The Consolation of Philosophy on the Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom

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Introductory Note

The Consolation of Philosophy is not a book of many words, but as a testimonial to an extraordinary man's refusal to capitulate to the ancient nagging fear that all of life's struggle is for nothing, that ultimate order is an illusion, that no divine purpose or agency finally governs the universe, it is a book that generates in its readership many powerful and lasting impressions. In its author's, Boethius,' case, the temptation to go to pieces in the throe of a world in which the good are unjustly chastised and the wicked go unpunished, must have been compounded by the miseries and dereliction that, near the end of his life, had so persistently hounded him – including the dramatic loss of position, power and good fortune, the pain of imprisonment, the threat and subsequently the tragedy of execution. Dreadful as they were, they possessed not the power to finally shatter his faith in the ability of divine Providence to establish and preserve cosmic order. This we know from the *Consolation* where, in the accents of lightning and grace, Boethius enunciates his unshakable belief that, notwithstanding mortal men's unremitting susceptibility to the painful arbitrariness of life *(Fortuna or fate),* that arbitrariness is only apparent, for, quite the reverse of standing sovereign and unregulated, *Fortuna's* action is held fast to an order far greater than itself. This much it will be possible for men to know. They can know that Fortuna forms part of the mechanism of God's providential care of the universe, that it

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is the servant and agent of God's good and holy will, the "outer expression" of the mysterious, hidden depths of God's intelligent governance of things. Boethius' own faith in God's unconquerable purposes for man and the universe enabled him to still whatever anxieties he might have been experiencing over the painful vicissitudes of his own life. It flooded him with that "consolation" that God imparts upon those who know that not man in all of his paralyzing intransigence, that not fate in all its crushing mutability, that nothing, absolutely nothing, ever stands outside the lawful pattern of divine love, that love rules all, that nothing can exist unless it return to this love that gave it being (cf. Prose 1, Book II through Prose 9, Book III; Prose 6, Book IV, of *Consolation*, to mention but a few of the relevant passages). Since Boethius' enunciation of that faith mainly derives from his conception of the relationship between human freedom and divine foreknowledge, it is that which will concern us here.

Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom

At the opening of Book V of *The Consolation,* we are provided anew with a statement of Boethius' basic insight that nothing, absolutely nothing, stands outside the lawful pattern of divine Providence. We find him wanting to know from Lady Philosophy whether anything exists that corresponds to the notion of "chance." Lady Philosophy replies that before one can respond to the question, one must distinguish between two meanings of "chance." If "chance" is taken to mean "an event produced by random movement without causal connections," then in the light of her previous exposition of the fact that "God arranges all things in an orderly fashion," Lady Philosophy can only emphasize that it is nothing at all. For in a universe established within the framework of God's all-encompassing governance of things, where every shift of fate is subject to and manifests the lawful patterns of Providence, there clearly can be no room for anything corresponding to the idea of "sheer randomness," the sheer absence of "law," that is, of those causal connections that can be traced back to the workings of Providence. A thing exists in the measure that it can be traced back to its proper cause, or to a confluence of causes; to say, therefore, that no such cause or network of causes exists is really to say the thing's

existence cannot be accounted for. It is to say that something comes from nothing, which in the light of the divine governance of the universe, is impossible and absurd. Nothing comes from nothing, and if a thing at all exists, it owes its existence to its proper cause or to a confluence of determinable causes.

If, however, following Aristotle, the word "chance" is taken to mean "an unexpected event produced by a concurrence of causes which had other ends in view," then it refers to some real thing. The everyday world, in fact, abounds in just this sort of event – an event which can be traced back to a confluence of causes that, taken singly, cannot be said to have had their respective outcomes in the event in view at all (e.g. the digger who, going out to prepare his field for planting, unexpectedly turns up a pot of gold). Notwithstanding their apparent serendipity, these events do not stand outside the lawful pattern of divine Providence, for a careful examination of their underlying causes would, in fact, point to divine Providence as the principle of their convergence in the unsought-for result. Boethius writes that there is an "order according to which things unfold in a pattern of inevitable connections, an order whose fountainhead is Providence which arranges all things, each in its proper place and time" (Prose 1, Bk. V).

But it is precisely the patterning of all things, under the impact of a Providence that never fails of its purposes, which, as it were, sets the stage for Boethius' statement of the problem concerning the relationship between divine foreknowledge and human freedom. Boethius introduces the problem by asking: "Is there any room for freedom of will within this network of integrated causes, or are all movements of men's minds also tied in with this fatal chain?" (Prose 2, Bk. 5). Granted that all things are squarely set within a cosmic order from which there is no possibility of deviation, is there space at all for the flowering of human free will? Is not the patterning of human activity by a Providence that is never deflected from its objectives too constricting a condition for freedom to be operative at all? Would not a future, determined in advance by the God who, as it were, leaves nothing to "chance," be for that very reason a future "closed," and, concomitantly, the freedom to act in respect of such a future, an illusion?

Although Boethius does not pose the difficulty in exactly those terms, they point in the direction of the problem he would like us

to reflect upon. If Lady Philosophy does nothing more than read his mind when she says, "Of course there is freedom," then it is clear that Boethius does not for a moment doubt the reality of human freedom. Freedom, after all, understood as the power of a human being to judge and to engage in decision-making, the power to determine the orientation of one's life and activities (and other such "movements of men's minds), is a *sine qua non* if the human being is to be human at all. For to be human is to be rational, and to be rational is to be free (on the level of thought and judgment, if nowhere else), "to seek that which he considers desirable and reject what he thinks should be shunned" (prose 2, Bk. V). Granted that there are grades of freedom that a person must learn to distinguish from one another – for while all men's minds are free, the minds of those who concern themselves with divine things seem to be freer than the minds of those who concern themselves with their own bodies and with the things of this world, or, equivalently, the farther one departs from "the contemplation of the divine mind" into the world of sensible phenomena and, worst of all, into the bondage of sin, the more decisively to a kind of self-captivity does one condemn oneself – the fact of freedom remains. Boethius himself has in mind freedom on the level of thought and judgment; indeed, the term he uses is *liberum arbitrium,* or "free will." In view of the numberless constraints imposed by fate upon other forms of human activity, the freedom of judgment or free will would even seem to be the only freedom still possible to man (cf. Prose 6, Bk. IV),

To say that Boethius does not for a moment doubt the reality of human freedom (on the level of thought and of judgment, if nowhere else), is not to say that he did not view adherence to such a position problematic. He asks: can a man's free judgment, which his rational nature gives him, exist in view of God's infallible prescience? His exact words are worth quoting in full:

> That God should know all things beforehand and that any liberty should exist seem to be militantly and radically opposed to one another. For if God, who cannot be deceived, sees everything in advance, then whatever his Providence foresees will occur must of necessity come to pass. If from all eternity he knows not only the deeds of men, but also their deliberations and decisions, there can be no freedom of will. For no other deeds or decisions can exist save those fore-

> seen by God's infallible Providence. For if something could be turned to any other end than such as was foreseen, God would have only uncertain opinion and not unshakable knowledge of future events, and to my mind it would be impossible to believe this of God. (Prose 3, Bk. V).

In other words, to speak of God's infallible prescience is equivalently to speak of his power to know everything – everything that exists in the present, everything that can be called a past determinate fact, and everything that it still lies in the power of any of his creatures to do, everything, that is, yet to come, all future events. With respect to future events, since God's power to know is not subject to error, he must know them with unassailable certitude, that is to say, as if they were happening now, as if they had already occurred. If God's knowledge of future events were in any way uncertain, or subject to revision, then it would not be genuine foreknowledge but mere opinion, mere conjecture, something proper to our own condition as fallible men but alien to God's nature as the all-seeing God. But if God foresees future events as if they were happening now, as if they had already occurred, then would it not be true of these future events that they occur of necessity? After all, what God sees to be happening cannot not be happening – what God knows to be so cannot not be so. And if future events, from the standpoint of God's knowledge of them, must of necessity come to pass, what then would be left of human freedom? If the future is preempted, so to speak, by God's foreknowledge of it, what content could we possibly assign to the notion of freedom? what meaning? what reality?

Behind this whole line of questioning, one finds, of course, the assumption that God's infallible prescience and man's free will are mutually contradictory, opposing forces, and that we cannot have both at the same time. If God is infallibly omniscient, then man is radically unfree; if man is gloriously free, then God's ability to have certain knowledge about the future is severely impaired. The question is framed in such a manner as to require that whichever way the vote goes, there will be a big loser. Man denied his freedom is denied his rationality, that which is most distinctive of his essential being. God denied the certainty of what he knows concerning the future is denied his omniscience, that which follows necessarily from his divine nature. Moreover, if freedom were to be denied of

man, short work would be made of such taken-for-granted human affairs as those that invite praise, blame, reward, punishment; indeed, of the entire fabric of morality and society. How could these things have any meaning at all if men are not responsible for what they think, and judge, and do? Prayer itself would be rendered completely inefficacious, and the idea of a genuine relationship with God, so self-contradictory as to be meaningless. What prayerful petition, even if it were to issue from the depths of a needful soul, would have the power to affect the course of things so immutably fixed; what sort of a relationship with God could man of his own volition enter, finding himself already implicated in the divine life by the unilateral arrangements of a Providence that never fails of its purposes. On the other hand, if infallibility were to be denied what God foresees, if the future which God foresees could conceivably come to pass in a manner other than as he foresees it, then divine foreknowledge would be no more extraordinary than the "human, all too human" manner of prophesying to which Tiresias stood condemned – "whatever I say will either be or not be," and this is as blasphemous as it is absurd.

It does not remedy matters to aver that even if all things are foreseen by God, it does not follow that all things foreseen must happen, and then to explain this by saying it is not so much that a given event will take place because divine Providence has foreknowledge of it, but that divine Providence has foreknowledge of it because it will take place. For that would only be to turn "necessity" upside-down, that is, to maintain that future events in themselves are not necessary, but only knowledge of them on the part of Providence. This, however, merely serves to stir up the question: is foreknowledge the cause of the future events, or is the necessity of future events the cause of the foreknowledge? Notice that from the logical point of view, whatever be the order of causes, whether it is a question of God's foreknowledge imposing necessity on future events, or a question of future events taking place in a manner which guarantees the infallibility of God's foreknowing them, there is still, concerning the future events themselves, the problem of their coming to pass necessarily. From the metaphysical point of view, however, only one order of causes is possible, and the other impossible. For it is impossible that God foresees future events insofar as they will happen. The finite could never be the cause of

the infinite; and so to say that the occurrence of temporal things is the cause of God's sovereign and eternal foreknowledge, would be both an impiety and an absurdity. And we're right back where we started, questioning whether divine foreknowledge and human freedom are compatible, whether in a universe where nothing exists without its proper cause, where everything is subject to the rule of a good and wise governor, there is room for liberty of choice. Is it, in other words, the case that only that which God foresees will take place, and must it take place on the basis of a necessity imposed upon it by the fact that it is foreseen?

Lady Philosophy's clarification of the dilemma set forth by Boethius begins with the resumption of an explanation previously rejected (cf. Prose 3, Bk. V): she argues that all things are foreseen by God but not all things happen of necessity (except in the sense of "simple" necessity, i.e. a necessity arising out of the nature of the thing, as in the necessity of the sun's rising). She says: "Let us (once again) suppose that foreknowledge exists but does not impose any necessity on things; (in which case) ... freedom of will would obtain *in toto*" (Prose 4, Bk. V).

In taking up this argument. Lady Philosophy is concerned to show that knowledge, whether of things present or of things future, has no causal effect on the events that form its objects. She points out that when we are spectators at an event, we do not on that account lay upon the event any constraint to continue unfolding in this or that determinate way. That is to say, when we witness an occurrence, or when something takes place before our eyes, we do not on account of our witnessing, on account of the fact that we "see" it, turn the occurrence into a necessary occurrence. So for instance, when we witness a jockey on the racetrack drive his horse as he sees fit so as to win the race, our observation of what he does in no way restricts his freedom of movement or decision. Likewise, when we see a little old lady coming up the hill from, say the bus stop, our observation of her movements does not lay upon her any constraint to continue walking or to stop walking. In the same way, the divine foreknowledge does not necessitate the actions that it contemplates. God's knowledge of future events does not differ from our own observation of events presently taking place, where the absence of any causal effect of the knowing on its objects is concerned. Lady Philosophy says: "Just as the knowledge of

present events does not entail that they occur of necessity, so neither does correct foreknowledge imply that the outcome of future events is necessitated" (Prose 4, Bk. V).

Against this argument Boethius had earlier (cf. Prose 3, Bk. 5) raised the objection that the foreknowledge of an event that may or may not happen could really not be classified as genuine foreknowledge, but only as opinion, and therefore as something that would be quite unacceptable as an activity of divine Providence. Lady Philosophy takes this objection into consideration, for she says, "these notions ("divine foreknowledge" and "events whose outcome is not necessary") seem to clash, and you think that to be foreseen that events must necessarily happen and if such necessity is wanting they cannot be foreseen ..." (Prose 4, Bk. V). She proceeds to meet this objection by clarifying the nature of divine foreknowledge. She contrasts divine knowing with human knowing, a task made possible by the fact that things are known not so much according to the nature of the thing known, but according to the nature of the knower's cognitive faculty. This is not, however, to say that the nature of the thing known has no importance whatsoever for its knowability. It is, rather, to say that knowledge is primarily a judgement, an act of the subject, something which depends on the capacity to know and on the standpoint of the knower. Hence, a whole hierarchy of modes or grades of knowing, corresponding to the hierarchy of the grades of being, can be posited, in which the various and hierarchically positioned beings or substances know things in different ways. Lady Philosophy then proceeds to distinguish four different grades of knowing: the senses, the imagination, reason, and intelligence. These four different modes of knowing, hierarchically ranked (i.e. set within an order of increasing grades of perfection), range from the sense impressions of such immobile but animate organisms as barnacles, which feed while clinging to stones, to that pure and radiant intelligence (called the divine "omniscience"), which belongs to God alone. An essential feature of this hierarchy is that in it each mode of knowing is subsumed under the superior mode and includes within itself all the inferior modes: "the higher power of comprehension includes the lower, but the lower in no way can come up to the higher" (Prose 4, BK. V). So, for instance, while it is in keeping with reason's proper nature to contemplate the universal genera and species of particular things by

means, neither of the senses nor of the imagination, but of that which is unique to itself, namely the concept, it does not on that account relinquish its capacity to synthesize and judge even objects of sensation and imagination. But, on the other hand, it is a limited mode of knowing compared to what is positioned above it, namely that intelligence which is proper to God alone. Concerning the perfection and simplicity of the divine intelligence. Lady Philosophy makes the following important remark:

> Intelligence having grasped that form (which it alone has the power to intuit), looks down in judgment as it were on all beneath it, and the way in which it comprehends the form itself is unknown to any other power. For intelligence knows the universals of reason, the figures of the imagination, the material sensible, and all this without using reason, imagination, or the senses. It beholds all things ... by grasping their formal nature as it were and doing so with a single glance." (Prose 4, Bk. V)

Be that as it may. Lady Philosophy exhorts Boethius not to be disheartened by the excellence of the divine intelligence, not to despair of ever catching a glimpse of its nature, but rather to use to the utmost that mode of knowing which is proper to him as a human being, namely the power of reason, because in so doing they can attain to the object of their quest, which is to grasp in some way the nature of the divine mode of knowing. She says:

> If we can then, let us rise to the plane of the highest intelligence; for from there reason will see what it cannot intend on its own ... (namely) that supreme science which in its simplicity is without bounds. (Prose 5, Bk. V)

In this wise Boethius is invited to join Lady Philosophy in her quest for an additional perspective on the logic of the divine intelligence, a mode of knowing that they already know (see quote near the top of this page) never abstracts from or excludes the multiplicity of the inferior modes of knowing, even if at the sane time it transcends ("looks down in judgment upon ...") this multiplicity. It is a quest, Lady Philosophy says, that will take them to the status *divinae substantiae,* that is, the "situation in the divine substance" (Prose 6, 12 Bk. 5), which is exactly where they would

like to be. As far as Lady Philosophy is concerned, the "situation in the divine substance" is summed up in one word, and the word is "eternity." That is to say, the nature of the divine mode of knowing is bound up with the implications of the fact that God is eternal (a fact that Lady Philosophy takes to be so obvious as to entail no apologetic footwork, for she states it without further ado). Consequently, any inquiry into the nature of the divine intelligence is concomitantly an inquiry into the nature of God's "eternity." As to the nature of "eternity," Lady Philosophy says: "Eternity is endless life possessed all at once in its totality and perfection" (Prose 6, Bk. V). A little further on she adds: "Only that deserves to be called eternal which comprehends the entire plenitude of endless life all at once with none of the past or future missing" (*Ibid*).

The terminology Lady Philosophy uses is definitely worth noting: "eternity" involves a "possession," an inclusion, an enfolding. An enfolding of what? An enfolding of "endless life." Does this terminology, this language, not recall to mind the language of "inclusion" and "comprehension" (in the sense of subsuming into its own proper ambit), already used with reference to the hierarchy of the various modes of knowing? Lady Philosophy appears to be saying that just as within the said hierarchy each mode of knowing enfolds within itself the multiplicity of subordinate modes, but at the same time transcends it, so also "eternity" enfolds within itself "endless time" but at the same time transcends it. Clearly, "endless time" means all the moments in the succession of time, the totality – with nothing missing – of events ranging from the past through the present to the future; in short, the totality of time. So, in effect, Lady Philosophy is saying that a reflection on the nature of eternity is concomitantly a reflection on the meaning of time; not, indeed, insofar as time and eternity can be considered separately, but insofar as eternity, of its very nature transcendent, cannot be known by us directly, except by way of something proper to our own nature and which, at the same time, it includes, namely time.

Lady Philosophy does not, however, provide an extended development of the meaning of time. Her earlier statement (cf. Prose 6, Bk. IV) to the effect that time is an "unfolding," the unfolding, that is, of the divine unity into a "plurality," receives, contrary to what one may have expected, no further explication here. This, however, is not surprising. Given the main problem she has set for herself,

namely the nature of the divine mode of knowing, her overriding concern is to characterize eternity, which she has already said sums it all up. Thus she is quick to declare: "It is one thing to endure an endless life ... and quite another to embrace the whole of this boundless life as present all at once, (and) obviously this latter is what is proper to the divine mind" (Prose 6, Bk. V).

The contrast between time and eternity is sharp and to the point. Whereas time moves from the past, through the present, to the future, in a succession of passing moments wherein not one of the moments embraces or comprehends the entire process, eternity is "motionless life where all is ever present," and eternal being (God), "that (which) with full possession of its mental powers (is) not only always present to itself but also (has) in its presence at every moment the infinitude of passing time" (*Ibid*).

In stark contrast, therefore, to the human knower who, as a being immersed in and conformed to the flux of his own temporal succession, is radically unable to embrace in a kind of imperishable "present-ness" all the moments of his existence, there is the Eternal Knower who, as the one "located far above all lesser things," is uniquely able to "look down upon them all from on high" (*Ibid*). In other words, in a manner altogether impossible to the human knower, for whom the future is "not yet," and the past "no more," and the present "unable to keep still" (racing as it does into the irretrievable past), the Eternal Knower contemplates what has already been, and what is, and what is not yet, in an "eternal now" where they are all somehow co-present, somehow equally real, somehow equally there.

There is no intention on the part of Lady Philosophy to deny the reality of our own "now," our own "befores" and "afters." For she says: "The divine vision looking down on all does not alter the nature of what is present before it" (*Ibid*). In other words, brought to bear upon all our "yesterdays," "todays," and "tomorrows," the gaze of the divine mind does not cancel their natural dispersion over the framework of time. For in a mode of inclusion reminiscent of that already considered with reference to the degrees of the modes of knowing, the gaze of the divine mind embraces and comprehends time – preserving the living, total reality of things temporal, and at the same time, transcending them. It is clear Lady

Philosophy has no quarrel with the first half of this last assertion; she wishes, however, to hammer away at its second half, which asserts that the divine gaze, and, equivalently, eternity, transcends time. In this connection she says that the divine gaze is more properly called "providence" than "prevision," inasmuch as the notion of "providence" can be more generally understood in a non-temporal sense, such as "prevision" cannot.

Indeed, as Lady Philosophy sees it, eternity can only be understood as something above and beyond the course of time, something above and beyond the structure of past, present, and future. So while with respect to our own partial, temporal perspective, there is a real dispersion, a real succession of our "befores" and "afters," with respect to God's eternal perspective, which unfailingly yields immediate insight into a totality, all of that talk about the "succession" of moments simply falls away. For God "sees" in a mode which far transcends our own living experience of a "succession" of events. Indeed, before the gaze of the divine mind, what to us can only come across as a "succession" of events, is gathered up into a kind of succession-less whole. This is the meaning of the assertion that God sees past, present, and future "all at once." God sees all of our temporal moments in a single sweep by which even those moments which are clearly "future" from our present, temporal point of view, are immediately "present" to him. Past, present, and future coalesce, so to speak, in a "simultaneity" radically different from our own experience of temporal simultaneity, simply because it is the possession of the "entire plenitude of endless life all at once with none of the past or future missing" (*Ibid*).

Lady Philosophy introduces all these considerations so that Boethius can understand that the difference between eternity and time is of an order that goes far beyond the mere duration or the mere measure of time. Endless time, the succession of events from everlasting to everlasting, does not eternity make. Even if one were to grant Plato's notion of a "perpetual" world, i.e. a world capable of existing through an infinite extent of time, a world without beginning or end, it would, for all that, not cease to be a world in time, and, therefore, a world (to borrow that line from Macbeth's cry of despair), that must "creep in this petty pace from day to day till the last syllable of recorded time." Such a world, even if it were of an age past reckoning, would hardly be coeval and coordinate with,

on the same footing as, eternity. In its unchanging simplicity, in its "successionless-ness," its "seamlessness" as it were, eternity is the far more excellent thing; it is impervious, in a way that time, even an infinity of time, is not, to anything that could force its decomposition, its scattering, its dispersion into those "moments" whose "fullness (one) could never embrace by (oh, for that eternal rest!) standing still" *(Ibid).* Time, never eternity's co-equal, can at best "imitate" eternity; but it is an imitation that cannot help but give itself away. Though time aim at eternity as its final goal, it has no other recourse than to go chasing after it through the entire length of its becoming. And, clearly, it is one thing to run the gamut of an endless succession of temporal moments, and quite another thing to envelop all the elements of this succession all at once, in a kind of total presence, as it is in the nature of God, the Eternal Knower, to do.

Indeed, it is in the notion of total presence, of simultaneous, successionless presence, in short, in the notion of God's eternity, that Lady Philosophy believes Boethius can find a solution to his difficulty concerning the reconciliation of divine foreknowledge and human freedom. Since the whole of boundless life, including the still-to-be-accomplished future, is present "all at once" (i.e. in a total, successionless way) to the gaze of the divine mind, there is no possibility of the degradation (which Boethius feared as an implication of the reconciliation), of the divine knowledge to mere opinion, i.e. to a merely conjectural, probable type of knowledge. Since God sees even future contingent events from the perspective of his "successionless present," the character of his knowledge of them can never be influenced by the fact that every human action is proceeded by a moment of uncertainty within which the freedom of choice is exercised: thus, "(the divine vision) does not change, as you might think, foreseeing in turn first this then that, but in one unchanging glance it envisions and comprehends all your changes" *(Ibid).*

Moreover, the divine vision does not change or suppress the nature or the properties of the things that stand before its sight. Because God is present to all times, and all times are present to him in that "successionless presence" which constitutes the nature of the divine vision, he sees our future acts as easily as we see another's present acts. And just as our seeing another person

walking does not lay upon him any constraint to continue or to stop walking, so also the gaze of the divine mind does not necessitate the sequence of human decision and action that it contemplates. Just as human knowledge imposes no necessity on the objects present to it in time (though it might apprehend or recognize simple necessity in things, i.e. a necessity belonging to the nature of the thing, as in, an object with mass when released in the air must fall to the ground), so also the divine (fore)knowledge imposes no necessity on the realities present to it (including voluntary human activity) in eternity.

Hence, it is not in vain that we lay our hopes and prayers before God and that we strive to know the good and seek to make it a reality in our lives, taking care to avoid its counterfeits. Such activities and such aspirations, far from being anything over which we have not the power of volition and choice, spring from our deepest center, which is the seat of volition and choice. As such they cannot be, in the universal economy of grace, without efficacy. In truth, they form the stuff out of which we build our lives.

To sum up, then, in the doctrine of God's eternity one finds the principal thrust of Lady Philosophy's response to Boethius' dilemma concerning divine foreknowledge and human freedom. However, because the doctrine (rightly) casts eternity as something above and beyond the course of time, and therefore beyond our minds' capacity to grasp/in a total, definitive, unreformulable sort of way, it preserves the mystery which, for all the perspectives that can be marshaled to aid us in understanding the problem a little better, constitutes the ultimate horizon against which the relationship between God's Providence and human freedom must be seen if it is to be seen at all.

In Conclusion

There is a permanent temptation to see the notion of God's omniscience and sovereignty over all things, and the notion of man's independence and self-activity in the management of his own affairs, as notions that confront us, on both a practical and a theoretical level, with the necessity of making a choice in the nature of an "either/or." There is a temptation, in other words, to stress man's autonomy and self-activity to the point that God's initiative and

guidance are denied any possible relationship to human affairs, or, if not that, then, to conceive of the divine initiative and guidance as driving and hurrying man along, to the point that his own free movement and advance are severely impaired if not completely suppressed.

Now, the temptation to overly stress one notion to the exclusion of the other arises, it seems to me, from the failure to see that the realities to which they refer are organically connected; not as co-equal elements in a comprehensive reality, to be sure (because whichever way one looks at it, the notion of man as "creature" or "contingent" will always be inferior to and depend on the notion of God as "Creator" and "self-subsistent"), but nonetheless as partners in an "alliance" or, if you will, in a "salvation history" within which the universality of God's eternal, transcendental activity is not gainsaid by the open-endedness of a history that man shapes by his own decisions. Boethius does not fail to attend to this organic connection between, on the one hand, God's sovereignty, and, on the other, man's decision-making activity. Therein, it seems to me, lies the value of his contributions to the debate concerning the relationship between – divine foreknowledge and human freedom.

His solution, which mainly consists in the invitation for us to join him in seeing the situation between God and ourselves from the standpoint of God's eternity (a standpoint that, as we have seen, takes us beyond all our own finite standpoints – but only to the extent that our own limited imagination will allow us to soar – to the unrestricted, un-perspectival, impartial, unlimited vision of God), may not be as theologically or even philosophically well-known as, say St. Augustine's or St. Thomas' outstanding works on the subject (after all, they wrote on the subject in the context of fierce theological controversies involving such famous heresies as Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism, and not, as Boethius himself apparently did, in the context of a personal struggle against the temptation to despair), but it is a solution worth pondering, if only because it embodies a vital concern, even in the context of affirming God's total, transcendent activity, to understand man's future for what it could only be, "an open realm of possibility that lies ahead and so is full of promise," to borrow a phrase from Jürgen Moltmann *(Theology of Hope,* p. 213).

By developing the idea that eternity grounds within divine existence the simultaneity of all time – past, present, and future – so that even events that have not yet occurred historically and which thus lack all temporal actuality can nonetheless be affirmed as possessing some kind of eternal actuality, Boethius furnishes us with a means of understanding how events that by our own system of reckoning are indeterminate and still open to the give-and-take of our own decision-making activity, can, like the "kingdom of God," be "not yet" and at the same time "already," simply because by God's reckoning they are not merely "possible" and "contingent" but, like God's own love for us, "always already there." The most beautiful thing, it seems to me, about Boethius' concept of the divine reckoning, is its sensitivity to what might be termed a profound "respect" on the part of God for those things that by their very to relationship to him as to their Creator and Lord are, in a manner of speaking, laid naked and bare before his divine gaze; a certain "tender regard," a refusal to coerce and to make exactions, a willingness to trust man for the achievement of the divine intentions concerning humanity.

Which brings us to a related point, the point that God does have plans and intentions for man and the universe. He is not a God "out there," who, like some rich aunt in Australia, will occasionally make a trip to see how things are "here," or who, like the gods on Mt. Olympus are serene above the cares and distractions of our world. Boethius' notion of Providence conveys the idea that-God is turned to the world, that he does have a "care" for the world, a providential care that in its own unfathomable way unceasingly urges the course of human history to the maximum fulfillment of God's own eternal vision. It is worth repeating Boethius' description of this providential order as "an order according to which things unfold in a pattern of inevitable connections +. whose fountainhead is Providence *which arranges all things, each in its proper place and time* +" (Prose 1, Bk. 5).

Hence, in the end, Boethius, despite the fact that his world has crumbled, can truly stand consoled. The efficacy of prayer, the ultimate inviolability of human free will, the autonomy of decision-making, the joy of rational and contemplative activity, the consolation of Philosophy herself; in short, everything essential to the pursuit of a meaningful human existence, despite all the signs to

the contrary, is man's by divine behest, is man's as "gift" from this "order which arranges all things." All else a man might lose, but not these things; for they stand preserved within their transcendent source, this "order which arranges all things."

In sum, what Boethius has to offer on the question of God's sovereignty and man's freedom, is a perspective that, to his credit, looks across the span of over fifteen hundred years, to our own contemporary vision of the world – a world and a history that are open to novelty and creative advance, a world and a history not predetermined beforehand in every respect and in all its particulars; in short, a world proper to man; a world of meaning, freedom, and personhood; a world in which at once individually and socially man "creates" himself with all the attendant risks implied; and yet, and yet, a world in which God interacts with man through his own continuing initiatives of love. Man's world is one that is shaped by man's finite decisions, yet, the final context of our finite decisions is God's own eternal life. ❑