, he chose to write an unprecedented consolation to himself and continued from there with producing philosophical writing at an unequalled pace of publication.⁵⁴ As testimony from the period immediately following his composition of the *Consolatio*—especially the letter to Luceius (*Fam.* 5.15)—this philosophical writing served only to deepen his despair, leading him further into philosophy in search of an answer that seemed all the more urgent. In this and the next four sections, I discuss the surviving fragments of Cicero's self-consolation, in order to understand why, having rejected the epistolary practice of consolation and having doubted for some time the efficacy of philosophical

⁵¹ See *Att.* 12.13.1 and 12.14.4.

⁵² *Att.* 4.5.

⁵³ See *Fam.* 5.13, 9.11.1.

⁵⁴ On the order and timeline of the rest of Cicero's writings, with absolute chronology, see *Cicero the Philosopher: Twelve Papers*, ed. J.G.F. Powell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). Miriam Griffin has argued, against the standard account of Cicero's later philosophical works' publication, that the *Hortensius* was published in March 45, before the *Consolatio* had been written. On this account, the consolation does not stand at the beginning of this transformation in Cicero's literary pursuits. Miriam T. Griffin, "The composition of the *Academica*: motives and versions," in *Assent and Argument: Studies in Cicero's Academic Books: Proceedings of the 7th Symposium Hellenisticum (Utrecht, August 21-25, 1995)*, ed. Brad Inwood and Jaap Mansfeld (Leiden: Brill, 1997): 7-8. See also the appendix with testimonia from the letters to Atticus, page 28. If her suggestion is correct, then Cicero's grief would not be definitive for the evolution of his philosophical thought, but rather it would be a diversion and a side-tracking of an original program.

consolatory literature, Cicero then resorted to publishing a philosophical self-consolation, and, further, why that self-consolation proved inadequate to resolve Cicero's grief.

Before I proceed to the fragments proper, it will be helpful to review the facts that are known about the work from Cicero's letter to Atticus. Cicero first mentions his planned self-consolation at *Att.* 12.14, which letter has been dated to March 8, 45 BCE. A letter from the previous day mentions the arrival of a consolatory epistle from Brutus, which, though "written both sensibly and in a friendly spirit, nevertheless brought forth in [Cicero] many tears" ("*scriptae et prudenter et amice multas mihi lacrimas attulerunt*" ad *Att.* 12.13.1). This letter from Brutus may well have been the impetus for Cicero's conceiving his project of self-consolation, provoking an urgency to say something other than what Brutus had written. In *Att.* 12.28.2, he speaks of the work as a *fait accompli*, so that he must have finished the composition by March 24, 45 BCE, the date of that letter. Still, it is not clear whether the work was not finished sooner. Cicero promises at *Att.* 12.14.3 that he will send the consolation to Atticus once he had made copies, and this could indicate that the work was already complete at that point. If Kumaniecki is right to suggest that the composition would not have been much longer than Seneca's consolatory writings or more different in character than those writings are to one another, and thus in its complete form "between twenty and forty Teubner pages,"⁵⁵ Cicero could certainly have completed it in as little as three weeks. However, suggestions of continued work on

⁵⁵ Kumaniecki, "Die Verlorene "Consolatio", " 30.

the *Consolatio* appear in *Att.* 12.20.1 from March 15, perhaps in 12.22.2 from March 18, and again in 12.24 from March 20. In this light, it is best to agree with the majority of scholars, who hold that Cicero had completed the bulk of the writing by March 11, when he writes that, “having tried everything,” he still finds he has “nothing in which [he] may find peace.” He continues, “while I was preoccupied with that work about which I wrote to you before, I was somehow medicating my pains; now I cast out all of them...” (*Att.* 12.18.1). In any case, he was certainly done with all changes by March 24,⁵⁶ on which date he writes, “*Quod me ipse per litteras consolatus sum, non paenitet me quantum profecerim. Maerorem minui, dolorem nec potui nec, si possem, vellem.*” “As for how I consoled myself through writing, it does not trouble me how little [*quantum*] I achieved. I have restrained my mourning – as for my grief, neither have I been able nor, if I could, would I want to diminish that” (*Att.* 12.28.2). This passage indicates something important about the reception of Cicero’s work by its intended audience. A self-consolation would seem to be addressed to oneself, and therefore to take its author as its audience. The text would therefore be intended to diminish its author’s own grief, as a variety of self-writing

⁵⁶ My analysis of the dates of composition agrees in the important points with Baltussen, who thinks a draft was complete by March 20. Baltussen, “Cicero’s *Consolatio ad se*,” 70. Elsewhere he seems to confuse the date of completion, and to rely upon Graver’s suggestion, for which he also says there is no evidence, that the text was not complete until May. This is a misreading of Graver, though, who says the final draft of the *Consolatio* was complete by March 20, and that he had also completed the *Hortensius*, *Academics*, and a political pamphlet to Caesar (he actually never wrote this last work though) *ibid.*, 85, fn. 23; Margaret R. Graver, *Cicero on the Emotions: Tusculan Disputations 3 and 4* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002): xiv, xxxii, n. 13. For the March date, he is dependent upon Kumaniecki. Kumaniecki, “Die Verlorene “Consolatio”,” 28. Philippson had previously argued for March 7, 45 BCE as the date of completion, but Kumaniecki is certainly correct to point to the letters requesting *exempla* from the 15th, 18th, and 20th as evidence against this date Philippson, “M. Tullius Cicero.”

by which the text's author aimed to accomplish a self-transformation.⁵⁷ None of this can be true of Cicero's self-consolation. First, if Cicero had intended to address this work exclusively to himself, there is no reason why he should have shared it with others. Second, in *Att.* 12.28.2, he expressly denies that the work should diminish his grief. So it seems the work simply was not intended to do that. But then in *Att.* 12.20.1, he had already said that he took on the writing of his consolation primarily "for the sake of checking and healing his soul," and only secondarily in order to meet the demands of his peers that he at least appear by a manner of dissimulation to restrain his mourning.⁵⁸

There is a problem in establishing precisely what the intended effect of this work was. Since Cicero's letters cannot resolve the question, I turn now to the fragments in pursuit of an answer. In the most recent edition, Vitelli groups the *testimonia* and the fragments of the text itself separately, according to the standard practice, and then he further divides the fragments into three headings: "*Prooemium*," "*Lamentatio Vitae*," and "*Aegritudinis Sedatio*." Though Vitelli means for this to act as a formal division of the work and intends to supply through that division a tentative arrangement of the fragments in order, for my purposes it will be necessary neither to preserve that order nor to reject it. As I am trying to work out the logic and intention of Cicero's composition, I will only use this arrangement heuristically, as representative fragments from two sides of a

⁵⁷ On the important practice of self-writing, see Foucault, "Self-Writing."

⁵⁸ "*Quod me hortaris idque a ceteris desiderari scribis ut dissimulem me tam graviter dolere, possumne magis quam quod totos dies consumo in litteris? quod etsi non dissimulationis [causa] sed potius leniendi et sanandi animi causa facio, tamen si mihi minus proficio, simulationi certe facio satis.*" *Att.* 12.20.1.

dilemma. Their actual order may have been different in the original text, but their logical dependence upon one another, contributing to a general metaphysical picture, ought to remain the same whatever the order of the fragments. So, in what follows, I offer commentary upon the fragments of Cicero's consolation according to Vitelli's division into three headings, and I introduce *testimonia* only when they shed light upon the significance of specific fragments. From the so-called *Prooemium*, it can be established that Cicero relied upon Crantor's strategy of *metriopatheia*,⁵⁹ but that he did so within a broader framework of Academic skepticism, so that he can maintain a measure of distance from the metaphysical picture he develops through the *Consolatio*. The *Lamentatio* and *Sedatio*, it will be shown, also advance a Platonic conception of the soul's immortality, life's imposition as a duty to be paid for crimes in previous lives, and the debasement of life as in truth a spiritual death, and the valorization of actual death as true life. Throughout the text, then, the fragments show that Cicero's self-consolation was deeply involved in a literary dialogue with the writings of Plato and the old Academy, as Cicero understood these.

In my reading of the fragments, I establish that Cicero's philosophical arguments, especially his Platonism, work primarily toward supporting the position that his daughter Tullia had become a goddess, and therefore deserved a cult honoring her divine status, which he aimed to establish by dedicating a sanctuary and shrine to her. It has long been

⁵⁹ Cf. my discussion in the following section, 5.6.1.

recognized that Cicero's *Consolatio* was unique in its attempted divinization of his daughter, and scholarship continues to recognize the peculiarity of this gesture.⁶⁰ By linking the timeline of Cicero's mourning to the timeline for the composition of the *Consolatio*, it can be established that the strategy of self-consolation was developed precisely to support this deification. Where Baltussen sees the consolation as a substitute monument for Tullia, I contend, rather, that the project of establishing the *fanum* and the publication of his self-consolation were a well coordinated strategy, in which a philosophical conception of immortality provides the theoretical support for unprecedented cult activity.⁶¹ In other words, Cicero aimed to put the assuagement of his private mourning on display in order to justify publicly the cult action that he aimed to take on behalf of his daughter's immortality.

5.6.1. *Prooemium*: Platonic Metaphysics and Socratic Skepticism; the Contest with Fortuna and *Metriopatheia*

Four fragments of Cicero's consolation that survive in later authors' works seem to belong to its "*Prooemium*" or opening; three of these have comparanda that place in doubt whether the exact wording that Cicero had used in the original context survives. Therefore only the first fragment in Vitelli's *Prooemium* is uncontroversial.

⁶⁰ Spencer Everett Cole, "Immortal Designs: Cicero and the Rise of Deification at Rome" (Columbia University, 2006), 1-11.

⁶¹ "It is possible that this new approach [writing a consolation to himself] came about after he had to abandon the plan to build a monument about which he continuously besieged Atticus..." Baltussen, "Cicero's *Consolatio ad se*," 78. See also Baltussen, "A grief observed," 363-64.

Lactantius' *Div. inst.* III.18.18 says that Cicero claimed "at the beginning [*principio*] of his consolation" that, "*luendorum scelerum causa nasci homines*," that is, "humans are born for the sake of expiating crimes."⁶² From the very start, then, Cicero has placed his consolation in dialogue with a tradition of Presocratic philosophical thought, common to the Orphics, Empedocles, and the Pythagoreans, that sees the birth of human life into this world as a punishment or, at the very least, as a captivity in which the criminal soul may hope to regain its pristine, immortal condition through spiritual effort.⁶³ Furthermore, this same line of thinking appears in Plato's *Phaedo*, with which text Cicero was certainly in dialogue, as his continued engagement with it in the *Tusculan Disputations* establishes.⁶⁴ In the *Phaedo*, at 81b-82b, Socrates presents an account of the impure soul's condition after death. He explains that in evil souls desires for material

⁶² Lact. *Div. inst.* III.18.18, as it appears in Vitelli's edition: "*Quid Cicerone faciemus? Qui, cum in principio Consolationis suae dixisset luendorum scelerum causa nasci homines, iteravit id ipsum postea...*" Vitelli, *M. Tullii Ciceronis Consolationis Fragmenta*, 37, fragment 1. It is not likely that these were Cicero's exact words, but it is also not decisive for my argument whether we have his exact words here. Kumaniecki has convincingly argued that Lactantius misrepresents Cicero's philosophy for the sake of promoting his own Christian reading of the consolation; cf. Kumaniecki, "Die Verlorene "Consolatio", " 30; Baltussen, "Cicero's *Consolatio ad se*," 71. The exact words of Cicero's original text are therefore often in doubt. But even taking that distortion of Cicero's sense into account, one can in most cases confidently separate Lactantius' rhetoric from Cicero's intention. It is therefore best to avoid dependence upon the exact words of Cicero's fragments, in favor of their sense, unless the editor explicitly marks the words as Cicero's (for example, fragment 2 below). I have followed Vitelli in each of these cases.

⁶³ MacKendrick compares this claim to the valorization of death in the *Somnium Scipionis*. Paul MacKendrick, *The Philosophical Books of Cicero* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989): 107. See further, in the Conclusion, pp. 530-538. In an early collection of the fragments, Baiter and Kayser included among the *Consolatio*'s remains a reference (at *Lactant. Div. inst.* VII.8) to Cicero's inability to choose between Plato, Pythagoras, Pherecydes, Dicaearchus, Democritus, and Epicurus, with respect to their positions on immortality and death Baiter and Kayser, *M. Tullii Ciceronis opera*, 72, fragment 9. MacKendrick, relying upon this collection, includes it MacKendrick, *Philosophical Books*: 106. Later editions have rejected this as a reference to *Tusc.* 1.23.

⁶⁴ See also *Tusc.* I.30.72-73.

things and the resultant attachment to material things force the soul after death, by attraction rooted in likeness, to return to the material, corporeal, and visible world, while the souls of the pure—especially of philosophers, naturally attracted to wisdom, invisibility, the incorporeal, and the immaterial—are drawn towards the divine, which shares in these qualities. He goes on to explain that the souls of the wicked wander around tombs and monuments until they are captured again into the bodies of lower or higher life-forms, according to the severity of their crimes, as a “punishment for an evil past life” (“δίκην τίνουσαι τῆς προτέρας τροφῆς κακῆς οὔσης” 81d). Those who have led pure, good, and especially philosophical lives, by contrast, escape from this cycle of rebirths. From the very first fragment, then, Cicero shows his consolation to be unfolding in consort with a Platonic metaphysical picture, in which the position that establishes birth or rebirth as punishment implies philosophical discipline as a pathway by which one may exit this cycle of rebirth.

This philosophical discipline is none other than the care of the self that was the major theme of Foucault’s late analyses.⁶⁵ A second fragment adds to the sketchy picture of Cicero’s *Consolatio* the other discursive formation that Foucault found Socrates had linked to the care of the self: “the courage of the truth” or παρρησία. At *Div. inst.* III.14.20, Lactantius quotes Cicero as saying, “*Sed nescio qui nos teneat error aut miserabilis ignoratio veri.*” “But I do not know which prepossesses us, error or

⁶⁵ See especially Foucault’s lectures on Plato’s *Phaedo*, but also the Introduction, especially pp. 40-48, and the Conclusion of this dissertation. Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*: 72-114.

lamentable ignorance of the truth.”⁶⁶ The force of “*nos teneat*” suggests a vague obstruction or blockage that must be somehow problematic for Cicero.⁶⁷ These words express first of all Cicero’s own position of ignorance—he does not know—and it is therefore ignorance that conditions what follows. His indirect question indicates two possibilities: Cicero is perhaps held captive by some “*error*,” that is, some straying or wandering from the right path, a failure to meet an ethical condition; or he is held by his “*ignoratio veri*,” his failure to recognize the truth, a fundamentally epistemological failure. The governing verb of the main clause, though, “*nescio*,” indicates a doubling of the latter possibility, so that his ignorance is unrecognized at another level, in that it is not even clear whether ignorance is the problem (since it could be error, after all). So, in either case, whether this is ignorance of ignorance or ignorance of error, ignorance is part of Cicero’s problem. This implies a third possibility, elided by Cicero’s use of “*aut*”: ignorance and error go together and mutually reinforce one another.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Vitelli, *M. Tulli Ciceronis Consolationis Fragmenta*, 37, fragment 2. Vitelli also includes as fragment 2a Lactantius’ paraphrase from *Div. inst.* III.18.18, which Kumaniecki uses to tease out the meaning of this fragment Kumaniecki, “Die Verlorene “Consolatio”,” 30-31. He observes that Lactantius criticizes Cicero’s devotion to philosophy, his “*magistra vitae*” (III.14.6), as a poor mistress if it led him into error, doubt, and ignorance. Kumaniecki tries to save Cicero from this accusation, by suggesting that Cicero considers human knowledge in general to be characterized by error, doubt, and ignorance. But see fn. 67 below.

⁶⁷ Kumaniecki argues that *nos* indicates Cicero means to speak of all human beings, not just of Cicero himself, as equally crippled by error or ignorance Kumaniecki, “Die Verlorene “Consolatio”,” 30. But any reader of Cicero can testify to the frequency with which the orator uses the plural first person with singular sense. Kumaniecki makes too much of this detail, which more likely concerns Cicero himself, since he is the one who is experiencing the grief that this text treats.

⁶⁸ Lactantius’ *Div inst.* III,18.18, Vitelli’s fragment 2a, reads, “*Recte ergo praefatus est errore ac miserabili veritatis ignorantia se teneri.*” It is probable that Lactantius chooses the conjunction “*ac*” here because he also sees the two prongs of Cicero’s dilemma as interconnected and mutually implicated in one another.

It is well known that ignorance had programmatic, even existential significance for Socrates.⁶⁹ The paradoxical knowledge of ignorance that Plato included in Socrates' apology as the source of his wisdom returns here in Cicero's text, this time pushed to a further degree of ignorance. While Socrates could trust the Delphic oracle's assessment of his ignorance to be no less than a merely human wisdom, Cicero cannot even be sure that his ignorance of the truth is not error, that he has not somehow gone astray and for this reason suffers from ignorance of the truth. This may seem to distance Cicero from Socrates and his skepticism, as if Cicero yearns for some revelatory comfort beyond what humans may expect of their finitude. It indicates also that Cicero's voice is rather unreliable in this text: for it may well be that his error and his ignorance of the truth have led him to the conclusion that human life is born for the sake of purifying its crimes. His discourse remains fundamentally Socratic, though, at the level of the performative. Cicero's action announces his ignorance as the truth that supports his discourse: he does not fall back into silence, but insists that this truth merits its communication to others as ethically significant for them as well. Carrying on with the attempted articulation of true discourse, even if one cannot be confident that one is actually delivering the truth, seems to be another governing principle of Cicero's text.

The third fragment shifts to another register, in which Cicero's pathetic worrying over his dilemma has given way to boasting over past public successes and lamentation

⁶⁹ E.g., Pl. *Ap.* 20d-21e.

of his current private defeat.⁷⁰ Again, Lactantius is the source. *Div. inst.* III.28.9-10 reads as follows:

M. Tullius in sua Consolatione pugnasse se semper contra fortunam loquitur eamque a se esse superatam cum fortiter inimicorum impetus rettudisset: ne tum quidem se ab ea fractum cum domo pulsus patria caruerit; tum autem cum amiserit carissimam filiam, victum se a fortuna turpiter confitetur: "Cedo" – inquit – "en manum tollo." Quid hoc homine miserius qui sic iaceat? "Insipienter" inquit, sed qui se profitetur esse sapientem.

Marcus Tullius says in his *Consolation* that he always fought against Fortuna, and that she was overwhelmed by him when he boldly beat back the attacks of his enemies: not even at that time, when he was driven from his home and lived without a country, was he shattered by her; but he confesses pitifully that then, when he lost his dearest daughter, he was conquered by Fortuna: "I fall," he said, "See? I raise my hand." What is more pathetic than this man, who lies in such a way? "Foolishly [*insipienter*]," he says, but this is a man who declares that he is wise [*sapientem*].

Cicero introduces his own *persona* for Fortuna, whom we have encountered already in Seneca and Boethius' texts,⁷¹ and he analogizes his political vicissitudes to a contest with her. The first clause may well be an allusion to Cicero's defeat of the Catilinarian conspirators, which story he promoted so often, but it could just as easily be a loose summary of his whole political career up to this point. The main point to be taken away is that it characterizes his political victories. From "*ne tum quidem*," Cicero recalls the period of his exile from Rome in 58-57 BC, when Clodius passed legislation that retroactively deemed illegal Cicero's execution without trial of certain of the Catilinarian

⁷⁰ I follow Vitelli, who positions this fragment third in Cicero's opening or *Prooemium*, whereas Kumaniecki places it at the end of the *Prooemium*.

⁷¹ See sections 1.5, 2.2, and 4.3.6.

conspirators. In Lactantius' text, Cicero insists that "even at that time" he was not yet "broken" by Fortuna, who is credited with orchestrating that trial. So in this clause, by contrast, he is describing a time of strictly political and social defeat. The final assault by which Cicero was "vanquished" (*victum*) was the death of his "dearest daughter." At this point, his meager concession to Fortuna is not only an admission of defeat, but also recognition of Fortuna's divinity and his own mere humanity. For he describes himself as performing a traditional gesture of surrender: "falling" to his knees and "raising his hand" (*"Cedo...manum tollo"*).⁷² This gesture indicates Cicero's position of absolute submission before a higher power. In the case of Fortuna, who had a cult at Rome,⁷³ this defeat indicates something more than the exposure to death that gladiatorial combat or warfare would necessarily involve, so that the gesture suggests a certain confusion of ritual supplication with the deity's victory in combat.

This fragment develops a theme that has already appeared in Cicero's letters: the association of public tribulation with private adversity. The three events described are increasingly more private, so that the second event in the series, Cicero's exile, involves both private and public spaces equally (*"cum domo pulsus patria caruerit"*). Still, this

⁷² This gesture primarily indicates an admission of defeat, especially in the context of gladiatorial combat. A. Otto, *Die Sprichwörter und sprichwörtlichen Redensarten der Römer: Supplement* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1890): 20, 117. See, in particular, Mar. 5.62.4; Apoll. Sidon. Ep. 5.7.3; Hieron. *adv. Pelag.* 3.7 (col. 789 Vall.); Schol. Pers. 5.119; Hieron. *contr. Lucifer.* 14 col. 186.

⁷³ A thorough review of the evidence for the Republican cult of Fortuna at Rome is found in Darius Andre Arya, "The Goddess Fortuna in Imperial Rome: Cult, Art, Text" (University of Texas at Austin, 2002), 167-216. Arya emphasizes especially the strategic association between Fortuna and political success developed by such "dynasts" as Paullus, Sulla, Pompey, Caesar, Augustus, and Antony.

passage establishes that for Cicero the entirely private loss of his daughter was comparable to the exclusively public victory over the Catilinarian conspirators and the meeting of public and private adversity in his exile. The device through which these events are made to be comparable here is the personification of Fortuna. The question this passage provokes is why Cicero's loss of his daughter was experienced as a calamity so much greater than that which he endured in his earlier political struggles. While it may seem natural that a loss of a loved one ought to be experienced as more painful and traumatic than the loss of public esteem, privilege, and honor, Cicero's letters regularly emphasize that he sees political life as a viable respite from private misfortune.

Within the logic of the introduction to this consolation, this fragment also accounts for the first two fragments in two different ways. If human life stands as a penalty for some misdeed, and if error or ignorance of truth obscure the human horizon of understanding, so that humans necessarily commit misdeeds, then Cicero's defeat by relentless Fortuna may be understood as a punishment, internal to the logic of punishment that governs all of human existence, or as a contest into which Cicero's ignorance and error, themselves also punishments, led him in spite of what would be good and right for a mere human to do. The facts may be separated from their interpretation at this point: Cicero's political career had had its upsets, but nothing so severe as this personal loss had occurred; that this misfortune could occur establishes Cicero's interpretation that life is a punishment, in which error or ignorance or both conspire to conceal the truth from humans, so that they are proudly led to challenge far greater divine powers, who have

established life as a punishment in the first place.⁷⁴ The question then arises why Cicero bothers to continue writing, speaking, and striving in life at all. If he has been so thoroughly defeated by Fortuna that he “raises his hand” in surrender, supplication, and acquiescence, then why does he go forward with the writing of this consolation?

Alternatively, Cicero’s metaphysical picture, in which a powerful deity has contended with him over his fortunes for so many decades, and now has finally won, may itself be the error and ignorance that withholds him from the truth. Perhaps no such deity punishes him, indeed perhaps there is no punishment, and life is after all not a penalty through which humans may purify themselves. Cicero’s profession of ignorance may also undermine this side of the presentation so far, so that it is not his hybris but rather his crippling regret that proves his error and ignorance. The fragments suggest that either of these possibilities may be the case, but not that both may be, so Cicero faces a true dilemma.

The final fragment that Vitelli assigns to the introduction, perhaps the most well known line of Cicero’s *Consolatio*, addresses this dilemma. Cicero is quoted in the preface of Pliny the Elder’s *Natural History* as having written quite simply, “*Crantorem [...] sequor.*”⁷⁵ Following Baltussen, I understand this remark quite specifically, as

⁷⁴ See sections 1.5, 2.2, and 4.3.6.

⁷⁵ Vitelli fragment 4b, Plin. HN Praef. 22: “*Scito enim conferentem auctores me deprehendisse a iuratissimis ex proximis veteres transcriptos ad verbum neque nominatos, non illa Vergiliana virtute, ut certarent, non Tulliana simplicitate qui de Republica Platonis se comitem profitetur, in Consolatione filiae: ‘Crantorem’ – inquit – ‘sequor’...*” Pliny’s remarks further make clear that, though Cicero is apparently acknowledging his debt to Crantor’s consolation to Hippocles for the writing of his own consolation to

Cicero's borrowing of what was most distinctive about Crantor's consolation:

metriopatheia.⁷⁶ This concept marks Crantor's innovative response to Stoic *apatheia* or impassivity. Where the Stoics had argued that any emotional disruption of one's rational self-possession had to be suppressed, Crantor introduced into the consolatory tradition the possibility of moderating powerful emotions, such as grief or fear, rather than completely eliminating them.⁷⁷ In the *Tusculan Disputations* this position is perfectly expressed.

Marcus quotes Crantor as saying,⁷⁸

himself, his imitation is comparable to the way in which he imitated Plato's *Republic* in his own *De Republica*. At the worst, then, this dialogue must be a thoughtful and well designed reworking of the Greek paradigm. Much more likely is that Cicero's text challenges the Greek original, as his *De Republica* challenges Plato's model.

Vitelli fragment 4a, his first dubious fragment, Jerome's *Epistle* 60.5, says similarly, "*Legimus Crantorem, cuius volumen ad confovendum dolorem suum secutus est Cicero; Platonis, Diogenis, Clitomachi, Carneadis, Posidonii ad sedandos luctus opuscula percucurrimus, qui diversis aetatibus diversorum lamenta vel libris vel epistulis minuere sunt conati...*" "We read Crantor, whose little volume Cicero followed in treating his own grief; we have trekked through the short works on sedating mourning by Plato, Diogenes, Clitomachus, Carneades, and Posidonius, all of whom at various times tried with letters or with books to reduce different peoples' laments..." See Scourfield, *Consoling Heliodorus*, 115-118.

⁷⁶ The fragments of Crantor have been collected by Mette and provided with illuminating commentary in Mette, "Krantor und Arkesilaos," 8-40. The same source features bibliography to that date on pp. 8-10. On the relationship between Cicero and Crantor, see also Margaret R. Graver, "Appendix A. Crantor and the Consolatory Tradition," in *Cicero on the Emotions: Tusculan Disputations 3 and 4*, ed. Margaret R. Graver (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

In the scholarship, this quotation was formerly understood to imply that Cicero had essentially translated Crantor's famous consolation, so that Cicero's *Consolatio* could be dismissed as derivative, a mere translation. Few understand these words in this way today; instead, it is normally read as acknowledgement that Cicero did borrow from Crantor, but that there was still much room for originality in his work.

Baltussen's suggestion that Crantor's influence may be explained by Cicero's borrowing of *metriopatheia* was already introduced by Kamaniecki: cf. Baltussen, "Cicero's *Consolatio ad se*," 71-72; Kumaniecki, "Die Verlorene *Consolatio*," 32-33.

⁷⁷ Graver, "Crantor."

⁷⁸ Where I refer to Cicero by his *praenomen* "Marcus," I intend to refer to the character identified as "M." in the *Tusculan Disputations*. Where I refer to him as Cicero, I intend to refer to the historical figure and author of the texts under consideration here.

*Minime...adsentior iis, qui istam nescio quam indolentiam magno opere laudant, quia nec potest ulla esse nec debet. Ne aegrotus sim: si sim, qui fuerat sensus adsit, sive secetur quid sive avellatur a corpore. Nam istuc nihil dolere non sine magna mercede contingit, immanitatis in animo, stuporis in corpore. [III.6.12]*⁷⁹

I do not agree at all with those who zealously praise that insensitivity of I know not what degree, because no one is able to be [without feeling] nor ought one to be. Let me not be diseased: should I be sick though, I who have had sensibility would still be aware, if something were cut off or torn away from my body. For that insensitivity to pain comes about not without a great price, cruelty in spirit, numbness in body.

As this passage shows, *metriopatheia* is characterized most consistently as a rejection of the Stoic's determination to preserve perfect rationality beyond the reach of all capacity for affectedness, for better or worse. If at first the Stoics rejected the view that one invariably experiences some undesirable sensations and affects, and that one is helpless to do anything about this, then they advanced a contrary position, articulated as *apatheia*, that draws an analogy between the body's treatment through medicine and soul's treatment through philosophy, dismissing all sensitivity and all affectedness as undesirable illness. Crantor's *metriopatheia* negates both of these positions, so that it upholds neither the passivity of the first position ("*ne aegrotus sim*"), nor the impassivity of the Stoics ("*...nec potest ulla esse nec debet*"), and thus chooses a moderate position between the two, while nevertheless leaving this undefined. Such is the way of Crantor's *metriopatheia*, which Cicero chose to follow in his *Consolatio*.

⁷⁹ On this quotation, see also Kumaniecki, "Die Verlorene "Consolatio", " 32-33.

If *metriopatheia* belongs to the introduction of Cicero's *Consolatio*, where Vitelli has situated it, then it is possible to understand the larger movement of the discourse as a working out of this position. For the sake of his capacity to continue feeling, as Crantor puts it, Cicero allows himself to give voice to the causes and reasons for his grief, to lament his misery, and to express at length the woes of human existence. He also pursues some course of therapy that will check that lamentation and prevent it from utterly perverting his rationality, so that illness, as it is conceived, overtakes all of his thinking and feeling. This strategy also takes up the dilemma of the two possible causes of Cicero's ignorance and error. If either his contentious hybris has led him into a position of profound error, or his abject surrender before what only seems to be a powerful goddess with cosmic punishments is instead only his ignorance, then Cicero, who does not know how to choose between these two, may take the safest course by refraining from taking dogmatic positions. Instead, he may follow Crantor, and strike a balance between dogmatic reflection, which should settle his affects in case his abjection is the error, and melancholy lamentation, which should express his regret that his existence was such that it brought him before so powerful a contendor as Fortuna with no resources to match her onslaught. In the end, the two positions are not incompatible, as long as his therapy offers a consolation that works within the terms of his metaphysical picture. In the one case, tentatively endorsing a fantasy would still offer a framework in which passions may be moderated, and in the other it is the correct vision of the world and

Cicero's task is to reconcile his weakness at least partially to the truth that he had so far overlooked.

5.6.2. *Lamentatio Vitae*

In the previous section, the fragments of the opening or "*Prooemium*" established first of all the broadly Socratic disposition of Cicero's *Consolatio*, associating the care of the self with the courage of the truth. Secondly, the fragments of this first grouping reveal that he regarded his grief as explicable, first, in terms of his lifelong contest with Fortuna, in which he had recently received a crushing defeat when his daughter passed away, and, second, in terms of a cosmic order that offers punishment for wrong-doing in previous lives with the inevitable return to that life for further purification. Finally, the last fragment associates Cicero's position with Crantor and his position towards the affects, *metriopatheia*. From that point, a division in the fragments can be explained, so that Cicero's courage to speak announces the truth that passions can only be moderated, not completely extirpated, or should only be moderated, even if they can be completely extinguished. His discourse also proceeds as the care of the self, that is, as the self telling the truth to itself, in order to provide for itself according to the best possible plan. To take care of oneself requires that one acknowledge the truth that one should not entirely extinguish the passions, but that, still, one cannot allow oneself to be utterly overwhelmed by them. Cicero's course throughout the rest of the *Consolatio* is now clear: he must leave room to lament the truth, but check that lamentation with the

appropriate therapy. There is thus a formal division in the text that reflects a philosophical position. Even if Vitelli's formal division cannot in the final account be supported, there is at least this logical separation between two registers of the authorial voice, one consoling, the other to be consoled.

In Vitelli's grouping, he includes all the fragments that seem to dwell upon the misery of life, in contrast to those that aim to balance one's attitude to this misery.

Fragment 5 comes from Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*, I.31.75-76. There he writes:

Nam haec quidem vita mors est, quam lamentari possem si liberet. – Satis tu quidem in Consolatione es lamentatus; quam cum lego, nihil malo quam has res relinquere, his vero modo auditis multo magis.

For truly this life is death, which I would be able to lament, if it were pleasing [to you]. – But you lamented life enough in your *Consolation*; when I am reading this work, I desire nothing else than to leave behind this world [*res*], and having now heard these words I desire that much more.

This is a position that Cicero had introduced as early as the *Somnium Scipionis* in Book 6 of the *De Republica* at paragraph 14. There the specter of Scipio Africanus, appearing in a dream to the still living Scipio Aemilianus, tells him that the life he currently lives is actually a kind of death, and that the state of death in which Africanus exists is true life. It is perhaps not irrelevant that he goes on to describe the celestial destiny of statesmen who act in defense of the Republic. It will be important to recall this point when I come to fragment 23 below. Here in the *Tusculan Disputations*, though, Marcus asserts the same truth, that “this life is death.” But since both he and his conversation partner, the speaker

labelled A. in the text, are still living, it is difficult to trust the authority of Marcus, who cannot know any other life than the life he lives.

A.'s response is important to consider, since this is where the *Consolatio* is introduced. Marcus suggests that he could lament the life that is actually death, if A. should approve. A. responds by observing that he has already read "enough" of Cicero's lamentation in the *Consolatio* to understand Marcus' claim in the present context. He goes on to explain his experience of reading, indicating that he responds to the text by preferring death to life. He admits that the lamentation found in the *Consolatio* has inspired in him a desire "to leave behind all of these things," the affairs of life, and furthermore that the direction of the ongoing dialogue with Marcus in the *Tusculan Disputations* only increases that desire. In the introduction, I mentioned that Cicero's reading of all prior consolation literature left him dissatisfied, so that the only response available to him was to write his own consolation, unlike any other that had previously been written. According to this fragment, the effect of his own consolation, far from providing moderate emotional stability and rational regulation of extreme affects, actually drives the reader to desire death. It is not possible to assess at this point whether this was the consolation that Cicero felt was missing from the older, Greek consolations he had read, but it is at least a possibility that this fragment raises.

Fragments 6 and 6a reinforce this picture. In 6a, one only learns from Augustine that Cicero supplied a lamentation in his *Consolatio*, and that he did so with characteristic

eloquence.⁸⁰ In Fragment 6, *Tusc.* I.34.83, A. first explains precisely why he fears death and considers it evil. This is the topic of the entire first book, and A. struggles, as so many of Socrates' interlocutors struggled, to articulate precisely wherein his fear and conviction lie. He says, "*Illud angit vel potius excruciat, discessus ab omnibus is quae sunt bona in vita.*" "This torments or rather tortures [me]: departing from all those things which are good in life." Marcus responds by challenging A.'s assumptions:

Vide ne 'a malis' dici verius possit. Quid ego nunc lugeam vitam hominum? Vere et iure possum; sed quis necesse est cum id agam, ne post mortem miseros nos putemus fore, etiam vitam efficere deplorando miseriores? Fecimus hoc in eo libro in quo nosmet ipsos, quantum potuimus, consolati sumus.

Be careful that it cannot be more truly said "from evils." Why should I now mourn over the life of humans? Truly and with right I can; but what is the need to make life even more pitiful by lamenting it, since I do this in order that we may not think that we will be pitiful after death? We have done this in that book in which, as much as we were able, we consoled ourselves.

He begins by confronting his partner in dialogue with a "truer" claim, that death is a departure from evils rather than from goods. Marcus then shows himself, as the authorial voice of the *Consolatio*, to be a *parrhesiast*, a truth-teller, who has the ethical authority and the knowledge supported by this ethical position that together enable him to articulate more truly how things stand with respect to life. He then excuses himself of his responsibility to lament the miseries of life, which his correction of A. would otherwise

⁸⁰ Fragment 6a (August. *De civ. D.* XIX.4) "*Quis enim sufficit quantovis eloquentiae flumine vitae huius miseras explicare? Quam lamentatus est Cicero in Consolatione de morte filiae, sicut potuit; sed quantum est quod potuit?*" "For who possesses so great a river of eloquence that he is adequate to unfold the miseries of this life? Cicero made lamentations in the *Consolation* on the death of his daughter, as he was able. But how much does what he could do amount to?"

entail; for he explains that he must show that humans are not *miser* “after death,” and that lamentation of the woes of life would be one possible strategy by which to establish discursively the truth and rightness of his claim that death takes humans “away from evils.” He can refuse this task, though, because he has already tended to it in his *Consolatio*. This fragment does not help to establish the precise content of Cicero’s lamentation, but it does show that the goal of lamentation is not simply to give vent to the affects. It is at least also a meditation on the miseries of life, designed to show that death is a departure from evils towards a true and better life.

Fragment 7 reinforces the idea that life is a kind of death by repeating the claim from the first fragment in the *Prooemium*, that humans are born for the sake of purifying them of their crimes.⁸¹ The text states that “*Iteravit id ipsum postea quasi obiurgans eum qui vitam non esse poenam putet.*” “He repeated that very [claim] afterwards as if chiding the man who would think that life is not a penalty.” Vitelli is right to place this fragment in association with the *lamentatio vitae*, since the fragment asserts that a man is misguided if he does not recognize that life is a penalty. The implication is that Cicero would then go on to establish that it is indeed a penalty, and this would then be further condemnation of life’s misery. It is perhaps also important to observe of this fragment that it establishes Cicero’s text as minimally dialogic. That is, one can hardly expect to

⁸¹ Vitelli understands the verb “*iteravit*” in Lactantius’ text as indication that Cicero “repeated” the claim of Fragment 1, that “humans are born for the sake of expiating crimes,” in another part of the text, that is, not at the “*principium*” (Lactant. *Div. inst.* III.18.18).

establish from these fragments, such as they are, that Cicero's *Consolatio* to himself actually proceeded formally as a dialogue with himself; one does not need to either. Cicero's rhetorical style is inherently argumentative to the extent that it is deliberative. This "*eum qui*," this "the man who" construction, allows Cicero to introduce the dialectical process of argument into his text, introducing interlocutors through relative clauses of characteristic. Cicero could then use these avatars to represent various consolatory positions, or various positions to be consoled. Such is the texture of his rhetoric.

Fragments 8, 8a, and 9 provide further substance of Cicero's lamentation in the *Consolatio*.⁸² Each of these texts indicate that, somewhere along the way, Cicero introduced Silenus' pessimistic wisdom about human affairs.⁸³ First, Fragment 8, preserved by Ambrose, muses on human misery in the following terms,

Quid enim nobis miserius, qui tamquam spoliati et nudi proicimur in hanc vitam, corpore fragili, corde lubrico, imbellico animo, anxii ad sollicitudines, desidiosi

⁸² Vitelli marks 8 and 8a as dubious fragments, but takes fragment 9 as fully reliable. Vitelli, *M. Tulli Ciceronis Consolationis Fragmenta*, 40. Lactantius indicates that fragment 9 is a direct quote from Cicero's *Consolatio*, and, even though 8 and 8a cannot claim such support, they have enough in common with the quote in Lactantius that they may contain some of Cicero's language and thought that Lactantius did not preserve. Scourfield clarifies the relationship between fragment 8, Ambrose's text, and Jerome's 60th letter at *Consoling Heliodorus*, 134.

⁸³ Kumaniecki argues that the source for Cicero's knowledge of the tale of Silenus and Midas was Aristotle's fragmentary *Eudemus*. See his arguments at Kumaniecki, "Die Verlorene "Consolatio", " 36. MacKendrick, commenting on Vitelli's fragment 9 (=fragment 11 of Baiter & Kayser, which he follows) observes that the valorization of death in this case is comparable to Crantor, in that he is celebrating those who die on behalf of their country.

It is possible that this pessimism is not strictly Silenic, but is instead Sophoclean. See Soph. *OC* 1211-1248 and P. E. Easterling, "Sophocles and the Wisdom of Silenus: A Reading of Oedipus at Colonus 1211-48," in *Tragedy and Archaic Greek Thought*, ed. Douglas L. Cairns (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2013): 193-204.

ad labores, proni ad voluptates? Non nasci igitur longe optimum secundum sancti Salomanis sententiam. Ipsum enim etiam hi, qui sibi visi sunt in philosophia excellere, secuti sunt. (Exc. Sat. II 29-30)

For what is more pitiful than we are, we who are cast forth so denuded and bare in this life, fragile in body, fleeting in heart, weak in spirit, troubled with worries, idle in labors, inclined to pleasures? Therefore not to be born is far best, in agreement with the opinion of holy Solomon. For even those who seem to distinguish themselves in philosophy agree upon this.

The Silenic wisdom that “*non nasci*,” “not to have been born,” is “*longe optimum*” or “far best” for humans here appears as a point of agreement between the Biblical Solomon and his pagan contemporaries. Ambrose emphasizes that it is specifically “those who seem to distinguish themselves in philosophy” that find agreement with Solomon, not just pagans in general. But the rhetorical question that opens this fragment also deserves attention, since it may preserve the sentiment if not the exact words of Cicero’s text. The comparative degree places humans in a more pitiful state than any other being, and the following relative clause lists some of the conditions that make human existence so very pitiful. The observation that “we are cast forth in this life so denuded and bare [*spoliata et nudi*]” stands apart from the first list of three ablatives of description and the second list of three adjectival phrases of the same form. Abject exposure thus defines human life as so very miserable, and nudity, the stripping off of covering garments, defines this incapacity of human life.

Two further fragments reference the Silenus’ wisdom. Vitelli 8a highlights two sentences from Pliny the Younger.

Itaque multi exstiterere qui non nasci optimum censerent aut quam ocissime aboleri. Uni animantium luctus est datus, uni luxuria, et quidem innumerabilibus modis ac per singula membra, uni ambitio, uni avaritia, uni immensa vivendi cupido, uni superstitio, uni sepulturae cura atque etiam post se de futuro... (Plin. Nat. VII 4-5)

Thus many exist who think that it is best not to be born or to perish as swiftly as possible. To one of the living sorrow is given, to another extravagance, and in innumerable ways and through the individual limbs, to another ambition, to another greed, to another a vast desire for living, to another fanaticism, to another anxiety for the burial and after that about the future...

The first sentence provides the rest of the Silenus' notorious *sententia*, that "to perish as swiftly as possible" would also be best, and adds this to the words Fragment 8 already provided. It continues with anaphoric brooding on the fates apportioned to men. There seems to be no principle unifying these different fates, only the device itself. Perhaps it can be said that all of these are vices, if indeed it is a vice to take care for one's burial. Moving to fragment 9, Vitelli takes a sentence from Lactantius, as well as Lactantius' remarks upon that sentence.⁸⁴ He begins by connecting the remark of the Silenus with the

⁸⁴ Fragment 9 (Lactant. *Div. inst.* III.19.11-14). "*Quid ergo dicemus nisi errare illos qui aut mortem adpetunt tamquam bonum aut vitam fugiunt tamquam malum? ... Damnunt igitur vitam omnem plenamque nihil aliud quam malis opinantur. Hinc nata est inepta illa sententia, hanc esse mortem quam nos vitam putemus, illam vitam quam nos pro morte timeamus: ita primum bonum esse non nasci, secundum citius mori. Quae ut maioris sit auctoritatis, Sileno adtribuitur. Cicero in Consolatione: "Non nasci—inquit—longe optimum nec in hos scopulos incidere vitae, proximum autem, si natus sis, quam primum tamquam ex incendio effugere fortunae". Credidisse illum vanissimo dicto exinde apparet, quod adiecit de suo aliquid, ut ornaret.*" "What therefore shall we say if not that they have wandered astray who seek death as good or flee life as bad? ... Therefore they condemn the whole of life and consider it full of nothing other than evils. And from this point of view that senseless opinion is born, that this is death, which we think life, and that is life which we hold in the place of death: so the first good is not to be born, the second to die quite quickly. This opinion is credited to Silenus, so that it possesses greater authority. Cicero in his *Consolation* said: "Not to be born is far best, and not to come upon these rocks of life, and next, if you have been born, to flee from the conflagration of fortune as soon as possible." That he believed this most hopeless expression is apparent from this, that he added something of his own, so that he might ornament it."

position I have already discussed above, that human life is actually and more truthfully recognized as a kind of death. But Lactantius continues, quoting Cicero as having written in his *Consolatio* that, “*Non nasci...longe optimum nec in hos scopulos incidere vitae, proximum autem, si natus sis, quam primum tamquam ex incendio effugere Fortunae.*” That is, “Not to be born is far best, and not to come upon these shoals of life, and next, if you have been born, to escape Fortune’s conflagration as soon as possible.” In his remarks upon this sentence, Lactantius observes that Cicero had added a few of his own embellishments to Silenus’ *sententia*, and deduces from this that Cicero must have so favored the Silenus’ position that he could not help but ornament these words. One need not accept Lactantius’ reading, but he does point to a problem. Why has Cicero added his own expansions of the Silenic *sententia*?

With the first of these embellishments, Cicero restates Silenus’ first proclamation through an analogy to shipwreck, so that “not being born” equates to “not falling upon the shoals of life.” In this way, the restatement is comparable to Fragment 10, again from Lactantius.⁸⁵ In this quotation, Lactantius records Cicero as having said, “*Hoc iter vitae tam confragosum putamus, tam plenum iniuriarum ac miseriarum atque laborum,*” or “This path of life we consider so rough, so full of injuries and miseries and labors.” The result introduced by “*tam...tam*” is not transmitted by Lactantius’ text, but what is

⁸⁵ Vitelli marks this fragment as possibly dubious; he cites Halm in favor of its inclusion, and Doignon as against. K. Halm, "Beiträge zur Berichtigung und Ergänzung der ciceronischen Fragmente," *Sitzungsberichte der Königlichen Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu München* 2 (1862): 34; J. Doignon, "Lactance intermédiaire entre Ambroise de Milan et la consolation de Cicéron?," *Révue des études latines* 51 (1973): 218 n. 3; Vitelli, *M. Tulli Ciceronis Consolationis Fragmenta*, 41.

preserved does fill out the meaning of Cicero's first expansion of Silenus' gnomic wisdom. Here "*iter*" is doubly intended as the path of a ship and the path in a more metaphysical sense, so that travel is analogized to the contingencies of life. This path on which the living travel is "*confragosum*" – prone to disastrous "injuries, miseries, and labors" in the same way that sea travel is prone to such incidents. This analogy is such a basic figure of ancient literature that tracking down a source would be entirely hopeless. It must be said though that this metaphysical analogy does reduce the complexity of life to one negative association with sea travel—and sea travel itself has already been reduced to only its most perilous outcomes. Not to labor the point, Cicero's rhetoric is here orientated toward taking advantage of pre-existing fantasies about sea travel's dangers, in order to capture life in a defining conceit. The same is true of the second expansion of Silenus' *sententia*, in which Cicero equates dying as soon as possible to "escaping Fortune's conflagration as soon as possible." In the previous section, Fortune was personified as a contender against whom Cicero had always fought (Fragment 3). The conceit substitutes for dying soon the escape from Fortune's conflagration, so that Cicero can continue the conceit that he had already introduced with this first fragment. It seems then that the question provoked by Lactantius' commentary may be answered by this correspondence between Fragments 3 and 9. Cicero has expanded Silenus' *sententia* not because he especially liked the idea—a point claim that is inherently impossible to establish from an author's textual traces—but rather because he has been developing a system of analogies, between life and nautical accidents, and between death and a contest

with Fortuna. The object of both of these systems, as Lactantius rightly detects, is to undermine the idea that life is worth living, that death is a misfortune, in other words, to direct one's will to live toward a desire for death.

The lamentation fragments continue with allusions to the poets and to Roman history.⁸⁶ Vitelli has arranged Cicero's fragments according to the conventional principle that Seneca states in the *Ad Marciam*,⁸⁷ that examples should follow precepts.⁸⁸ Cicero need not have followed this principle, but it is helpful to consider the function of Cicero's examples by analyzing them together. The first of the three poetic fragments states a general principle taken from Naevius, who said that mortals necessarily suffer many evils.⁸⁹ The other two examples come from the same passage of Jerome's *Epistle* 60 to Heliodorus.⁹⁰ In the 14th paragraph, Jerome adds to his quotation of Naevius an observation concerning Niobe's transformation "*in lapidem*," "into stone," and other womens' "*in diversas bestias*," "into various beasts."⁹¹ Jerome also introduces Hesiod, who, he says, "*natales hominum plangens gaudet in funere*," "bewails the birthdays of

⁸⁶ Vitelli marks fragments 11-14 as dubious, and fragment 15 as authentic. Vitelli, *M. Tulli Ciceronis Consolationis Fragmenta*, 42.

⁸⁷ See also my discussion of the *Ad Marciam*, section 4.2.

⁸⁸ Sen. *Dial.* 6.2.1.

⁸⁹ Fragment 11: (Hieron. *Ep.* 60.14) "*Naevius poeta: 'Pati—inquit—necesse est multa mortalem mala...'*" "Naevius the poet: 'To suffer,' he said, 'many evils is necessary for a mortal.'"

⁹⁰ The authoritative scholarship on Jerome's use of Cicero's *Consolatio* as a source is Scourfield, *Consoling Heliodorus*. See especially pp. 13, 19-20, 22n., 25n., 31, 83, 109, 113, 115, 116, 117-118, 119, 120, 131, 134, 189, 190, 193, 194, 195, 223.

⁹¹ Fragment 12: (Hieron. *Ep.* 60.14) "*Unde et Niobam, quia multum fleverit, in lapidem et [diversas] in diversas bestias commutatas finxit antiquitas...*" "And from this even Niobe, because she wept much, antiquity imagined transformed into stone and others into various beasts..."

humans as he rejoices in burial.”⁹² The logic joining these three statements is somewhat elliptical, but basically Jerome means to say that the myth of Niobe’s transformation into stone, just as those of other womens’ transformations into beasts, demonstrates the principle stated by Naevius, that excessive mourning and “weeping,” themselves the products of these necessary evils and also a necessary evil in itself, produce the greater evil of a transformation into something entirely unfeeling. Finally, Hesiod is introduced as an authoritative figure who mourned life and celebrated death, in just the way that Cicero's text has advocated from the start.

Two further fragments treat historical figures. The first of these connects poetry to history through an epigram of Callimachus.⁹³ At *Tusculanae Disputationes* I.34.84, Marcus relates that, “There is an epigram of Callimachus on Cleombrotus of Ambracia, to whom, he says, although nothing unwelcome had happened, he threw himself from a wall into the sea when he read Plato’s book.” This fragment is crucial to my argument because it establishes the *Consolatio* as kind of repetition of Plato’s *Phaedo*, the only book to which Marcus can be referring in the fragment. The *Consolatio* repeats the *Phaedo* in that A.’s reading of the *Consolatio* inspired in A. a desire for death of so great

⁹² Fragment 13: (Hieron. *Ep.* 60.14) “...*Et Hesiodus natales hominum plangens gaudet in funere...*” “And Hesiod bewailing the birthdays of humans rejoices in burial...” On the question of whether this fragment should take for its subject Herodotus or Euripides in place of Hesiod, see Scourfield, *Consoling Heliodorus*, 193-194.

⁹³ Fragment 14: (Cic. *Tusc.* I.34.84) “*Callimachi quidem epigramma in Ambraciotam Theombrotum est, quem ait, cum ei nihil accidisset adversi, e muro se in mare abiecisse lecto Platonis libro.*” Vitelli marks this fragment as dubious Vitelli, *M. Tulli Ciceronis Consolationis Fragmenta*, 42. However, see Johann’s arguments for its inclusion in the *Consolatio* Johann, *Trauer und Trost*: 105-08.

an intensity that he checked Marcus, who had offered to lament the miseries of life in the presence of A., claiming that even what Marcus had said up to now had already greatly exacerbated that desire. Cleombrotus also is so overcome with a desire for death upon reading the *Phaedo* that he throws himself into the sea, even though he had experienced no particular misfortune that would reasonably lead to such an extreme action. Both the *Consolatio*'s lamentations and the *Phaedo*'s enchantment, it would seem, can drive their readers to pursue extreme action on their lives. The essential thrust of their rhetoric reverses the polls on life and death, so that the latter becomes desirable to the extent that the former is reduced to its miseries, suffering, and pain.

The final fragment also comes from Cicero's later works. *De divinatione* II.9.22 tries to establish the observation that knowledge of future events is not "useful" to humans by posing a dilemma. On the one side, one does not need to know if something good will happen – humans tend to worry only about future misfortunes. To this point, Cicero adduces examples of "the city's most distinguished men," whom he had formerly discussed in his *Consolatio*. He briefly characterizes Marcus Crassus and Gnaeus Pompey as two great men who, though flourishing at one point, ended their lives in disgrace.⁹⁴ Of each he poses the rhetorical question whether it would have been useful to

⁹⁴ Fragment 15: (Cic. Div. II.9.22) "Atque ego ne utilem quidem arbitror esse nobis futurarum rerum scientiam... Clarissimorum hominum nostrae civitatis gravissimos exitus in Consolatione collegimus. Quid igitur, ut omittamus superiores, Marcone Crasso putas utile fuisse tum cum maxumis opibus fortunisque florebat scire sibi interfecto ignominia et dedecore esse pereundum? An Cn. Pompeium censes tribus suis consulatibus tribus triumphis maximarum rerum gloria laetaturum fuisse, si sciret se in solitudine Aegyptiorum trucidatum iri amisso exercitu, post mortem vero ea consecutura quae sine lacrimis non

them to know what their final fate would be, to which questions the answer is apparently negative. Though Cicero is discussing these men here as examples of the uselessness of foreknowledge of evils, one can easily see how their fates would in the context of Cicero's lamentation in the *Consolatio* have offered fine examples of life's vicissitudes. They are thus further evidence for Cicero that life is worse than death, that death is after all more desirable than life. But more than that, they are also examples of the inevitability of human ignorance. Human finitude inevitably results in ignorance of one's fate, so this fragment may also have a connection with Cicero's proclaimed "ignorance and error" fragment 2.

The grim picture that Cicero's lamentation presents may be summed up as follows. First, Cicero establishes the claim that human life is actually a kind of death (Fragment 5). He argues this because life is full of evils (Fragment 6), and concludes further that life is a punishment for crimes (Fragment 7). The various miseries to which

possumus?" "But I think that knowledge of future things is not even useful to us... We have collected in our *Consolation* the most grievous departures from life of our city's most distinguished men. What about it then, as we skip over the elders, do you think it was useful to Marcus Crassus at that time when he was enjoying the greatest wealth and fortune to know that he must perish by killing himself with dishonor and shame? Or do you think that Gnaeus Pompey with his three consulships, his three triumphs, with the glory of his greatest achievements would have been delighted, if he knew that he would be cut down in isolation among the Egyptians with his army lost, and that after death those things would follow which without tears we cannot name?"

Münzer's comments on Cicero's historical *exempla* begin here; he concludes from the parallel use of Pompey's death in Cicero's *Consolatio* and Seneca's *Ad Marciam* (20.4) that Seneca must have employed Cicero as a source text. Friedrich Münzer, *Roman Aristocratic Parties and Families*, trans. Thérèse Ridley (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999): 367. Münzer's text usefully collects cross-references of these examples from most of Cicero's late philosophical works.

human life is exposed are listed together with the pessimistic wisdom of Silenus (Fragments 8, 8a, and 9), in order to support this argument. Further support comes from the analogies that Cicero draws between life's struggles and seafaring or combat with Fortuna. Finally, the authority of the poets and examples from Roman history add weight to this claim. All of this returns to the basic position that death is preferable to life. The lamentation in its entirety, then, is best represented by the response of A. in the *Tusculanae Disputationes* (Fragment 5): arguing, as the *Phaedo* did, that death is preferable to life, its effect on the reader is so depressing that the reader entertains suicide as the best course of action, just as Cleombrotus responded to the *Phaedo*. Left only to lamentation, the reader of the *Consolatio* is driven to this course of action. But the opening of the text had at least set the course on moderating passions, both disgust with life and enthusiasm for death, so it is necessary to turn to the Vitelli's *Aegritudinis Sedatio* in order to understand the complete discourse of Cicero's *Consolatio* to himself.

5.6.3. *Aegritudinis Sedatio*

Cicero's *Consolatio* presents a Socratic text that approaches the care of the self, treating one's grief therapeutically so that one lives according to the best possible plan, through a discourse of truth, declaring that passions ought to be moderated—and only moderated, instead of extirpated altogether—by a series of rhetorical arguments. Following Vitelli's arrangement of the fragments, I have suggested that one may read the fragments as the elements of a logically coherent picture. In this way, the previous

section treated those lamentations that represent one component of Cicero's text. If his *metriopatheia* allowed on the one hand some space to vent his passions, it also demanded a strategy by which he must have tried to balance his grieving. Vitelli's Fragments 16-23, titled the "*Aegritudinis Sedatio*," shows this other side of Cicero's discourse.

Fragment 16 gives the general picture of Cicero's therapy, aimed at reducing his grief. He explains the various therapeutic methods developed by the Hellenistic schools, and then differentiates his own approach from them. He says:

Sunt qui unum officium consolationis putent [docere] malum illud omnino non esse, ut Cleanthi placet; sunt qui non magnum malum, ut Peripatetici; sunt qui abducant a malis ad bona, ut Epicurus; sunt qui satis putent ostendere nihil inopinati accidisse, nihil mali. Chrysippus autem caput esse censet in consolando detrahere illam opinionem maerenti, ut se officio fungi putet iusto atque debito. Sunt etiam qui haec omnia genera consolandi colligant—alius enim alio modo movetur—, ut fere nos in Consolatione omnia in consolationem unam coniecimus; erat enim in tumore animus et omnis in eo temptabatur curatio. (Cic. Tusc. III 31.76)

There are those who think the one duty of consolation is to teach that this is not at all an evil, to which position Cleanthes consents; there are those who think it is to teach that there is no great evil, such as the Peripatetics; there are those who lead away their addressees from evils back to goods, as Epicurus; there are those who think it is enough to show that nothing unexpected has happened, [and so] nothing evil. But Chrysippus thinks that the principle thing in consoling is to remove this opinion of one in mourning, that he thinks that he observes a duty, just and owed to the dead. And there are those who gather all these kinds of consolation—for each is moved in a different way—, basically as in the *Consolation* we threw together all into one consolation; for my soul was inflamed and every cure was tried on it.

This important fragment casts the most light on Cicero's strategy in the *Consolatio*. As he explains in the third sentence here, he attempted to collect "*omnia genera consolandi*," differing in this way from the Hellenistic schools whom he describes briefly. His method,

then, was to borrow freely from the Stoics, Epicureans, and Peripatetics whatever he found useful as a therapy for himself. Following Epicurus, he tried to divert his attention from bad things to good things, just as, following the Peripatetics, he tried to establish that at least no great evil had occurred when his daughter died. The position that asserts nothing “unexpected” has happened, and that therefore what happened cannot be an “evil,” seems to be a variation on the Cyrenaic line of thinking, which developed the method of *praemeditatio malorum futurorum*. From the Stoics Cleanthes and Chrysippus, he takes, first, the strategy to go beyond the Peripatetic position and assert that no evil has happened at all, and, second, that he who is in mourning must lose his belief that he has an obligation of debt to mourn the dead. All of these strategies must have been tried if Cicero can rightly claim to have gathered every kind of consolation. This would also support the claim in his letter to Atticus XII.14.3, wherein he boasted that he had fruitlessly read all available consolation literature. The strategy also seems suitable to Cicero, who would in many works, such as *De Natura Deorum*, for example, strive to give a fair hearing to all sides on a topic. His Academic skepticism thus supports an openness to all participants in a debate, and supports his freely borrowing from all of the schools. Thus any argument developed by any school may have been used to moderate his passions.

Two important notions are added to Cicero’s discourse by a fragment from Jerome’s quotation of Ennius (Fragment 17, Hieron. *Ep.* 60.14), featured in the same context as Fragments 11-13. If Jerome borrowed this quotation from Cicero, as the

scholarly tradition holds, then this fragment marks a shift in registers.⁹⁵ For Ennius (“...*Prudenterque Ennius:*”) is quoted as saying, “*plebes—ait—in hoc regi antestat loco: licet lacrimare plebi, regi honeste non licet,*” that is, “the plebeian,” he said, “has a privilege over a king in this matter: it is allowed to a plebeian to weep, to a king it is not with propriety allowed.” This fragment shows that consolation is not exclusively a matter of subjective well being: the sedation of violent passions appears here as a duty. For a king may not weep, where a plebeian freely feels whatever he feels. It has been shown that the sense of duty attached to receiving consolation well is a commonplace of consolatory epistles, and it furthermore contrasts with the position that Chrysippus critiqued, which regards the duty as owed to the dead. Consolatory discourse maintains, instead, that the duty is to the living, so that a friend has a duty to console a friend in mourning, just as a king’s office demands of him that he suppress his affects for the sake of the community. A plebeian, however, having no office, is free of this duty.

But there is more to this selected example than simply the statement of a principle of obligation. As Fragment 3 above illustrates, Cicero’s own political career was at once compared to and distinguished from the private disaster he experienced in losing his

⁹⁵ Fragment 17: (Hieron. *Ep.* 60.14) “...*Prudenterque Ennius: ‘plebes—ait—in hoc regi antestat loco: licet lacrimare plebi, regi honeste non licet.’*” Vitelli considers this fragment of questionable authenticity. There is no guarantee that it belongs in the *Consolatio*, since Jerome never confirms his source, but the beginning of this letter clearly depends upon Cicero’s *Consolatio*, and for that reason Jerome’s source for this quote may have been the same text. It would be appropriate for the quotation to appear in the *Consolatio*, since it anticipates the political basis of Tullia’s planned deification, which fragment 23 details. Scourfield argues for Jerome’s dependence upon Cicero. Scourfield, *Consoling Heliodorus*, 194. For further scholarship defending the inclusion of this fragment see Vitelli, *M. Tulli Ciceronis Consolationis Fragmenta*, 45.

daughter. If this quote appeared in his *Consolatio*, he must have employed it to demonstrate that he, having been through the *cursus honorum* and risen to a consulship, at which time, at least in his view, he saved the Republic from disaster, had reached a position as close to kingship as a Roman could hope to achieve—at least until Caesar came along. I also observed that the major argument of the lamentation, that life is actually a kind of death, stated plainly in Fragment 5, appeared also in Cicero's *De Republica* at 6.14 as the reason why Scipio Africanus recommends neglecting personal enjoyment for the sake of civic duty. There are at least these three references to the political affairs of the city in Cicero's *Consolatio*. Again, I defer accounting for the presence of these political references to the next section, on my conclusions from the fragments; for now, it is only important to note that there is a political significance of this fragment.

Vitelli's fragment 18 adds two more insights into the character of Cicero's *Seditio*. First, Marcus explains at *Tusc. IV.29.63* that the “*aegritudinis seditio*” he offered through the course of the conversation featured in *Tusculanae Disputationes* book III also appeared in his *Consolatio*.⁹⁶ This need not mean that there is some exact parallel

⁹⁶ Fragment 18: (Cic. *Tusc. IV.29.63*) “*Est autem utilis ad persuadendum ea quae acciderint ferri et posse et oportere enumeratio eorum qui tulerunt. Etsi aegritudinis seditio et hesternae disputatione explicata est et in Consolationis libro quem in medio—non enim sapientes eramus—maerore et dolore conscripsimus; quodque vetat Chrysippus, ad recentis quasi tumores animi remedium abhibere, id nos fecimus naturaeque vim attulimus, ut magnitudini medicinae doloris magnitudo concederet.*” “But, for persuading the man who suffers that he is able and ought to endure those things which happen by chance, an enumeration of those things is useful. Even if the assuaging of misery was explained in yesterday's disputation and I also wrote about that in my book of *Consolation* in the midst of mourning—for I was no sage—and grief, what

between the contents of each text, only that the general strategy of tempering grief was discussed at length in each place. Beyond this general point, though, a specific does emerge: Cicero attempted his treatment prematurely, according to Chrysippus' advice, which forbids that one "apply a remedy to quite recent wounds of the soul" ("*ad recentis quasi tumores animi remedium adhibere*"). Chrysippus' consolatory practice only became suitable at a precise moment, the "*kairos*," neither too soon nor too late, at which point one's mourning was not so powerful that a consolation would be rejected immediately, and it was not so advanced that a consolation would be superfluous, either because of a permanent collapse of the *consolandus* or recovery. Cicero, though, treated himself quite soon after his daughter's passing, within a month of the event, and so rejected Chrysippus' advice. As he says, "I brought in the strength of nature [*vim naturae*], so that to the greatness of the medicine the greatness of the grief yielded." These retrospective remarks on the effect of Cicero's *Consolatio* must be taken with caution. They cannot establish that Cicero's therapy was effective—only that Marcus, a rather more militant Stoic than Cicero most often seems, remembers that therapy as effective. Of the lost primary text, this fragment suggests that possibly Cicero remarked in the *Consolatio* that, although treatment so soon after his daughter's death was unadvisable, nevertheless the peril of his situation demanded a response. Some such

Chrysippus forbids, applying a remedy to quite recent wounds, we did this and we brought in the strength of nature, so that to the greatness of the medicine the greatness of our grief yielded."

remark would not have been out of place, and very likely could have appeared in Cicero's text. Even if it did not, that Chrysippus' counsel was readily available to Cicero's readership shades Cicero's act of composition, so that his *Consolatio* could have been read as forced prematurely. Cicero was at least working within this horizon of expectations. As with his disavowal of knowledge in Fragment 2, Fragment 18 casts great uncertainty over Cicero's enterprise, so that his *Consolatio* is perhaps not only offered by one afflicted by great moral and intellectual error but also delivered in an untimely manner.

Exemplary figures are presented in Fragments 19-19c and 20-20c, since Vitelli has arranged these fragments according to the same principle that governs his presentation of the fragments of the *Lamentatio*. In Fragment 19, taken from *Tusc.* III.28.69-71, Marcus advances the ignorance of even the best philosophers with a rhetorical question, but observes that their ignorance does not burden them with *aegritudo*: for they recall that they have no "duty" ("*officiosi*") to feel grief.⁹⁷ This follows

⁹⁷ Fragment 19: (Cic. *Tusc.* III.28.69-71). "*Quid? Ex ceteris philosophis nonne optumus et gravissimus quisque confitetur multa se ignorare et multa sibi etiam atque etiam esse discenda? Neque tamen, cum se in media stultitia, qua nihil est peius, haerere intellegant, aegritudine premuntur; nulla enim admiscetur opinio officiosi doloris. Quid qui non putant lugendum viris? Qualis fuit Q. Maximus efferens filium consularem, qualis L. Paulus duobus paucis diebus amissis filiis, qualis M. Cato praetore designato mortuo filio, quales reliqui quos in Consolatione conlegimus. Quid hos aliud placavit nisi quod luctum et maerorem esse non putabant viri?*" "What? Does not each of the best and most serious out of all philosophers admit that he does not know many things and that he has to learn many things over and over again? And, although they understand that they are stuck in the middle of folly, than which nothing is worse, still they are not oppressed with misery; for no thought is confused with an obliged sense of grief. What about those who do not think that it is right for men to mourn? The sort of man Quintus Maximus was, carrying out his consular son to bury him, what sort Lucius Paulus was, a man of two sons bereft within a few days, what sort Marcus Cato was, a man with a son who died having been elected praetor,

Chrysippus' consolation that the living owe no debt of felt loss to the dead, but gives it a different inflection within the epistemology of the skeptical Academy; just as one may wrongly perceive an obligation toward the dead that one must feel grief for them, one may also wrongly feel bitterness at an ignorance that is naturally the lot of mankind. But beyond this, Marcus asks about those who think that mourning is inappropriate in men, and he adduces a couple examples of Romans who rejected mourning. Quintus Maximus, Lucius Paulus, and Marcus Cato all stand as examples of men who sustained great personal loss without failing in their public duties. Marcus, Cicero's persona, mentions that in the *Consolatio* he had gathered similar examples. There is furthermore nothing in his language that indicates these examples themselves did not appear in the *Consolatio*. Fragment 19a adds Pulvillus to the Roman examples, and Pericles and Xenophon from Athenian history.⁹⁸ Fragment 19b seems to be an incomplete list of the *exempla* that

what sort the rest were whom we mentioned in the *Consolation*. What else pleased them, if not that they did not think that grief and mourning were right for a man?"

⁹⁸ Fragment 19a: (Hieron. *Ep.* 60.5). "*Proponunt innumerabiles viros et maxime Periclen et Xenophontem Socraticum, quorum alter amissis duobus filiis coronatus in contione disseruit alter, cum sacrificans filium in bello audisset occisum, deposuisse coronam dicitur et eandem capiti reposuisse, postquam fortiter in acie dimicantem reperit concidisse. Quid memorem Romanos duces, quorum virtutibus quasi quibusdam stellis Latinae micant historiae? Pulvillus Capitolium dedicans mortuum, ut nuntiabatur, subito filium se iussit absente sepeliri; Lucius Paulus septem diebus inter duorum exequias filiorum triumphans urbem ingressus est.*" "They advance innumerable men, and especially Pericles and Xenophon the Socratic, of whom one, having been crowned after his two sons died, spoke in the assembly and the other, since he was sacrificing when he heard that his son died in the war, is said to have removed the crown from his head to to replace the same one there, after he found out that his son had fallen fighting bravely in the line. What about the memory of Roman leaders, with whose virtues Latin histories glitter as with stars? While dedicating the Capitol, Pulvillus, when it was announced that his son had suddenly died, ordered that the son should be buried though Pulvillus himself was absent; and amidst the funerals of his two sons within

Cicero employed, all of which Cicero included in his *Consolatio*: “the Maximi, the Catones, the Galli, the Pisones, the Bruti, the Scaevolae, the Metelli, the Scauri, the Marii, the Crassi, the Marcelli, and the Aufidii.”⁹⁹ Finally, Fragment 19c introduces Quintus Marcius Rex, who “so checked his grief with the loftiness of deliberation, that, coming straightaway from the pyre of the youth he approached the curia and convened the senate, which by law was bound to hold session on that day.”¹⁰⁰ All of these examples act as proof that men ought not to feel grief, that allowing oneself to be burdened by loss suits neither the philosophical temperament of wise men, nor the fortitude of Athenian and Roman political leaders.

seven days Lucius Paulus entered the city triumphing.” See fn. 93 from this chapter above for the argument for including this passage among the fragments of Cicero’s *Consolatio*. For scholarship on this fragment, see Vitelli, *M. Tulli Ciceronis Consolationis Fragmenta*, 46.

⁹⁹ Fragment 19b: (Hieron. *Ep.* 60.5) “*Praetermitto Maximos, Catones, Gallos, Pisones, Brutos, Scaevolae, Metellos, Scauros, Mar[t]ios, Crassos, Marcellos atque Aufidios, quorum non minor in luctu quam in bellis virtus fuit et quorum orbitates in Consolationis libro Tullius explicavit...*” “I pass over the Maximi, the Catones, the Galli, the Pisones, the Bruti, the Scaevolae, the Metelli, the Scauri, the Marii, the Crassi, the Marcelli, and the Aufidii, [all] whose virtue was no less distinguished in mourning than in combat, and whose losses Tully set out in his book of *Consolation...*”

¹⁰⁰ Fragment 19c: (Val. Max. V.10.3) “*Q. Marcius Rex, superioris Catonis in consulatu collega, filium summae pietatis et magnae spei et, quae non parua calamitatis accessio fuit, unicum amisit, cumque se obitu eius subrutum et eversum videret, ita dolorem altitudine consilii coercuit, ut a rogo iuvenis protinus curiam peteret senatumque, quem eo die lege habere oportebat, convocaret.*” “Quintus Marcius Rex, colleague in the consulship of the elder Cato, had a son of the highest loyalty and of great promise and, what was no small attack of misfortune, he lost this singular child, and since he saw that he was undermined and overthrown by his death, he so checked his grief with the loftiness of deliberation, that, coming straightaway from the pyre of the youth he approached the curia and convened the senate, which by law was bound to hold session on that day.” Vitelli marks this fragment as dubious, but on Helm’s authority he includes it among the fragments of the *Consolatio*. R. Helm, “Valerius Maximus, Seneca und die Exemplsammlung,” *Hermes* 74 (1939); Vitelli, *M. Tulli Ciceronis Consolationis Fragmenta*, 47.

Fragments 20-20c are further examples to the same point, taken from Seneca's *Ad Marciam* and *Ad Helviam matrem*.¹⁰¹ Fragment 20 raises the "two Cornelias," as Seneca puts it.¹⁰² Fragment 20a repeats the praise of Cornelia, emphasizing once again these two facets of her persona.¹⁰³ On the one hand, she is the mother of twelve children, ten of whom died according to a simply natural rhythm. On the other, she is the mother of the Gracchi, Tiberius and Gaius, men of great public importance. This other Cornelia's two great sons were denied burial, so that she would have seemed to suffer great disgrace. Her response, boasting, "Never will I say that I am not lucky, I who gave birth to the Gracchi," shows a kind of manly *virtus* displaced onto a woman, who can achieve a kind

¹⁰¹ Vitelli marks all of these fragments taken from Seneca as dubious. By including them among the fragments of the *Consolatio*, he is following Muenzer and Meinel, who both argued that Cicero was Seneca's source. Fr. Meunzer, *Römische Adelsparteien und Adelsfamilien* (Stuttgart 1879): 398ff; Meinel, *Seneca über seine Verbannung*: 201ff.

¹⁰² Fragment 20: (Sen. *Dial.* 6.16.3) "*Ex una tibi familia duas Cornelias dabo: primam Scipionis filiam, Gracchorum matrem. Duodecim illa partus totidem funeribus recognovit. Et de ceteris facile est, quos nec editos nec amissos civitas sensit: Ti. Gracchum et Gaium, quos etiam qui bonos viros negabit magnos fatebitur, et occisos vidit et insepultos. Consolantibus tamen miseramque dicentibus: 'numquam—inquit—non felicem me dicam, quae Gracchos peperit.'*" "From one family I will give two Cornelias to you: the first the daughter of Scipio, mother of the Gracchi. She reviewed twelve births with just as many funerals. And it is a simple matter for the rest, whom the city noticed neither when they were born nor when they died; Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, whom even those who will deny that they were good men will still admit were great, she saw murdered and left unburied. Nevertheless to those consoling her and calling her pitiful, she said, 'Never will I say that I am not lucky, I who gave birth to the Gracchi.'"

¹⁰³ Fragment 20a: (Sen. *Dial.* 12.16.6) "*Corneliam ex duodecim liberis ad duos fortuna redegerat: si numerare funera Corneliae velles, amiserat decem, si aestimare, amiserat Gracchos. Flentibus tamen circa se et fatum eius execrantibus interdixit ne fortunam accusarent, quae sibi filios Gracchos dedisset. Ex hac femina debuit nasci, qui diceret in contione: 'Tu matri meae maledicas, quae me peperit?'*" "Fortune had reduced Cornelia from twelve children to two: if you were eager to count the funerals of Cornelia, she had lost ten, but if to value them, she lost the Gracchi. Still to those weeping around her and to those cursing her fate she forbid that they accuse fortune, which had given the Gracchi to her as sons. From this woman it was he was worthy to be born, who proclaimed in the assembly: 'you curse my mother, who gave birth to me?'"

of public recognition by participating in the glory of male family members.¹⁰⁴ The remaining fragments from Seneca also show this possibility: 20b praises another Cornelia, the wife of Livius Drusus, Seneca praises for her endurance of her son's death, crediting her with the support for the legislation he had advanced;¹⁰⁵ 20c praises Rutilia Cotta, who followed her son into exile, and remained away from Rome, until he was allowed to return.¹⁰⁶ Vitelli's inclusion of these fragments shows that Cicero, and not Seneca, first introduced female *exempla* among the treasury of historical figures outstanding for their suppression of mourning. His doing so can be explained by the extraordinary task he hoped to accomplish in this text: the apotheosis of his daughter. To bring her to that point, Cicero had to associate male political accomplishment with women who had no formal political role within the city. These women that appear in Seneca's texts perform that function for Cicero: through their nurture and support of male political actors, and especially through their confidence in the greatness of their children,

¹⁰⁴ Wilcox has emphasized how in Seneca's consolations women may exemplify male paradigms of virtue, and nevertheless reinforce the gender ideologies that predominated in the early Empire. Wilcox, "Exemplary Grief."

¹⁰⁵ Fragment 20b: (Sen. *Dial.* 6.16.4) "*Cornelia Livii Drusi clarissimum iuvenem inlustris ingenii, vadentem per Gracchana vestigia imperfectis tot rogationibus intra penates interemptum suos, amiserat incerto caedis auctore: tamen et acerbam mortem filii et inultam tam magno animo tulit, quam ipse leges tulerat.*" "Cornelia, the wife of Livius Drusus, had lost a most brilliant son of distinguished ability to an unknown agent of his slaughter, when he was struck down at his own hearth following the Gracchan tracks with so many unfinished proposals. Still, she suffered this bitter and unavenged death of her son with so great a spirit, that it seemed she herself had brought forth his legislation."

¹⁰⁶ Fragment 20c: (Sen. *Dial.* XII 16.7) "*Rutilia Cottam filium secuta est in exilium et usque eo fuit indulgentia constricta ut mallet exilium pati quam desiderium, nec ante in patriam quam cum filio rediit. Eundem iam reducem et in re publica florentem tam fortiter amisit quam secuta est, nec quisquam lacrimas eius post elatum filium notavit.*" "Rutilia followed her son Cotta into exile and her love for him had to so great an extent bound her to him that she preferred to suffer exile rather than longing, nor did she return to her country before her son. The same son now restored and thriving in the republic, she lost him as bravely as she had followed him, nor did anyone observe her tears after her son's burial."

they put aside their female domesticity and acquire something of the greatness of men such as Pericles or Marcus Cato.

This application of these examples supports the direction in which the last fragments take the logic of Cicero's *Consolatio*. Fragments 21-23 return to the immortal soul and its destiny. The first of these, Fragment 21, comes from the *Tusculan Disputations*, in which Marcus quotes himself as having written,

*Animorum nulla in terris origo inveniri potest; nihil enim est in animis mixtum atque concretum aut quod ex terra natum atque fictum esse videatur, nihil ne aut umidum quidem aut flabile aut igneum. His enim in naturis nihil inest, quod vim memoriae mentis cogitationis habeat, quod et praeterita teneat et futura provideat et complecti possit praesentia. Quae sola divina sunt, nec invenietur umquam, unde ad hominem venire possint nisi a deo. Singularis est igitur quaedam natura atque vis animi seiuncta ab his usitatis notisque naturis. Ita quicquid est illud, quod sentit quod sapit quod vivit quod viget, caesleste et divinum ob eamque rem aeternum sit necesse est. Ne vero deus ipse, qui intellegitur a nobis, alio modo intellegi potest nisi mens soluta quaedam et libera, segregata ab omni concretione mortali, omnia sentiens et movens ipsaque praedita motu sempiterno. Hoc e genere atque eadem e natura est humana mens.*¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Fragment 21: (Cic. *Tusc.* I.26.65-27.67) “*Et quidem, si deus aut anima aut ignis est, idem est animus hominis. Nam ut illa natura caelestis et terra vacat et umore, sic utriusque harum rerum humanus animus est expers; sin autem est quinta quaedam natura, ab Aristotele inducta primum, haec et deorum est et animorum. Hanc nos sententiam secuti his ipsis verbis in Consolatione hoc expressimus: ‘Animorum nulla in terris origo inveniri potest; nihil enim est in animis mixtum atque concretum aut quod ex terra natum atque fictum esse videatur, nihil ne aut umidum quidem aut flabile aut igneum. His enim in naturis nihil inest, quod vim memoriae mentis cogitationis habeat, quod et praeterita teneat et futura provideat et complecti possit praesentia. Quae sola divina sunt, nec invenietur umquam, unde ad hominem venire possint nisi a deo. Singularis est igitur quaedam natura atque vis animi seiuncta ab his usitatis notisque naturis. Ita quicquid est illud, quod sentit quod sapit quod vivit quod viget, caesleste et divinum ob eamque rem aeternum sit necesse est. Ne vero deus ipse, qui intellegitur a nobis, alio modo intellegi potest nisi mens soluta quaedam et libera, segregata ab omni concretione mortali, omnia sentiens et movens ipsaque praedita motu sempiterno. Hoc e genere atque eadem e natura est humana mens.’*” “And indeed, if god is either breath or fire, the soul of man is the same. For as that celestial nature is void of earth and moisture, so the human soul is free of each of these things; but if not [fire or breath] it is some fifth nature, as Aristotle first induced, and this is the nature of gods and souls. Following this position I expressed this argument in these words in my *Consolation*: “No origin of souls is able to be discovered on the earth; for in souls there is nothing mixed or concrete or what seems to have been born and made from the earth, nothing

No origin of souls is able to be discovered on the earth; for in souls there is nothing of the mixed or the concrete, nothing of what seems to have been born and made from the earth, nothing even that is wet or airy or fiery. For there is nothing in these natures that possesses memory's power of mental cognition, that considers both past and future and takes forethought and can comprehend the present. All of which are solely divine, nor will it ever be discovered from which source these things can come to a human, if not from god. Therefore some nature and power of the soul is singular, separate from those habitual and well known natures. So whatever that is, that perceives and tastes and lives and flourishes, necessarily it is celestial and divine and on account of that it is eternal. Nor truly can god himself, who is comprehensible to us, be understood in any other way than as a mind somehow boundless and free, separated from all mortal density, sensing and moving all things and itself given to everlasting motion. The human mind is from this origin and from the same nature.

In this quotation, Cicero makes a case for the essential difference between the human mind and the four elements, air, earth, water, and fire, that construct all natural beings.

Memory's power to escape the present toward the past and cognition's capacity to anticipate the future stand apart from all other material beings, so that the mind seems to be "divine," since only divine beings escape the finitude of the present. Cicero's claim that "it will never be discovered from which source [these powers] can come to a human, if not from god" must be understood as a performance of the very claim that he is

even that is wet or airy or fiery. For there is nothing in these natures that possesses memory's power of mental cognition, that considers both past and future and takes forethought and can comprehend the present. All of which are solely divine, nor will it ever be discovered from which place these things can come to a human, if not from god. Therefore some nature and power of the soul is singular, separate from those habitual and well-known natures. So whatever that is, that perceives and tastes and lives and flourishes, necessarily it is celestial and divine and on account of that it is eternal. Nor truly can god himself, who is comprehensible to us, be understood in any other way than as a mind somehow boundless and free, separated from all mortal density, sensing and moving all things and itself given to everlasting motion. The human mind is from this origin and from the same nature."

making. That is, since Cicero possesses in his mind this capacity to anticipate future things, his claim about the future (“*invenietur umquam*”) is founded upon this power that he is currently describing. His cognition, attaining its own comprehension of itself, ascends to a view of all future time, and recognizes about that future time that at no point will its own source be comprehensible as anything other than a divine power. Cicero’s claim thus performs the very truth that it seeks to establish. The inverse of this position is that divinity itself is just as incomprehensible as the mind, but Cicero clarifies both by defining god as this power of mind, “a mind somehow boundless and free, separated from all mortal density, sensing and moving all things and itself given to everlasting motion.” Perhaps it is also not too far a stretch to understand Cicero’s claim about the lasting inscrutability of the mind, even more than as a performance of the mind’s omnipotence, as a short-circuit with the godhead itself. Cicero would then be immediately participating in divinity, insofar as his limited capacity for certainty will allow him to do so. At the limit, this idealism challenges his skepticism, and the two positions may in the final account be incommensurable, so that he either puts forward this claim tentatively with room for skeptical uncertainty toward the absolute truth of this position, or he overcomes his skepticism in the end through thinking and the self-clarification of thinking’s essence. The fragmentary evidence does not allow for a decision between these two possibilities.

In either case, Cicero still advances this Socratic definition of the soul, holding that the soul shares the nature and power of the divine mind, even though it is confined in its power by the limitations of the body. In the *Phaedo*, this portion of divine nature in

which humans participate founds Socrates' argument for the soul's immortality. With Fragment 22, Cicero's discourse turns to an associated position, the fates of good and evil souls after death.¹⁰⁸ Lactantius quotes Cicero's *Consolatio* as evidence for a truth known to both pagan and Christian alike, that the just and the impious have different destinies in the afterlife:

Nec enim omnibus – inquit – idem illi sapientes arbitrati sunt eundem cursum in caelum patere. Nam vitiis et sceleribus contaminatos deprimi in tenebras atque in caeno iacere docuerunt, castos autem animos, puros integros incorruptos, bonis etiam studiis atque artibus expolitos leni quodam et facili lapsu ad deos id est ad naturam similem sui pervolare.

Likewise those sages thought that the same course into heaven did not lie open to all. For they taught that souls polluted by vices and crimes were pushed down into the shadows and lie in their filth, but that spotless souls, pure, untouched, uncorrupted, and refined with good habits [*studiis*] and arts slip away by a certain gentle and easy flight to the gods—that is, to their like nature.

Here Cicero refers to the wisdom of certain “sages” who divide those who are good and those who are evil, setting them on different paths, to the heavens and to the Underworld

¹⁰⁸ Fragment 22: (Lactant. *Div. inst.* III.19.3-6) “*Docent enim divinae litterae non extinguere animas, sed aut pro iustitia praemio affici aut poena pro sceleribus sempiterna. Nec enim fas est aut eum qui sceleratus in vita feliciter fuerit, effugere quod meretur aut eum qui ob iustitiam miserrimus fuerit, sua mercede fraudari. Quod adeo verum est, ut idem Tullius in Consolatione non easdem sedes incolere iustos atque inpios praedicaverit: ‘Nec enim omnibus—inquit—idem illi sapientes arbitrati sunt eundem cursum in caelum patere. Nam vitiis et sceleribus contaminatos deprimi in tenebras atque in caeno iacere docuerunt, castos autem animos, puros integros incorruptos, bonis etiam studiis atque artibus expolitos leni quodam et facili lapsu ad deos id est ad naturam similem sui pervolare’.*” “For divine scriptures teach that spirits are not destroyed, but are delivered either to a reward for their justice or to an everlasting penalty for their crimes. And it is not permissible [*fas*] either for him who in a life of great fortune has committed great wickedness to escape what he deserves, or for him who has been most pitiable on account of his justice to be cheated of his reward. It is then true, as likewise Tully in his *Consolation* foretold that the just and the impious do not inhabit the same seats [after death]: he said, ‘Likewise those sages thought that the same course into heaven did not lie open to all. For they taught that souls polluted by vices and crimes were pushed down into the shadows and lie in their filth, but that spotless souls, pure, untouched, uncorrupted, and refined with good habits [*studiis*] and arts slip away by a certain gentle and easy flight to the gods—that is, to their like nature.’”

respectively. According to the physics that Scipio presented in the sixth book of the *De Republica*, the soul and the living god of the cosmos are made of the lightest substance, even lighter than fire, so that the even the most divine of the heavenly bodies are weighed down more by their substance than the divine soul. The earth, by contrast, is located at the center of the cosmos, and weighs more heavily than all other substances, so that the center of the earth is also the greatest point of density in the whole ordered world. This passage reflects the same cosmology, so that “souls polluted by vices and crimes” become denser, and sink into the earth, clinging more to the lowest element, and “spotless souls...refined with good *studia* and *artes*” ascend as they grow lighter. Again, the source of this cosmology is Plato, a variation of the same ethico-physical world picture that I described in connection with Fragment 2 above.

Taking fragments 21 and 22 together, a picture emerges where the souls of the good ascend to the heavens according to their adoption of a more and more intellectual nature. As Cicero explains it, the “souls refined with good *studia* and *artes*” become lighter as they become more intellectual, so that in his cosmological picture, the wise are so refined that they are quite literally weightless, unoppressed by any material restraints, or, if material, then at least reduced to some fifth element that has eternal and supreme power over the other four elements and their combinations. It is with this perspective in

mind that one must understand the very last fragment, also from Lactantius.¹⁰⁹ Here the Christian apologist praises Cicero as a “*philosophus*” and the only competent “*Platonis imitator*.” Lactantius goes on to explain that “in that book in which [Cicero] consoled himself on the death of his daughter, he did not hesitate to say that the people who tend to the public good were gods.” There is nothing outstanding or surprising in this position, but where Cicero goes with it does present an important difference from other arguments for the divinity of public leaders. Emphasizing the high social position of Cicero as not only an esteemed philosopher but also as the holder of the augural priesthood, Lactantius

¹⁰⁹ Fragment 23: (Lactant. *Div. inst.* I.15.16-20) “*M. Tullius qui non tantum perfectus orator, sed etiam philosophus fuit, siquidem solus extitit Platonis imitator, in eo libro quo se ipse de morte filiae consolatus est, non dubitavit dicere deos qui publice colerentur homines fuisse. Quod ipsius testimonium eo debet gravissimum iudicari, quod et augurale habuit sacerdotium et eosdem se colere venerarique testatur. Itaque intra paucos versiculos duas res nobis dedit. Nam dum imaginem filiae eodem se modo consecraturum esse profitetur quo illi a veteribus sint consecrati, et illos mortuos esse docuit et originem vanae superstitionis ostendit. ‘Cum vero—inquit—et mares et feminas compluris ex hominibus in deorum numero esse videamus et eorum in urbibus atque agris augustissima delubra veneremur, adsentiamur eorum sapientiae quorum ingeniis et inventis omnem vitam legibus et institutis exultam constitutamque habemus. Quod si ullum umquam animal consecrandum fuit, illud profecto fuit. Si Cadmi progenies aut Amphionis aut Tyndari in caelum tollenda fama fuit, huic idem honos certe dicandus est. Quod quidem faciam teque omnium optimam doctissimam adprobantibus dis immortalibus ipsis in eorum coetu locatam ad opinionem omnium mortalium consecrabo’.*” “Marcus Tullius, who was not only an accomplished orator, but also a philosopher, if indeed he stood preeminent as the only imitator of Plato, in that book in which he himself consoled himself on the death of his daughter, he did not hesitate to say that the people who were tending to the public good were gods. His testimony in this ought to be judged most serious, because he held the augural priesthood and he testifies that he worships and venerates the same gods. And so within a few short lines he has given two positions to us. For while he proclaims that he will consecrate the image [*imaginem*] of his daughter in the same manner in which they were consecrated by the ancients, and he has taught that they are dead and shows the source of a hopeless superstition: he says, ‘Since we see that males and females from many men are among the rank of the gods and we venerate their most august shrines in cities and in the country, let us agree upon the wisdom of those by whose intellects and discoveries we have established our whole way of life and developed it with laws and institutions. But if any living thing ever deserved to be consecrated, that one indeed was the one. If the progeny of Cadmus or Amphion or Tyndareus was to be raised to heaven for their fame, to this one likewise honor is to be devoted. I will do this and I will consecrate you to the approving immortal gods themselves as the best and most skillful of all, set in the company of them in the opinion of all mortals.’”

attempts to show the divinities of Cicero's non-Christian cult as false gods, as nothing more than a lingering superstition. But in doing so he communicates that Cicero had tried to have an "*imago*" of his daughter, that is, a cult statue of her, consecrated "in the manner in which [such images] had been consecrated by the ancients." Lactantius then quotes Cicero's *Consolatio* as confirmation that Cicero pursued this divine honor for his recently deceased daughter:

Cum vero...et mares et feminas compluris ex hominibus in deorum numero esse videamus et eorum in urbibus atque agris augustissima delubra veneremur, adsentiamur eorum sapientiae quorum ingenii et inventis omnem vitam legibus et institutis excultam constitutamque habemus. Quod si ullum umquam animal consecrandum fuit, illud profecto fuit. Si Cadmi progenies aut Amphionis aut Tyndari in caelum tollenda fama fuit, huic idem honos certe dicandus est. Quod quidem faciam teque omnium optimam doctissimam adprobantibus dis immortalibus ipsis in eorum coetu locatam ad opinionem omnium mortalium consecrabo.

Since we see that males and females from many peoples are among the rank of the gods and we venerate their most august shrines in cities and in the country, let us agree upon the wisdom of those by whose intellects and discoveries we have established our whole way of life and developed it with laws and institutions. But if any living thing ever deserved to be consecrated, that one indeed was the one. If the progeny of Cadmus or Amphion or Tyndareus was to be raised to heaven for their fame, to this one likewise honor is to be devoted. I will do this and I will consecrate you to the approving immortal gods themselves as the best and most skillful of all, set in the company of them in the opinion of all mortals.

Between Lactantius' prefatory remarks to this fragment and what Cicero says in these sentences, it is clear that Cicero consoled himself in his *Consolatio* with the thought that his daughter would be consecrated as a divine being. He begins by observing the custom according to which "men and women" are considered to be "among the rank of the gods," and that attendant to this custom shrines are established "in cities and in the country."

The fragment does not make clear why such an honor would be appropriate for his daughter, but merely asserts here that “if any living thing ever deserved to be consecrated, that one indeed was the one,” as if such a proposition were obviously true. Even the profound melancholy of Cicero’s temperament at that time cannot have made such extravagant claims on behalf of his daughter with no justification. The last sentence does provide some help in recovering his position. As Baltussen has said, Tullia is praised there as “*optima*” and “*doctissima*,” although this does not explain Cicero’s claim that she above all deserves sacred honors reserved for “those who tend to the public good,” this does at least have the merit of relating Tullia’s character to the intellectualism that Fragments 21 and 22 define as Cicero’s theology in the *Consolatio*.¹¹⁰ Her soul would then have been refined and lightened by the *studia* that made her *docta*. This much one may see in the connection between these last three fragments. But there is still the question of Tullia’s public service: while Cornelia’s public persona or Rutilia’s at least have a connection to the impressive careers of their sons, Tullia’s children were far too young to accomplish anything that would comparably make a case for their mother’s greatness. The second to last sentence suggests that the solution to this problem should be sought in the other direction: looking to Tullia’s father. For there Cicero claims for Tullia “the same honor” that “elevated to the heavens” the fame of “*Cadmi progenies aut Amphionis aut Tyndari*,” “the descendants of Cadmus, Amphion, or Tyndareus.” These

¹¹⁰ Baltussen, “Cicero’s *Consolatio ad se*,” 67-92.

“*progenies*” to whom Cicero elliptically makes reference are perhaps Semele, Chloris, and either the Dioskouroi or Helen, all of whom were mortals who through the winding narratives of myth found their way to an immortal destiny as gods or goddesses.¹¹¹ This is precisely what Cicero had in mind for Tullia. That he refers to these figures through their fathers, though, emphasizes the patrilineal connection of each divinized figure. This nuance suggests that he had done the same for Tullia. Few Romans had more esteemed political careers than he did, so Cicero could perhaps, he must have thought, justify his daughter’s divine honors by referring to her private support that enabled his public accomplishments.

The *Sedatio* fragments then support the following summary of Cicero’s consolatory discourse proper, the voice that treated Cicero’s grief as expressed in the *Lamentatio* fragments. First, Cicero chose freely from among the various philosophical schools, taking whatever seemed good from any of their arguments (fragment 16). Second, he seems to have allowed himself premature treatment (18), therefore putting the force of his *Consolatio* in doubt, just as his ignorance and error had done so in the *Prooemium* fragments. Third, a contrast between kings and plebs with respect to tolerance for their grief connects Cicero’s discourse to political relations (17), and

¹¹¹ Cf. *Tusc.* I.12.28, where Marcus is going over the authority of past tradition that elevates humans to immortality. He mentions not only Romulus, who as founder of the *patria* earned an ascent to the heavens, but also Hercules, “Liber born of Semele,” the sons of Tyndareus (Castor and Pollux, the Dioscuri), and Ino, the daughter of Cadmus. On the deification of each of these figures, see Gantz, *Early Greek Myth: A Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources*, I: 184-85 (on Amphion), 467-73 (on Cadmus), and 564-66 (Tyndareus).

exempla are invoked to demonstrate both the power of resolve over the negative affects associated with loss and the importance of political duty; importantly, this therapy includes male (19-19c) and female examples (20-20c), so that Cicero may transfer the political successes to the domestic space, where women tied to great men may share in the glory of those men. Fourth, this representation of female examples of fortitude worthy of admiration and adequate to the challenges of political obligation opens the way for the divinization of Tullia that Cicero's text aims to achieve, just as the description of the immaterial or material substance of the divine mind (21) and the fates of souls do (fragment 22). Taken together, these fragments suggest that the main theme of Cicero's therapy for himself was the cosmic award that the gods have attached to political service. Those such as Cicero who have served the *civitas* with dignity may hope to be divinized for their action, especially if they have made efforts to refine their habits through study and erudition, intellectual habits that mankind shares with divine being, as it is described in fragment 21. Cicero seems to have taken the greatest consolation from the idea that his daughter would be divinized for her good habits and her support for his political action. The final fragment reads less as a kind of alternative memorialization for Tullia, as Baltussen as suggested, and more as a vow that Cicero will deliver on a promise to honor her divine spirit as befits its good nature.

5.6.4. Findings from the Fragments of the Consolation

Reflecting on the previous three sections, it is necessary to draw some conclusions on the *Consolatio* taken as a whole. I have claimed that the Socratic suturing of the discourse of truth to the care of the self governs the self-writing that Cicero advances in this work. Cicero has substituted for the Roman epistolary practice of consolation the philosophical ethics that he discovered in Plato's writings. The letters that his friends sent to him relied upon a complex system of civic and domestic duties, in which each participating member of the governing elite owed it to one another to act in such a way that the network of duties would persist. In the wake of Caesar's newly established dictatorship, though, Cicero found himself unable to participate in political life and without consolation in his *domus*, so that the old system of related duties became irrelevant in these new circumstances. He turned at that time to his studies and discovered the therapy that philosophy had to offer. The texts of the Greek consolatory tradition provided a different perspective, in that they illustrated how a philosophical art of consolation would work, but nothing like the self-consolation that Cicero would attempt was to be found among the writings of his predecessors. By applying this discourse of truth to his own practice of taking care of himself in his own self-consolation, Cicero composed the first consolation that proceeded as a mode of self-writing.

Just as the care of the self and the discourse of truth are two conditions supporting Cicero's writing, the internal principles governing the unfolding of his text are also two: Crantor's oppositional *metriopatheia* and the skepticism of the New Academy. As I

discussed above, the former of these two, *metriopatheia*, is supported by the latter, skepticism. Since Cicero does not know whether he is in error now, as he attempts to console his mourning with philosophical argument, or he has been in error formerly, when he contended with Fortuna as a mere mortal should not be so proud to do, *metriopatheia* is a safe middle of the road for his strategy of self-consolation. By not allowing himself to give way entirely to the negative affects that characterize his mourning and by not demanding of himself that he experience a godlike or else bestial supremacy over all the passions, Cicero can strike a balance that acknowledges both the power and the weakness of both his knowledge and his spirit.

These two principles govern two orders of discourse that unfold in Cicero's text. One is lamentation of the evils of life, and the other is therapeutic sedation of the pain these evils cause. The fragments show that both of these orders have their origins in Platonic and Academic thought, broadly conceived, just as the two principles of his discourse do. For, just as Cicero derived his *metriopatheia* from Crantor, the last important figure of the old Academy, and his skepticism from the New Academy (and Philo of Larissa in particular), so too do his arguments in the *Consolatio* depend mostly upon Platonism, and more specifically upon Plato's *Phaedo*. For his lamentation ultimately strives to establish that death is really life and life is really death. The sedation, for its part, works to check the pessimism of the lamentation by showing that duty obliges one's participation in political life, insofar as the practice of virtue, and especially practices of intellectual virtue employed for political ends, are the best path by which one

may assimilate himself to god, and therefore ensure an escape from the agonizing cycles of rebirth, life, and death. This mitigates the suicidal drives to which the Silenic wisdom of the lamentation appeals, since such drastic action would not in fact lead to a release from evils, but rather only to their repetition. Settling the negative affects leads most naturally toward duty, then, and it is in this direction that Cicero addresses the advice that he received from Sulpicius Rufus and others: while duty in no way binds him to service of the republic now—for there is no republic to serve—it does still bind him to intellectual virtue, and in that he may hope to find an escape from the misery of existence. So when Cicero writes to Atticus that he at least seems to strive for consolation in his writings, he means what he says: in intellectual excellence Cicero seems to have sought an answer to his grief.

But it is clear that above all Tullia's immortality was the principle consolation from Cicero's point of view. From the analysis of the fragments of Cicero's *Consolatio*, it has become clear that the composition was undertaken not only to present a metaphysical picture with which Cicero could console himself, but also to announce through that picture Cicero's planned deification of his daughter Tullia. This deification was to be both promoted as a notion through the publication of his *Consolatio*, and supported with the act of dedicating a shrine to her.¹¹² The text of the *Consolatio* remained incomplete,

¹¹² That he speaks of his monument often with an alternative diction of consolation—"levaris" at *Att.* 12.37, "levari" in 12.41.3, "levamento" in 12.43.2—shows the deep parallelism between the words of the *Consolatio* and the cult act he had planned. The monument is also contrasted with writing by this word, for

therefore, without a complementary act that would fill out its meaning.¹¹³ What came of these plans for Tullia’s “apotheosis,” as he calls it in two letters to Atticus,¹¹⁴ can be gathered from the letters to Atticus through the spring and summer of 45 BCE.¹¹⁵ Having tried everything, he says, the *Consolatio* only provided a temporary relief, which therapy Cicero now rejects, for the monument he intends to have built.¹¹⁶ It was to be the ultimate consolation, after which he could establish himself in a fixed mode of life as a kind of

example, at 12.18.1 or at 12.38.1, where Cicero says, “*at ego hic scribendo dies totos nihil equidem levor, sed tamen aberro.*”

Similarly, at 12.41.2, he requests that Atticus “redirect all his efforts at consolation toward this one thing” (“*omnis tuas consolationes unam hanc in rem velim conferas*”)—securing a suburban estate for Tullia’s shrine.

¹¹³ The correspondence with Atticus first makes reference to this planned “shrine” (“*fanum*”) on March 11, 45 BCE (*Att.* 12.18.1), just a few days after he had first mentioned the composition of the *Consolatio*. This fact contradicts Baltussen, who seems to regard the *Consolatio* as Cicero’s alternative to the *fanum*. The timeline would have to place the *Consolatio* after the last mention of the *fanum*, in order for his thesis to make sense. As it is, either Cicero completed the *Consolatio* before developing on his plans for the *fanum*, or he worked on the *Consolatio* as he started making plans for the *fanum*. In neither case can the *Consolatio* be reasonably understood as a fallback, to which Cicero turned once his plans for the *fanum* came to nothing.

¹¹⁴ *Att.* 12.12, 12.36.1.

¹¹⁵ Cicero, at that time having parted from Atticus and taken up residence at Astura since March 6, writes to Atticus to remind him of this request for help with securing a property for his planned sanctuary (*Att.* 12.18). In this letter, he echoes the language of the *Consolatio*, emphasizing that Cicero plans to “consecrate her [Tullia] with every kind of memorial supplied by the genius of all the Greeks and Romans” (“*...profecto illam consecrabo omni genere monimentorum ab omnium ingeniis sumptorum et Graecorum et Latinorum.*” *Att.* 12.18.1). He explains that he is obligated “*voto quodam et promisso,*” “by a vow and promise,” to accomplish this dedication for his daughter. See also 12.38a for a reiteration of this felt obligation.

This shows that the shrine had been planned at least as a concept even before the writing of this letter. The single-mindedness of his pursuit of this plan over the next few months, though, show that the plan was far from complete. He had not selected even a location, let alone a design, at this point. At *Att.* 12.18.1, he is contemplating several authors’ recommended designs for the structure, and expresses his preference for Cluadius’ model.

¹¹⁶ “*habeo enim nihil temptatis rebus omnibus in quo acquiescam. nam dum illud tractabam de quo ad to ante scripsi, quasi fovebam dolores meos; nunc omnia respuo...*” *Att.* 12.18.

cohabitant of his daughter's spirit at the property on which he was to build her shrine.¹¹⁷

As it turned out, Cicero never did accomplish this grandiose plan, and so the promise made at the end of the *Consolatio* was left unfulfilled.

5.7. Conclusion: Political Theology and Perpetual Mourning; toward a reading of the Tusculans

That the *Consolatio* strove to establish Tullia's deification shows, once again, the importance of political theology to the Roman philosophical consolatory texts. Just as Boethius had two divine women, Philosophia and Fortuna, struggling over him in the *De consolatione Philosophiae*, and just as Seneca pitted Claudius against Fortuna as her master and opponent, so does Cicero show Tullia to be a goddess worthy as an ally in his own struggle against Fortuna. When read with fragments 21-23, fragments 3 and 9 establish the primary fantasy of this text as a contest between Cicero and Fortuna, who rules over the affairs of this burning world of material elements consuming one another ("incendium Fortunae," fragment 9), over the happiness attainable through domestic tranquillity and political action. Cicero's failure in both areas, but especially in his home, show that Fortuna holds sway over this life, proving that this life is not better than the exposure to divine violence for those who "are cast forth so denuded and bare..." (fragment 8). But the discovery of another goddess, a sacred, sovereign power, could

¹¹⁷ Bailey describes the character of this planned retreat in his appendix dedicated to the *fanum*. Shackleton Bailey, ed. *Cicero's Letters to Atticus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966): 404-13. See also Pierre Boyancé, "L'Apothéose de Tullia," *Revue des Études Anciennes* XLVI (1944).

protect Cicero's exposed, bare life and give him security for his last years. In this way, his very defeat by Fortuna becomes the opportunity to acquire security from Fortuna's violence.

This is why Cicero must establish a cult to Tullia; she is his best hope for some respite from his contest with Fortuna. The metaphysics of Cicero's text, then, provide the scaffolding by which her divinity would be defensible.¹¹⁸ All would be hopeless, if it were not for the metaphysical picture, derived from Platonic sources, in which life reveals itself to be death in actuality, and death is the beginning of one's true life. In Cicero's corpus, this truth had been first announced by none other than the great Scipio Africanus (*De Republica* 6.16), perhaps the most outstanding of Rome's saviors through the long struggle for empire in the republican period of their history. In that text, the figure revealing this truth and the figure having ascended to divine status are one and the same. In the *Consolatio*, however, it is Cicero—at this point no insignificant figure in Roman history, he who exposed the Catilinarian conspiracy and, beyond that, whom the Senate dubbed *parens* or *pater patriae*—who announces that life is actually death, that death is the true life (fragment 5), but it is his daughter who ascends to divine status. His theology in this text is furthermore comparable to that presented in the *Somnium Scipionis*: those who use their *studium* and their intellectual discipline above all may arrive at an immortal destiny, in which they ascend to share the heavens with the gods, by

¹¹⁸ Boyancé arrives at the same conclusion in his short statement on Tullia's monument. Boyancé, "L'Apothéose de Tullia," 184.

using their excellence for the sake of saving the Republic. This deification therefore depends upon duty to the *res publica* having been adequately performed, and examples are adduced to show how Tullia's private support for Cicero's political action situate her in the role of guardian of the Republic.¹¹⁹

But more basically that ascent to the divine rests upon the fundamental reversal that Cicero's lamentation tries to effect: death is the true life. The evidence for the truth of this picture is in fact the insufficiency of life itself, the suffering it entails, as described in fragments 6, 8, 8a, and 10. It is as if the vacuity of human life, its wretchedness, shows that life must be a punishment, so that there must be a higher agency that imposes this punishment. It is this judgment on life that stands at the source of the reversal that Cicero's text, as all the consolations I am investigating, effects with respect to life: the judgment that human life is misery reverses the poles on life and death, so that an excess of life, another life, is exposed to thought. With this short-circuit between the faculty of judgment and the excess of life over and above natural life, Cicero links a fifth element, greater even than fire, that stands in as the "special stuff," a material bearer of life's excess over merely human life.¹²⁰ As fragment 21 shows, this surplus element that goes beyond the other four elements and rules over them is the mind or the soul, which, as its unmatched powers prove, must be the indestructible essence of the god's power as well.

¹¹⁹ There is also a connection to the consolatory epistles here, which, as I argued in the section on Musonius Rufus' letter to Cicero, emphasized duty as the primary cause for consolation's delivery and its acceptance.

¹²⁰ Eric L. Santner, *The Royal Remains: The People's Two Bodies and the Endgames of Sovereignty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011): 96.

Cicero is therefore led to conclude that “god himself”—though incomprehensible to human intelligence—must be a vast and limitless mind unfettered by contact with the other four elements. These three things, eternal life, judgment, and divine nature, combine to form an apparatus, a point of negativity which coordinates the cooperation of heterogeneous elements, in Cicero’s *Consolatio*. The name of this apparatus, in Agamben’s thought, is sacred life. It is as if by one grand gesture Cicero hoped to provide both domestic and public consolations for himself, or even more to find a consolation that resolved these two poles into one higher and complete consolatory act.

Cicero’s dedication for Tullia never came to closure in that final act of dedication, by which her spirit would be acknowledged with his promised monument. What comes of this metaphysical picture, then, which Cicero endorsed in the *Consolatio*, since the monument never came to be? Is such a failed apotheosis simply forgotten, or does it entail a void and a spectral presence haunting that incompleteness? Two letters from the period following the composition of Cicero’s *Consolatio* speak to this question. In 12.46 Cicero announces his decision to return to Tusculum, where Tullia had passed away, and to which place he had not returned since he left for Atticus’ suburban villa immediately following her death. He says at that point that he may as well return now since his pain will be no different in ten years time, “For the grief will remain the same, only better hidden” (“*nam dolor idem manebit, tantum modo oc<cul>tius*” 12.46.1). He goes on to anticipate a question Atticus could ask. Does writing do no good (“*quid ergo...nihil*

litterae”)? Indeed, it makes matters worse,¹²¹ he complains, “in a cultivated spirit” – and he means “cultivated” by literature and philosophy – “there is nothing coarse or lacking in sensitivity,” “*exculto enim in animo nihil agreste, nihil inhumanum est.*” His grief is therefore immune to the passing of time, and his literary efforts actually serve to sharpen the pain felt in grief. Likewise, as a letter from two days later reveals, his pain is unchanged by his relocation: “For...these miseries were more unbearable (ἀνεκτότερα) at Astura and those things which gall me do not torture me more here; even still, wherever I am, those miseries are with me” (“...*Nam...ἀνεκτότερα erant Asturae nec haec quae refricant <non> hic me magis angunt; etsi tamen, ubicumque sum, illa sunt mecum.*” *Att.* 12.45). This testimony, together with Cicero’s professed belief that a monument would serve as the only suitable consolation,¹²² shows that the his incapacity to accomplish the cult act he had planned on behalf of Tullia’s divine nature leaves a void that cannot be filled by writing. His grief persists in this void, regardless of the passing of time and movement between places. He suggests to Atticus at one point that, after completing the monument, he could perhaps return to his normal habits. It is as if a certain excess of sacred life haunted Cicero as long as he failed to keep his vow to Tullia. But that path proved impassible through the months following Tullia’s death, as if Tullia’s deification was unthinkable to Cicero’s Roman peers because of her improper *gens* – it would take so dignified as name as the *Julii* had to make deification an

¹²¹ “*In hac quidem re vereor ne etiam contra; nam essem fortasse durior.*”

¹²² *Att.* 12.41, 12.42.3, 12.43.

acceptable reality at Rome—and her improper body—it would furthermore take a man and not a woman. Cicero would have to find another way.¹²³

By July 9, 45, to which date *Att.* 13.33a is perhaps dated, it had become painfully obvious to Cicero that even his most dedicated supporters would not support his bold plans for Tullia's deification.¹²⁴ As it happens, this letter, the last in which the *fanum* is mentioned, is also the first letter that Cicero wrote after his return to Tusculum. It should not be forgotten that Tullia passed away at Cicero's Tusculan villa, and that Atticus had suggested Tusculum as a location at which the *fanum* could be constructed.¹²⁵ Through the course of this stay, Cicero would compose the *Tusculan Disputations*, which philosophical text returns to the problem of the philosophical management of the affects in general, giving special attention to the grief in the third book.¹²⁶ It is unsurprising, then,

¹²³ One may gather from the correspondence that Cicero's excessive grief was strongly disapproved of among his colleagues, and frequent requests that Atticus indulge Cicero's folly indicate that the plan for the *fanum* was similarly met with disapproval. See *Att.* 12.38a and 12.40 for Cicero's response to popular disapproval of his excessive grief, and, e.g., 12.41.2-3 for one of Cicero's many requests for indulgence on Atticus' part. There he even manages to blend a somewhat ridiculous threat with his request.

¹²⁴ Shackleton Bailey dates this letter approximately, suggesting July 9, 45 BCE, but more important for my purposes is that it is the first letter that Cicero sent from Tusculum, after having returned there a second time since Tullia had died.

¹²⁵ Cicero seems to have been at least content with this possibility, if a suburban *hortus* in Rome could not be secured. See *Att.* 12.37.2.

¹²⁶ Though the first book seems to have been drafted as early as May (*Att.* 15.2.4), most scholars agree that the rest of the text was completed through July and August. Gildenhard reviews the dates of composition, as well as the dramatic dates of this work in Ingo Gildenhard, *Paideia Romana: Cicero's Tusculan Disputations* (Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society, 2007): 279-81.

As Erskine has observed, the *Tusculans* situate Marcus' account of *aegritudo* within a more comprehensive account of the significance of all the passions within the ethical life, but also, in a manner entirely different from the Stoic sources upon whom he depends, privileges *aegritudo* within that more comprehensive account as different and more important than the other passions. Andrew Erskine, "Cicero and the expression of grief," in *The Passions in Roman Thought and Literature*, ed. Susanna Morton Braund and

that once Cicero had to abandon his plans for a monument acknowledging Tullia's divinity, he also had to abandon the *Consolatio*'s philosophical program as inadequate. Thus the writing of another philosophical text, the *Tusculans*, in which dying and the philosophical response to death were the focus became necessary, just as they had been in the *Consolatio*. It will not be possible in this space to provide a reading of the *Tusculans*, but in the context of Cicero's mourning, it cannot go unmentioned, simply because in a certain sense the *Tusculans* stage a return to Cicero's *Consolatio*. It was death, the death of a beloved daughter, that demanded the response of self-consolation in the *Consolatio*. In much the same way, the *Tusculans* frame the fear of death as the ultimate obstacle to the philosophical mode of life. As long as one fears death, one cannot be a philosopher; having overcome death, one may assume philosophy as the very "rule...and art...of one's life" ("*ratio...ars...vitae*," *Tusc.* II.4.12).¹²⁷ In this programmatic work, Cicero tried to bring not just philosophical literature but even the very practice of philosophical schools into his *domus* (I.2.5, 3.7, and 4.8). The *Tusculans* may therefore be read as an attempt to deal with issues raised in the *Consolatio* in a more complete and more philosophical

Christopher Gill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). See also William Stull, "Reading the *Phaedo* in *Tusculan Disputations* 1," *Classical Philology* 107, no. 1 (January 2012).

¹²⁷ Bernard Koch, for example, has argued that the *Tusculans* have a protreptic function, introducing the reader to an art of healing the soul that begins from conquering the fear of dying. Bernhard Koch, *Philosophie als Medizin für die Seele: Untersuchungen zu Ciceros Tusculanae Disputationes* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2006): 61-81. Lefèvre emphasizes the Platonic orientation of Book 1, against the Stoic orientation of the remaining books Eckard Lefèvre, *Philosophie unter der Tyrannis: Ciceros Tusculanae Disputationes*, vol. 46, *Schriften der Philosophisch-Historischen Klasse der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2008): 29-57.

manner, so that he and his readers would come at grief through a method more agreeable to all of them. How far different that account of grief, death, and consolation was from the *Consolatio* he had composed just months before he began this work may be measured by two points of comparison. In the *Consolatio*, a tomb for his daughter was the point of culmination for his entire argument; the body and graves are unworthy of philosophers' concern in the *Tusculans*, so that only custom and nothing more must be followed (I.44.105-I.45.109). Tullia's monument would on this account be grossly overwrought. Furthermore, in the *Consolatio*, he had also accepted the soul's immortality as the security that his daughter would become a goddess; in the *Tusculans*, on the contrary, the soul's immortality cannot be proved rationally, but Cicero finds himself convinced by no more than the authority of Plato's writing (*Tusc.* I.21.49), so much so that Marcus and A. would prefer Plato's error to the truth (I.17.40). I turn in my conclusion to that writing in which Plato communicates that most enduring error.

Conclusion

“Provisoirement, à titre d’hypothèse, nous allons considérer que celle-ci constitue, au niveau d’une aventure sinon psychologique, du moins individuelle, l’effet d’un deuil que l’on peut bien dire immortel puisqu’il est à la source même de tout ce qui s’est articulé depuis, dans notre tradition, sur l’idée d’immortalité — du deuil immortel de celui qui incarna cette gageure de soutenir sa question, qui n’est que la question de tout un qui parle, au point où lui la recevait, cette question, de son propre démon, selon notre formule, sous une forme inversée. J’ai nommé Socrate — Socrate ainsi mis à l’origine, disons-le tout de suite, du plus long transfert, ce qui donnerait à cette formule tout son poids, qu’ait connu l’histoire.

“J’entends vous le faire sentir — le secret de Socrate sera derrière tout ce que nous dirons cette année du transfert.”¹

Cicero’s *Consolatio*, Seneca’s *Ad Polybium de consolatione*, and Boethius’ *De consolatione Philosophiae*, when taken together, constitute a tradition of self-consolation within the history of Latin philosophical literature. Cicero’s introduction of a consolatory essay in which he addressed arguments that would ostensibly calm his own excessive grieving for his daughter Tullia established a paradigm to which both Seneca and Boethius’ consolations refer. Seneca’s complicated attempt to fuse self-consolation into the more traditional consolation addressed to another provides a second model for Boethius. Boethius pushes Cicero’s and Seneca’s consolatory practices even further, insofar as he situates his own authorial voice and persona as the *consolandus* rather than the *consolator*, so that he receives a consolation from his invented interlocutor, and then he gradually reveals that this interlocutor is in fact recognizable as one aspect of his own

¹ Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire livre VIII: Le transfert* (Paris: Seuil, 1991): 16. My thanks to Professor Micaela Janan for suggesting this quotation as an epigraph for this dissertation.

self. This is the minimal and modest achievement of this research: that it advances previous attempts at understanding these texts and the consolatory practice of ancient philosophers more generally by identifying the development of a problematic self-consolation.

Beyond this, though, the self-consolations demonstrate conflicting allegiances in the philosophical authors who constitute this tradition. Their writings point beyond the self's withdrawal into the self, toward the world outside the inner citadel, so that these works reflect the political circumstances that condition the situations of their literary activity. This dissertation has shown, then, that the Roman authors of these self-consolations developed this mode of self-writing in response to the increasing importance of sovereign power in Roman political life. Cicero had at least been aware that, with the clear separation of public and private spaces during the Republic, the consolation had once operated as a private mode of discourse at Rome. By the time he composed his *Consolatio*, though, these Republican practices no longer seemed meaningful to him, because Caesar's dictatorship had displaced the public space that provided for the security of domestic comfort. The two spaces became confused, and the mourning proper to each—regret that the Republic had been lost and grief at his daughter's death—consequently became more complicated. Cicero turned to his *Consolatio* in answer to the dissolution of both spaces, establishing his daughter as a sovereign power at least as capable of providing security for him as Cicero had once been capable of providing security to the threatened Roman *res publica*. Seneca's consolations cluster around the

beginning of Claudius' principate, at a point when the domestic space of the *princeps* had become the center of public concern. By positing Claudius as the most likely source of consolation in his own self-consolatory letter to Polybius, Seneca situated himself as the bare life exposed to sovereign authority, either to be saved or to be destroyed by that authority. Boethius, finally, constructs a complex and philosophically sophisticated counter-empire within which the god revealed by Philosophia holds a position analogous to that of Theoderic, the Ostrogothic king, but with the important differences that Philosophia's god seems to possess a legitimacy and justice, at least on Philosophia's account, that distinguish him from Theoderic. In each case, these Roman authors used this mode of self-writing in order to situate the philosophical rejection of politics *within* Roman political life, insofar as this had been both preserved and transformed by the Caesars into a struggle between sovereign power and bare life. The story of the Latin literary self-consolations is thus the story of the philosopher in politics, two terms that cannot support one another, but nevertheless remain joined in a world where the two are opposed but inextricably linked.

These antagonistic allegiances are negotiated through the literary form of the consolations. The analyses indicate that self-consolation, consolation that passes from the self back to the self, proceeds more as a literary mode than a strictly philosophical mode of discourse. Because the self-consolers must meet two contradictory conditions, both possessing the self-sufficiency and self-mastery inherent to any felicitous consolatory performance and at the same time lacking those qualities so that consolation becomes

necessary, the text of each self-consolation is above all a literary performance, featuring philosophical argument as another literary device alongside metaphor, prosopopoeia, and poetic artistry. The self-consolation is therefore not entirely convincing as a mode of philosophical argumentation—none of the texts prove beyond all doubt that grief and mourning should be rejected. This is proven by the need in each case for some action supplementary to the text itself. Where Cicero required cult action that would have acknowledged the divine status of his daughter in order to fill out the meaning of his *Consolatio*, Seneca seems to have demanded in the end a recall from his exile, and Boethius, finally, for his self-consolation to succeed needed to come to the point that, when at last he would have been executed for his alleged crimes, he would have faced his death fearlessly and to have someone, even an inaccessible and remote divine being, act as witness to his virtue. All of these actions indicate that the philosophical consolatory arguments on their own cannot carry the authority to prove that grief and mourning are beneath human dignity.

This leaves a question with respect to philosophical consolation, though. Why was consolatory argumentation inadequate, why is the philosophical consolation not more convincing than it is? Could self-consolation not have worked in spite of the ethical inadequacy of those individuals taking up the arguments for themselves, if the arguments in the writings they encountered had been sufficiently convincing? What in the original formation of a mode of philosophical consolatory discourse renders the consolation ultimately ineffective for these Roman authors? A passage from Cicero's *Tusculan*

Disputations reveals an important point about the original configuration of self-consolation, and its connection to the very beginnings of philosophical consolatory practice. As Marcus and the persona identified as “A.” debate the merits of various views on the immortality of the soul, Cicero seems to suggest that he read Plato’s *Phaedo* as at least possibly self-consolatory in its most basic impulses. At I.21.47-49, Marcus is explaining to his conversation partner that natural philosophy may well convince students of philosophy that the soul perishes upon death, but he claims that no convincing proof that Plato and the Pythagoreans were definitely wrong to hold that souls are immortal. At this point, he declares, “For were Plato to introduce no rational proof—behold what I credit to the man—, he would crush me with his authority itself: however, he brought forth so many arguments that he seems to want to have persuaded others, certainly he seems to have persuaded himself.”² With this claim, Cicero indicates what he sees as Plato’s intended effect upon himself in writing the *Phaedo*. Though Cicero does not expressly identify a consolatory function of this self-persuasion, book one of the *Tusculan Disputations*, which in so many ways revisits both his own *Consolatio* as well as Plato’s *Phaedo*, the major source text for Cicero’s *Consolatio*, is concerned with the immortality of the soul. It is likely in this context that Cicero intended for Marcus to suggest that Plato’s arguments for the immortality of the soul were developed for consolatory purposes. Above all, Marcus seems to say, they were designed to convince

² “*Ut enim rationem Plato nullam adferret—vide quid homini tribuam—, ipsa auctoritate me frangeret: tot autem rationes attulit, ut velle ceteris, sibi certe persuasisse videatur.*” (I.21.49)

and to console Plato himself. If Cicero derived his original invention of a self-consolatory mode of discourse from his reading of Plato's *Phaedo*, then it is possible that by looking to the *Phaedo* the answers to the questions I posed above may be answered.

The *Phaedo* not only shows what form philosophical consolatory discourse originally took, it also shows Socrates offering a series of consolatory arguments designed to ensnare his circle of friends into an impossible mourning of his loss. Along the way, they are deprived of all the traditional resources of mourning. At 115a, Socrates chooses to bathe himself before drinking the hemlock, so that the women will not have to clean his corpse. This, however, also prevents them from *being able* to clean the corpse. He continues from there, boasting that his soul will escape death, and insisting that it hardly matters what they do with his body, leaving the specifics to reliable Crito (115c-116a). At 116b, when Xanthippe and the children come to him one last time, he provides them with some counsel and then sends them away before he drinks the poison. At 116c-d, when Apollodorus begins to weep, Socrates explains that the young man must cease or else leave, since he sent the women away precisely so that they could not lament him in this way (60a, 117d-e).

The community gathered around him therefore can only mourn Socrates in the one way that he allows: repeating his philosophical way of life. At 115b, when Crito asks whether Socrates has any last wishes about his children, or anything else, Socrates encourages them to do nothing more than take care of themselves and his children, in accord with all of their previous discussions on justice, the good life, and virtue. Through

the course of the dispute with Simmias and Cebes on the soul's immortality, which makes up the bulk of the text, Cebes asks Socrates at 77e-78a where they will be able to find a suitable replacement once he has died, someone who can charm away the childish fear of death; Socrates responds by encouraging him to spare no expense in searching through all of Hellas and the foreign lands looking for another like him, asking after men of an equally philosophical temper, and he concludes by recommending that they question among themselves after another who could replace him. Later when the argument for the soul's immortality is challenged convincingly by Simmias, Socrates proposes a pact with Phaedo himself, proposing that, while Phaedo may of his own volition cut his hair on the next day, they should perhaps consider doing so now in a gesture of mourning for their argument, if they cannot save it from Simmias and Cebes' attacks (89b-d); in this way, he suggests that the only suitable cause for mourning is a lack of philosophical conviction. In the continuation of this line of thought, at 91a-c, just before he returns to the argument, he characterizes the last moments of his life in terms of his relationship to the truth: if, by believing his soul immortal, he knows the truth, he is more fortunate for this; if he deceives himself, then he at least "will not be loathsome to those present at the last moment before death" ("ἀλλ' οὐν τοῦτόν γε τὸν χρόνον αὐτὸν τὸν πρὸ τοῦ θανάτου ἤττον τοῖς παρούσιν ἀηδῆς ἔσομαι ὀδυρόμενος," 91b). The main point Socrates is making here is that Simmias and Cebes must worry more about taking care of the truth than about their polite regard for Socrates, but he also communicates in making this point that he regards mourning as inherently repulsive, that

his friends would find it “loathsome” to see him mourn and lament his imminent execution. Insofar as Socrates deprives his friends of the traditional resources of mourning and he insists that, feeling his absence, they should seek replacements among themselves or in the wider world of Greece and beyond, he creates conditions in which his followers must receive as the appropriate mode of mourning their loss the enactment and repetition of the pattern of his life. Essential to this pattern, this life set up as a paradigm, is also the general refusal of mourning.

Socrates’ death thus provoked in those devoted to him two conflicting reactions. On the one hand, they felt the impulse to mourn him, to deal with the loss of this special and unrivalled friend. On the other, the very feelings of loss seems to have provoked equally powerful feelings of loyalty to Socrates, so that his desire not to be mourned intersects with his rejection of any need for mourning in such a way that grief and mourning bring about their own obstruction. A basic ambivalence towards the traumatic death of Socrates governs the philosophical subjectivity that would come to formulate a more definitive mode of philosophical consolatory discourse, so that it is unsurprising that the philosophers are so often compelled to address grief from this position of ambivalence down to the end of antiquity.³

³ “So you can see that Socrates’ death, the practice of his *parrhēsia* which exposed him to the risk of death—and well and truly exposed him to this risk since he actually dies as a result of it—, the practice of his truth-telling, and finally this devotion to inducing others to take care of themselves just as he took care to take care of himself, all form a very closely woven ensembles whose threads intertwine throughout the series on Socrates’ death (*Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo*). All these threads running through these three texts come together one last time in Socrates’ two final recommendations. First, manifestly, when he says: My

At least in the case of the self-consolers I have studied there is evident testimony for a Socratic legacy behind the consolatory discourse in their texts. Cicero's indebtedness to Plato's *Phaedo* was evident in numerous places within his *Consolatio*, and at the remote end of antiquity even Boethius testifies to his Platonic heritage. Seneca may seem the freest of this Socratic subjectivity, but he too depends upon Socrates for his conception of the soul in the *Ad Marciam* (22.3, 23.1-2), and in the *Ad Polybium* his invocation of Aesop also recalls Socrates' prison writing (8.3-4). Given these Socratic bearings, the consolatory arguments came down to these authors from classical Athens and from Socrates' Hellenistic successors, so that they ultimately advance withdrawal into the self as the best security against grief. For the early Socratics who first formulated a philosophical practice of consolation, grief was above all "among the enemies of the living," and for this reason it had to be suppressed, not worked through. For the Roman self-consolers, by contrast, an ambivalent sense of commitment to and alienation from the

final wish is that you take care of yourself. And a second time, symbolically, in the form of the sacrifice to Asclepius, no longer referring to the care men must take of themselves, but to the gods' care for men so that they take care of themselves. All these threads come together for the last time in the sacrifice of the cock. It is the mission concerning the care of oneself that leads Socrates to his death. It is the principle of "caring for oneself" that, beyond his death, he bequeaths to the others. And it is to the gods, favorable towards this care of oneself, that he addresses his last thought. I think that Socrates' death founds philosophy, in the reality of Greek thought and therefore in Western history, as a form of veridiction which is not that of prophecy, or wisdom, or *tekhnē*; a form of veridiction peculiar precisely to philosophical discourse, and the courage of which must be exercised until death as a test of the soul which cannot take place on the political platform." Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*: 91, see also 113-14.

state made withdrawal into the self a desirable but ultimately dissatisfying or even impossible pursuit.

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Biography

Clifford Robinson was born in Portsmouth, VA on January 22, 1984. He attended East Carolina University from 2002, where he graduated with honors in 2007, majoring in English, Philosophy and Multidisciplinary Studies (Classics). After studying abroad at Leiden University in Spring-Summer 2007, he matriculated at Duke University in 2007. He graduates in December 2014 with a Ph.D. in Classical Studies and Certificates in Medieval and Renaissance Studies and in College Teaching. While at Duke University, he won the Anne T. and Robert M. Bass Competitive Teaching Fellowship in academic year 2012-2013, and the Classical Studies Departmental Competitive Teaching Fellowship in 2013-2014. In Spring 2014, he was awarded the Dean's Award for Excellence in Teaching for his merit as a graduate instructor of record within Duke University's Trinity College.