

A God that is All-Knowing can not be All-Good

What becomes Boethius' vessel for displaying both his own philosophical and theological ideals is Lady Philosophy. Heavily inspired by the works of Plato or Aristotle, Boethius leverages this secondary character to bring about the type of discourse known as the socratic method: a way in which pointed questions are asked towards reaching a specific end through the logical movement between each premise. However, these ends can only be found if the premises do not take any logical leaps or have any holes in the bridges between them. In *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Boethius deals a lot in abstract concepts like power, suffering, or goodness; it is these ideals that muddle his more nuanced, theological concepts. Of all of his concepts, the one that seems to suffer the most is that God is always going to be all-powerful and all-knowing; Boethius argues this point with what we call now the "privative theory of evil", the concept that everything is designed by God so it must lean towards the Good, and that good becomes meaningful by being placed next to evil. So, we will take the existence of God as a given, regardless of personal belief, in order to look at the argumentative style of Boethius and the gaps within his logic that leave the capability to strike at his larger theme: that his God is all-powerful and all-knowing. We will then look at how it becomes impossible for a God to be both all-powerful and all-knowing based on the issues within Boethius' arguments attempting to prove this "fact". Our argument here rests on the concept that an all-knowing and all-powerful God can not exist if there is evil at all in the world; Boethius would argue against this in three ways: that everything leans towards good eventually, good becomes meaningful based on the gaps within it, and the perfection of God. This paper will set out to disprove these premises

towards Boethius' conclusion in order to reach our own conclusion, contrary to that of Boethius: that it would be impossible for a God to be both all-powerful and all-knowing.

Classical Aristotelian philosophy argues that "every action is thought to aim at some good" (Nicomachean Ethics 1), it then finds how people evaluate these actions in order to find the good. Boethius takes this concept another step further in that he applies it to Theology; he argues that everything tends to lead towards good as an all-powerful God created it to do so. Working to prove this concept, Boethius writes that "without any difference of instinct all men, good and bad alike, strive to reach the good" (Boethius 88). He is arguing that every human is created in God's image, and is thus always leaned towards goodness, or more specifically, towards God; this argument, however, hinges upon the fact that God would be able to know all human's desires and use his power to predict their actions towards those desires. But, Boethius himself shows that God is unable to do this. Lady Philosophy tells him: "[that] there are two things on which all performance of human activity depends, will and power" (Boethius 88). Here lies an inherent contradiction within the argument that Lady Philosophy lays out for the concept that God is in fact all powerful because all humans lean towards goodness as goodness is God. The contradiction is then that if God was able to create and know the future of all beings and lean them towards good, they wouldn't be solely motivated by the goods of the physical world, like power outside that of God. Boethius attempts to dismiss this contradiction later in the book by saying that "a thing exists when it keeps its proper place and preserves its own nature. Anything which departs from this ceases to exist" (Boethius 91). This seems to be a lazy dismissal of a very valid claim against Boethius' concepts of religion. By saying that a thing no longer exists when it doesn't fulfill its original purpose is a ridiculous way to dismiss the mistakes that a clearly not all-knowing and all-powerful God would make. To clarify, think about

a Pringles can; if I were to eat all of the pringles chips out of it it would have fulfilled its intended purpose; let's say then that I were stranded in a desert and all I had was this empty Pringles can, which I used to scoop water out of an oasis to drink. Would the can of Pringles not have fulfilled a greater purpose in saving my life after it had fulfilled its original, intended purpose? So, to bring this back to Boethius, when he argues that after one has deviated from their original purpose they lose all potential value, it becomes an impossible claim because the potential of someone does not change once they move on to a different path. Thus, even if the path is altered from its original form does not mean it ceases to exist, the path and the person still would exist. This person could even seek out goods outside of God in the future, and this existence of potential at all is enough to bring down the concept that God is all-powerful.

Another way in which Boethius attempts to prove the supremacy of his God is through the reasoning of divine providence. I will admit that divine providence could be used to defend the above premise by saying that God sees that when a person will deviate from their path it adds to the good of those that stay on the path. This would essentially be saying that God lets those who deviate from the good stay away in order to bring more to the light. Thus, expressing that God seems to be making a simple math problem of it: if he loses one follower but gains three it would be an overall success. However, the phrasing that Lady Philosophy uses is that, as stated above, "all... human activity depends [on] will and power". If all human activity is resting on will and power, then what hold does goodness have on the personal consciousness? Boethius argues that the highest power is God, so all must go towards that. But some do not. Those that don't go towards the good are then dismissed as no longer existing and just adding to the light of what is good. However, this is an active choice by God to leave out some people from finding true happiness and goodness within themselves. To elaborate, God creates all human beings in

his image, but then denies some the ability to find happiness and goodness, and exchanges that with the individual becoming an example for the rest of the world on what not to do. This active choice by God is a wicked one. God creates this blank space, devoid of goodness, and gives humans the ability to go into it for the sole purpose of maybe converting more people than what went into the darkness, all while knowing who will and won't make it to happiness. Thus, actively letting them go to the wrong side. Boethius also writes that "supreme goodness cannot do evil" (Boethius 91). Meaning that if God is actively allowing evil to exist, as he permits it, he is committing an act of evil, so he cannot be a supreme good by Lady Philosophy's own logic, and if he is not a supreme good he can not be all-knowing or all-powerful.

With all of that being said, we are able to look at the final conjecture of Boethius: God is perfect. We have looked at the path of the individual, as well as actions of God himself in proving God can not be all-knowing and all-powerful, so the next step is to look at God as a function of the individual's own philosophy; meaning, the practical implications in Boethius' philosophy that an all-powerful and all-knowing God brings about– the lack of free will. Boethius argues heavily that even an all-powerful, all-knowing God would give their followers free will: "'there is freedom,' she said. 'For it would be impossible for any rational nature to exist without it'" (Boethius 118). So, with Boethius defending that an all-knowing God is at the helm and they give humans free will, he fortifies it by Lady Philosophy saying: "all those things which happen without happening of necessity are, before they happen, future events about to happen, but not about to happen of necessity" (Boethius 125). The sentiment expressed here is that God being all-knowing must be able to see every possibility for every action of every human every day, at all times; Boethius also argues this by saying that God is outside of what humans perceive as time, so God is thus able to see all of these futures at the same time. The problem

with these steps is that if God can see every possible future, without any concrete certainty because the people have free will, it becomes the same thing as not being able to see anything. If every possibility exists at the same time for God, then what is reality for humans becomes indiscernible; thus, creating a paradox in which God can not really be all-knowing if they are unable to see what is happening in our world as it is happening at the same time as an infinite amount of other timelines that have only slight change to our own. In other words, God can not be expressed to have an infinite amount of knowledge, because if he truly does it will amount to nothing as he would be unable to use his infinite foresight of all timelines to see what will really happen in one isolated timeline.

Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* becomes a valid medium to express the seemingly neoplatonic philosophical ideals that he is positing, but falls short in his relation of these ideals to theology. When he moves out of the abstract and towards, what he believes, to be the concrete facts of life under his God, his argument falls into a state of decline. His God, which is assumed to be always all-powerful and all-knowing, is shown to not be even close to true, based on his own concepts explored through *The Consolation of Philosophy*. Ultimately, even still assuming that his God exists and was the one to create our world, it becomes impossible to continue to assume that God is all-knowing and all-powerful because the contradictions within his reasoning become too large to ignore.

Works Cited:

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Boethius. *The Consolation of Philosophy*. Penguin, 1999.