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The Comforts of Knowledge: The Consolation and the Therapeutic Qualities of Philosophy

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The Comforts of Knowledge:
The *Consolation* and the Therapeutic Qualities of Philosophy

Senior Project Submitted to
The Divisions of Languages and Literature and Social Studies
of Bard College

by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
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Dedication

*Even as a child she had lived her own small life all within herself. At a very early period she had apprehended instinctively the dual life—that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions.*

— Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*

To the girl who wrote her first college essay asking the question “what does it mean to be lost?”

Never let go of that curiosity; it serves you well.
Acknowledgements

To David, thank you for always seeing my potential and challenging me to be the student you saw rather than the one I was. You always met me with patience, compassion, and understanding, and for that, I will forever be grateful. Words cannot express how much your help has meant to me over the years. I could not have asked for a better advisor. I hope you can see how much your influence has shaped me as a person.

To Katie, I do not know who or where I would be without your consistent guidance and support. You taught me that philosophy is much more than abstract ideas people throw around to sound intelligent. It is art, mathematical proofs, and scientific discoveries. If Lady Philosophy were not a fictional character, I would like to imagine that she were you.

To Daniel, for letting me linger after class each day during Citizen Science to talk about Classical Studies, academia, and—most importantly—Boethius. This project would not exist without you encouraging me to get messy, weird, and creative (to paint on the table). You reminded me that it was okay to be myself in an academic setting.

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Introduction

Philosophy, coming from the Ancient Greek word φιλοσοφία which translates to “love of wisdom,” is broadly defined as the search for knowledge. However, it is not uncommon to hear “philosophy” being used outside of academic contexts to mean a sort of ideology or worldview (i.e. personal philosophy, company philosophy, etc.). When searching for philosophy books in stores, it is likely that you will find texts by Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus, Henry David Thoreau, and Friedrich Nietzsche shelved not in their own section, but alongside contemporary books among the self-help genre. This alternative, colloquial meaning of “philosophy” as a way of being is not something that we should dismiss. Instead, we should investigate how and why this alternate meaning arises, and whether it can tell us something about the nature of philosophy, how it is commonly understood, and the value it holds for the general public. What does it mean for philosophy to be a source of comfort and personal insight for people, and is this a strictly modern conceptualization?

These questions are particularly pertinent as it seems philosophy has fallen to the wayside in favor of strictly scientific methods. What use do we have for philosophy in modernity when there are other modes of uncovering knowledge? Is there anything unique to philosophy that separates it from the sciences? What is special about philosophical methodology? An examination of an ancient text sheds light on some possible answers.

This project is centered on a Late Antique text by Boethius called the Consolation of Philosophy. Although the project focuses on an ancient text, it seeks more broadly to explore what kind of connections exist between the academic discipline of philosophy and the practice of therapy across time. In order to undertake this investigation, I will perform a close reading of the
personification of Lady Philosophy in the *Consolation*. My close reading will reveal that she may be said to act as a therapist for the narrator who has befallen a sort of mental despair. This choice on Boethius’ part to make the personification of philosophy a therapeutic healer can function as a cipher for decoding the text and help readers understand the interrelation of philosophy and therapy. Chapter 1 is an introduction to this project, including a biography of Boethius and contemporary literary review. Chapter 2 will provide historical background for modern and ancient forms of therapy, looking at psychagogues and therapists. Chapter 3 will focus on Lady Philosophy herself, particularly on her characterization within the text in ways that other scholars gesture to, but do not develop because it is not their primary concern. My portrait of Lady Philosophy will show that she is—as her title suggests—a philosopher, but serves a double purpose—and that some of her work may qualify her as a therapist. This will be done through looking at her methodology for healing the narrator’s depression, a methodology which is inherently philosophical and therapeutic in nature. Reading Lady Philosophy in this way compels us to ask: what is the difference between philosophical dialogues and Cognitive Behavior Therapy? Both are conversations that aim to raise new knowledge about the self in the world. My aim is to use Lady Philosophy as an example of a therapist to show how therapeutic and philosophical methods, as well as their goals and effects, often overlap. Overall, I am proposing a new way of reading the *Consolation*—being careful to contextualize ancient therapy in order to not haphazardly apply strictly modern notions of psychology to an ancient text—to give readers an updated perspective on a “classical” philosophical work. Afterall, how often do we see bookstores place works of philosophy among books within the self-help genre?
Chapter 1: How to Read Boethius

Boethius’ Biography

We begin at the end. It is approximately 525 CE and a man by the name of Boethius is imprisoned awaiting his execution, mourning a premature death, and leaving behind a book called the *Consolation of Philosophy*. The time period is what historians refer to as Late Antiquity: an age of transformation, spanning from the very height of the Roman Empire to its supposed collapse, precipitating the dawn of the Medieval Ages. More specifically, it is during the Ostrogothic revival under the rule of Justinian I of the Eastern Roman Empire. The last emperor of the Western Roman Empire had been deposed nearly fifty years prior, and what remains of Roman civilization is under tense cultural and political negotiation. Now is the time for the death of a Roman Senator, a contentious political martyr, at the hands of Theoderic, Italy’s barbarian Arian King.

Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, better known as Boethius, was a blue-blooded Roman aristocrat. In his past life, he held almost every prominent position in the Roman *cursus*. He was a prefect of the city of Rome, and a praetorian prefect of Italy. He served as consul in 510, then as *magister officium* in 522.¹ Boethius held the powerful offices that most men—of any age—could only dream of. These positions were privileges afforded to him by his lineage. His father held prefecture in 454, but died when Boethius was young. Boethius was left in the care of

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an even nobler family: that of the Symmachi. Under the care of Quintus Aurelius Symmachus, Boethius achieved the highest level of education. He was an expert in both Greek and Latin literature, and worked diligently as a scholar, producing his own original philosophical writings and translations of classical predecessors. Such work, like his translation of Aristotle’s *Categories* from Greek into Latin, helped Boethius achieve a special level of civic nobility and cultural celebrity. His downfall was a political matter.

As a representative of old school Roman aristocracy, Boethius was put in a precarious position. He was torn between the Ostrogothic ruler Theoderic and the Byzantine ruler Justinian I as the fragments of Western Roman Empire sought reunification and orthodoxy. Boethius had agreed to serve as a ‘Master of Offices’ under Theoderic, which put him directly in the crossfire. Ultimately, he was accused of treason and of engaging in magic. These accusations led to his imprisonment in 526 where he awaited execution. As Boethius mourned his fate and untimely demise, he wrote his literary masterpiece: *De Consolatione Philosophiae*.

Boethius was an extensive writer. His philosophical work mainly falls into the category of Neoplatonism. In the third century, debates concerning the differences between Aristotelian

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6 Boethius’ categorization as a Neoplatonist is of scholarly debate, as he could be considered a Platonist. For the sake of this project and its length, this argument will not be explored and, for simplicity, his work will be considered Neoplatonic due to the time period in which it was written.
and Platonic philosophers reached new intensity. Plato’s philosophy took the form of dialogues where he posited rational arguments based on human observation. Through this method, he aimed to move from the general to the particular (i.e. observing an act of virtue v. questioning what is virtue itself) and was able to present theories about the universe and the divine in a compelling form. His *Timaeus* talks about the idea of a divine creator, cosmology, and the human soul as a host for intelligence and reflection of this deity.\(^7\) Aristotle was a student of Plato whose ideas built upon and diverged from his teacher. He critiqued Plato’s dialogues, reading them as metaphorical, and used other forms of logical and syllogistic writing to shift the study of ethics, psychology, physics, and cosmology away from the strong Platonic emphasis on metaphysics. Plato saw intelligence as part of the soul, whereas Aristotle saw it as an unchanging facet of the universe.\(^8\) One result of this conflict was a new branch of philosophy called Neoplatonism, which sought to combine logic and metaphysics. Neoplatonism is defined broadly as a school of thought that arose among Late Antique Greco-Roman philosophers that brought meta-discourse to philosophy and collated the sum of human wisdom about the human condition and natural world.\(^9\)

All of these concepts fascinated Boethius and he was determined to bridge some of the gaps between disparate philosophical schools, and thereby help solve and explain certain foundational mysteries of the world. His body of work is encyclopedic. There are his lost and fragmented translations and commentaries of Plato, Aristotle, the Neoplatonist Porphyry, and Cicero. Some of these works never had the chance to be completed due to Boethius’ tragic early

\(^8\) Marenbon, p. 7
death. They include: “a commentary on Cicero's Topics, translations and commentaries for Porphyry's Isagoge, and Aristotle's Prior Analytics, Categories, and Perihermeneias; translations of Aristotle's Topics and Sophistici elenchi.” He wrote twice on syllogism with De Differentiis Topicis and De Divisione. Boethius also wrote theological essays on the Trinity and a “polemic text against several heresies.” Then there are his attempts to systematically resolve some of the thorniest problems of knowledge and the Liberal Arts: Institutio Arithmetica and De Institutione Musica. Lastly, there is Boethius’ most well known and best remembered work, a dialogue called De Consolatione Philosophiae. The writings of Boethius leave him with a legacy of a true scholarly genius well versed with knowledge in nearly every area of study.

One of Boethius’s foremost scholarly readers, Henry Chadwick, notes that the De Institutione Musica reveals a therapeutic element to Boethius’ writings. He says that:

[Boethius] enjoys anecdotes of music therapy, of Terpander and Arion delivering Lesbians and Ionians from plague by their songs, or of Empedocles calming an angry armed man by music. Martianus Capella13 similarly stresses its curative effects on the sick in mind and body. Among the mathematical sciences, declares the sixth century commentator on Aristotle Elias, music alone has the capacity to bring therapy to both the body and soul.14

These comments give historical context for the role music played in the lives of people living in the Classical and Late Antique world. Music was considered curative, healing for both the mind

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11 Conte, p. 715
12 Conte, p. 715
and body. They also require further probing as to how therapeutic means play a role in the work of Boethius. Music and poetry often go hand in hand. Songs are composed melodically and poetry is written in meters. This is an important connection when looking at Boethius’ *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, a work that is prosemetric in nature, switching between sections of prose and poetry.

As stated previously, the *De Consolatione Philosophiae* is a philosophical dialogue. Boethius wrote the text during his imprisonment leading up to his execution. The text predominantly operates from a first-person perspective, but its autobiographical elements are of scholarly debate. Scholars sometimes refer to the narrator as Boethius and other times simply as the narrator. In my project, I will make the distinction between Boethius the author and Boethius the narrator, referring to them as BA and BN respectively. The dialogue is between BN and a personification of Lady Philosophy, who appears in the second passage—the first prose section—of the prosimetric work. The narrator is in prison and mourning his life, the positions he held in the Senate, and is overcome with grief about his impending death. Lady Philosophy manifests to him and through a mixture of Platonic dialogue and poetic verses, attempts to console BN by reminding him of who he truly is. The dialogue covers topics such as good and evil, free will, identity, the divine, unhappiness, indulgence, philosophy, and the Muses. Lady Philosophy and the tactics she uses to console BN is where my focus lies.

This project will focus on the personification of Lady Philosophy and her role within the *Consolation*. More specifically, I will be looking at the methods she uses to alleviate the mental anguish that has befallen the narrator. In the course of my re-reading of the *Consolation*, I intend to show that Lady Philosophy functions not just as a friendly conversation partner, nor as an
impersonal philosopher, but as a healing therapist. In order to do this, I will frame close readings of Boethius’s text with examinations of ancient and modern conceptions of therapy. Ensuing discussions will lead us through what may, on the surface, appear very disparate fields of study, from the ancient practice of psychagogy, to modern methods of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. Ultimately, the goal of this project is to reveal the ways in which Boethius’s *Consolation* may help us to forge connections between the academic discipline of philosophy and the search for self-knowledge and self-help performed through therapy.

**A Scholarly Look at the *Consolation*: the 1980s - the Present**

Interest in the *Consolation* is nothing new. Commentaries and translations date back to Regimus of Auxerre in the tenth century, with the most notable medieval commentary being produced in 1335 by William of Aragon.¹⁵ English translators of the *Consolation* famously included King Alfred, Geoffrey Chaucer, and Queen Elizabeth I.¹⁶ It is even thought that Chaucer took inspiration from Boethius’ *Consolation* in his own writings.¹⁷ With such famous historical figures interacting with the *Consolation*, whether through producing commentaries, translations, or their own inspired works, it is clear that Boethius’ text has captivated people for over a millennium.

The intrigue surrounding the *Consolation of Philosophy* continues and generates modern scholarly debates about the intent of the text and how it should be interpreted. In general, these debates are preoccupied with whether the work is completed, the meaning of its unique mix of

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¹⁷ Minnis, p. 334
prose and meter, the dynamics of intertextuality as it pertains to classical literature, and the circumstances of Boethius’ life that brought him to write this *magnum opus*. This section will detail several ways in which literary scholars read the *Consolation* and what they believe is the primary purpose of the text. A chronological analysis of scholarly work on the *Consolation* from the 1980s to the present shows an interesting move away from the purely literary and philological readings of the text to an investigation of its emotional and psychological impact.

In her essay “Literary Design in the *De Consolatione Philosophiae*,” literary scholar Anna Crabbe reads the *Consolation* as a philosophical text that makes references to other notable figures and creates interplay with an assortment of philosophical schools of thought. Crabbe’s argument hinges mainly on analysis of the text’s metaphors and personifications. She is most interested in the formal relationship between philosophy and poetry.

Her essay begins with a brief praise for the literary work of ancient philosophers, admiring their creativity and skill. She then sorts Boethius into the philosophical tradition of both Platonism and Neoplatonism.\(^\text{18}\) Crabbe links this dual philosophical sortment to the logic and style of text in the *Consolation* as well as the historical context in which it was written. She says that:

> The group of philosophical writings, both Greek and Latin, from which Boethius assembled his material and arguments, ‘consolatio,’ protreptic and discussion of the nature of the soul, is a consistent one. It turns on the same questions of rejection of this world, the pursuit of the ‘summum bonum,’ the understanding of man’s existence and essence. Much of its metaphorical vocabulary is also common ground: imprisonment and freedom, exile and return, slavery and tyranny and the like.\(^\text{19}\)

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\(^{19}\) Crabbe, p. 241-242
This statement establishes several things. It explains how Boethius’ philosophy fits into Platonism as someone focused on logic, imprisonment, and the nature of man with elements of Neoplatonism as someone delving into discussions surrounding theology. From here, Crabbe delves deeper into the metaphor of imprisonment in the *Consolation*.

Imprisonment is a common metaphor throughout literature spanning the Roman Empire into Late Antiquity. The Roman Empire was one of constant political turmoil and the elite were often faced with imprisonment, exile, or execution as those holding positions of power ebbed and flowed. Crabbe compares Boethius to Ovid, Cicero, Seneca, Socrates, and Augustine. She imagines Boethius–Author and Narrator–mulling over such fates and imagining his own as he wrote the *Consolation*. Out of all the figures mentioned, Crabbe spends the most time relating the connections between Boethius, Ovid, and Augustine.

While Ovid’s exile poetry delights in the Muses, Boethius’ poetry is a rejection of them in favor of a more Platonic and philosophical understanding of meter. For Crabbe, the comparison goes only so far as to say that:

Premature old age and a death-wish are features to common to [Ovid and Boethius’ works], although the discussion of Death’s insensitivity and uncertain temper belongs as much to the philosophical diatribe or indeed the ‘consolatio’ proper as to the Ovidian elegy.  

The themes presented in both authors' works may be similar, but they play different fundamental roles. Ovid’s poetry is personal and emotionally driven. These are still present elements in Boethius’ *Consolation*, but the purpose is to reject these strong feelings and return to one’s true self through philosophical teachings.

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20 Crabbe, p. 243
21 Crabbe, p. 246
Crabbe shifts here to discuss the personifications in the *Consolation*. The Muses and Philosophy herself are figures that Boethius personifies in his work. The description of the Muses is something we get through the eyes of Lady Philosophy, who sees them as sirens, whores, and harlots.\(^\text{22}\) She explains that this is because for Boethius “poetry and indeed the whole art of music was a dangerous affair, requiring rigorous discipline to make safe.”\(^\text{23}\) This does not mean that music lacks a place in philosophy. On the contrary, we see prose and meter in the Consolation for a reason. Crabbe explains the intimate link between philosophy and poetry, saying that “[t]he relationship has a strong historical basis in that in its infancy much natural philosophy used didactic poetry as its vehicle.”\(^\text{24}\) Lady Philosophy has such a distaste for the Muses because Boethius Narrator is valuing them over her.

As for the personification of Lady Philosophy herself, Crabbe does a dual analysis of Augustine and Boethius’ works. In Augustine’s *De Ordine*, he imagines Philosophy as a woman “brutally domineering” as she attempts to pull Augustine away from the Muses and their devilish poetics.\(^\text{25}\) His portrayal is quite the opposite of the one given by Boethius. While both call her mistress, ‘*domina,*’ the role Lady Philosophy plays in the Consolation is that of what Crabbe refers to as medicinal. She states:

*[Boethius] is remarkably well-restrained about casting philosophy herself in the answering role of a desirable woman. Physician, wet-nurse, teacher, proctress, any other in the long list of common metaphors, yet the most frequent characterization as the woman desired above all others, unearthly love instead of worldly, is played down to a surprising extent.*\(^\text{26}\)

\(^{22}\) Crabbe, p. 249  
\(^{23}\) Crabbe, p. 250  
\(^{24}\) Crabbe, p. 251  
\(^{25}\) Crabbe, p. 252  
\(^{26}\) Crabbe, p. 257
This statement refers back to comments made earlier in the chapter about the role Lady Philosophy plays in the *Consolation*. For Boethius, Lady Philosophy is a nearly divine woman whose teachings can bring him back to his former self. Lady Philosophy is someone who “diagnoses his problem and brings him gradually to recognize that it is his own distorted perception that has allowed temporal circumstance and mundane ill-fortune to affect him.”

Crabbe’s understanding of Lady Philosophy is that of a sort of healer.

Moving into the 2000s, literary criticism surrounding the *Consolation* remains relatively unchanged, only starting to dig deeper into the work by preceding scholars. Danuta Shanzer details several different ways of understanding Boethius’ *De Consolatione Philosophiae* in her essay “Interpreting the Consolation.” Like Crabbe, she focuses on the connections between Boethius and other Latin authors. She places special emphasis on intertextuality as a literary tool of analysis, and demonstrates how Boethius may have used techniques of allusion, to authors such as Vergil, to convey context to educated readers. She compares the *Consolation*’s opening lines “*Carmina qui quondam studio florente peregi, / Flebilis heu maestos cogor inire modos*” to both Vergil’s *Aeneid* and *Georgics*. This intertextual aspect is the mode with which Shanzer reads the *Consolation*. She views the connections between Boethius and other Latin works as the key to understanding the value of the *Consolation*.

Shanzer’s critical survey then moves on to consider the *Consolation* as a dialogue, and its place in the history of the dialogue in philosophy. The conversation partner Boethius chooses for the *Consolation* is the personification of Lady Philosophy. Personification in the period of Late

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27 Crabbe, p. 238
Antiquity, Shanzer shows, was used by authors like Martianus Capella, Augustine, and Sidonius to represent epiphany or revelation. One way in which Boethius’s dialogue stands distinct from this contemporary tradition of dialogic personification involves the matter of religion. Unlike Augustine or Sidonius, Boethius did not bother to Christianize his pagan personification of Lady Philosophy and she is left reminiscent of otherwise divine figures like Athena, Thetis, and Hypatia.  

Having laid this groundwork, Shanzer is then able to examine the unique form of Boethius’ *Consolation*. The book is composed using both prose and poetry, making it similar in quality to prosemetrical satires like Varro's *Menippeae*, Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*, and Julian's *Caesares*. The mix of prose and poetry allows for a broader intertextual interpretation. It is not only Vergil who Boethius references, but other prominent Latin authors. This prosemetry raises questions about the *Consolation’s* generic taxonomy. Generic classification is not something that Shanzer herself attempts. Instead, she argues against positions made by other scholars and the methodologies they use to classify the *Consolation’s* genre. She denounces satirical interpretations and points toward the dialogic elements, highlighting its pedagogical use in the history of philosophy. Shanzer$vouches$ for careful, close readings for obscure messages in the text.

Some of the remaining issues with the *Consolation* are questions of its completeness, audience, and Christianity. The question of completeness remains open, but Shanzer suggests that it is possible to read any work as unfinished if one wished to make that claim. As for the audience, it is almost certainly Roman Aristocrats. This aligns with Shanzer’s intertextual

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30 Shanzer, p. 228-232
31 Shanzer, p. 233
32 Shanzer, p. 233-235
interpretation, seeing as Roman Aristocrats would most certainly be familiar with the other authors Boethius’ alludes to. The Christianity of the Consolation is a point of great contention for literary scholars. Shanzer reads Boethius’ silence as an author of the matter to be an answer. Boethius himself is a confirmed Christian, but Christianity is intentionally excluded from the Consolation for, what Shanzer believes, a curious look at philosophy and religion. She concludes that the Consolation is a rich text with mixed generic qualities that only drew attention centuries after it was written.33

Things become a bit more interesting as we move into the 2010s when there is a shift from the purely literary mode of reading the Consolation to one considering the emotional impact of the text on its readers. Scholar Anders Cullhed provides a chapter on Boethius and the Consolation of Philosophy in his book The Shadow of Creusa where he discusses the various literary traditions Boethius employs and adds onto the work of Crabbe and Shanzer. More specifically, he adds on to Crabbe’s conception of Lady Philosophy and the role of personification in the Consolation. His analysis starts with historical context for the literary modes Boethius uses: comedy, rhetoric, and dialogue.34 Then, he begins to discuss the personification of both the Muses and Lady Philosophy. For Cullhed, the Muses are where a “pathological argument against fiction comes to the fore: it is treacherous and dangerous, tempting us with its allures but exercising a disintegrating effect on our souls.”35 The Muses in the Consolation worsen Boethius Narrator’s mood and this must be corrected by Lady Philosophy. It is a case against fiction in favor of reason.

33 Shanzer. p. 240-245
35 Cullhed, p. 438
This may seem paradoxical since the *Consolation of Philosophy* is composed of both prose and meter. How can it be a fictional work against fiction and poetry in favor of reason and philosophy, but making its argument through prosemetry? Cullhed says the solution is simple. The Lady Philosophy of Boethius has Muses of her own who “promote as well as embody Philosophy’s rational music” and “execute her therapeutic message.” Philosophy uses the tools of the Muses against them to console her student back to her discipline. She is cunning, intelligent, and more powerful than the inferior Muses of the arts.

These qualities that Boethius gives to his personification of Lady Philosophy relate to Cullhed’s account of gender roles. He says that:

> Philosophy resembles a man disguised as a woman. She is in command of her own Muses, the philosophical ones. Their music is controlled by reason and may be described in terms of a carefully dosed antidepressant drug. It is in accord with the harmony of the spheres, it regulates the changes of the element and the seasons, and it tempers the state of human souls.\(^{37}\)

The Lady Philosophy we see in the *Consolation* is not very lady-like for the Classical or Late Antique world. Femininity and its associated qualities were viewed as seductive and tempting for the ancients; a distraction from the more virtuous and disciplined work of rhetoric and reason. Boethius’ Lady Philosophy is much more masculine in nature as she works to heal the narrator with her rigid dialogue.

Thus, the narrative pattern of the Consolation is a dialogic form that resembles an epic. Cullhed describes it as “the supernatural correction of a hero gone astray.” Boethius Narrator has not gone on a physical journey like Odysseus, rather a mental one where Lady Philosophy works “to release the author’s alter ego from his entanglement in the web of fiction so as to restore his

\(^{36}\) Cullhed, p. 441
\(^{37}\) Cullhed, p. 439
reason’s unimpeded view of the universe, of the cosmic numbers and the causes of things.”

All of these threads—rhetoric, dialogue, poetry, and allegory—weave together a text that Cullhed concludes is about spiritual ascension.

Lady Philosophy performs a sort of therapy to raise the Narrator out of his depression, away from the Muses, and towards his true self. This is a cognitive process that mirrors religious ascension. Boethius breaks down human cognition into our senses, imagination, reason, and divine intelligence, which is a hierarchy that Cullhed relates to scholastic psychology (444). Cullhed credits this process to the Hellenistic nature of Boethius’ Lady Philosophy who he claims is part Platonic, part Stoic. She works “as a therapist and converting [Boethius’] own alter ego into her patient” and curing him through philosophical methods. However, Cullhed does not explore the psychological implications of this, choosing to instead focus on imagination and its relationship to fictional narrative.

Another scholar from the 2010s, Stephen Blackwood, reads the *Consolation* in an entirely different manner. Though, the scholarly focus continues to move more toward the relation between the text and its readers and how we should engage with ancient literature. In his book, *The Consolation of Boethius as Poetic Liturgy*, Blackwood emphasizes a component that Crabbe, Shanzer, and Cullhed overlook: the musical aspect. Later Latin poetry—one of the two primary modes of writing in the *Consolation*—has an inherent musical quality. Blackwood covers the historical context of the interrelation among music, literature, and reading in Boethius’s era and compares them to our modern understandings of these topics. Through a reading that privileges

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38 Cullhed, p. 440
39 Cullhed, p. 442
the acoustic elements of the *Consolation*, Blackwood seeks to demonstrate that an enunciated, or even sung, performance of the text reveals its true intellectual depth and inner-workings.

Modern practices of engaging with written works are drastically different from those of the Classical Era, Late Antiquity, or the Medieval Ages. Blackwood notes that Greek and Latin texts were written without punctuation or spacing between words (i.e. *scriptura continua*). The lack of break between words combined with the complex grammatical structures of the Latin language, which uses case endings and verbal conjugations, makes the act of reading much more demanding than modern texts. This is key to understanding the *Consolation*, though, because it demonstrates how ancient texts were composed to be read aloud and not silently.

The historical context in which a text is written is critical to fully understanding the text itself. If we read the *Consolation* in the same manner as we would read a book from any other period besides its own, then our experience would be fundamentally different. Blackwood explains that:

> By transcribing the *scriptura continua* of ancient texts into our punctuated, word-separated text, we have made it possible to read these works quickly and silently, which is indeed what we do nearly all of the time. But in the process of this transcription we lose the sound, and with it everything else in the text that makes sense only when it is heard. Every author writes for an expected audience, medium, and context, and therefore the conditions of a work’s reception are inevitably in the author’s mind at the time of composition.\(^1\)

Thus, in order to read the *Consolation*, we must be familiar with Boethius’ place in literary history, his other works, and even his personal philosophical beliefs surrounding music and poetry.


\(^{41}\) Blackwood, p. 9
Blackwood explains the concepts of the ancient liberal arts: the *quadrivium* and the *trivium*. The *quadrivium* was the study of astronomy, music, geometry, and arithmetic and the *trivium* was the study of grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic. Together, the *quadrivium* and *trivium* paired the sciences with the arts to help students attain a higher intellectual grasp on the world.

Blackwood then continues to explore Boethius’ *De Institutione Musica* as an example of Boethius’ musical opinions. The text focuses on proportional arithmetic of harmony, melody and rhythm. For Boethius, music theory and the power of sound can lead to ascension of the soul.\(^{43}\)

Blackwood summarizes Boethius’ point, saying:

[The] body and soul are so completely and involuntarily related by the sounds and ratios of music that it is ‘beyond doubt that music is so naturally united with us that we cannot be free from it even if we so desired.’ And therefore, because we cannot escape music’s hold upon us, ‘the power of the intellect ought to be summoned, so that this art, innate through nature, may also be mastered, comprehended through knowledge.’\(^{44}\)

Someone who believes that music is fundamental to knowledge and the world is bound to incorporate that belief into their works. Blackwood shows us that knowing Boethius’ stance on music as an inherently powerful aspect of the human condition, related almost mathematically or scientifically to the status and state of our minds and souls, as well as appreciating the audible essence of ancient literary culture, is crucial to reading the *Consolation*.

Having set this background, Blackwood finally turns to the *Consolation* itself. He views the book as a self-aware dramatic dialogue due to its metatextual qualities. Like the previous scholars, he notes the prosimetric form of the *Consolation*. However, he pays much closer

\(^{42}\) Blackwood, p. 11

\(^{43}\) Blackwood, p. 12

\(^{44}\) Blackwood, p. 14
attention to Boethius’ word choice as the speaker or singer of each section switches. Blackwood points out that:

The narration that is used to recount this dialogue requires near constant use of verbs that describe an oral exchange: *inquit, dixit, ait, inquam, cantabas, delatravi, dixerat, cecinisset, modulata est*, and so forth. These words are not only technically necessary (that is, to describe an act of speaking or singing), but they also give clear signposts to the listener, marking the transition between speakers while tracing the development of the narrative.45

The Latin text of the *Consolation* frequently employs words that involve speaking and listening. These words are exchanged between BN and Lady Philosophy, but when the text is read out loud, they also work as an exchange between speaker and listener. Thus, the argument for a spoken reading of the *Consolation* is much more compelling.

Lady Philosophy sings most of the poems herself and—as Blackwood points out—arrives at BN’s distress singing about the dangers and benefits of music. BN has fallen ill to the bad music (i.e. the Muses) and must now be restored to his health by good music (i.e. Lady Philosophy). Blackwood describes Lady Philosophy as appearing “to restore to health, by music, a man whom music has made ill.”46 Her role is curative and her methods melodic. The result is a prosemetric dialogue that performs a sort of musical therapy.

My project will broaden the understanding of Lady Philosophy and her character in the *Consolation of Philosophy*. Shanzer’s piece entirely lacks a portrait of Lady Philosophy, only briefly mentioning the personification of women in Late Antique works. Crabbe gently brushes the surface of portraiture as she calls Lady Philosophy a nurse. Blackwood gets closer to understanding the therapeutic role of Lady Philosophy through his analysis of music theory. The

45 Blackwood, p. 16
46 Blackwood, p. 19
best picture is painted by Cullhed, who repeatedly references the psychotherapeutic work Lady Philosophy performs. However, that is not the focus of his piece and the topic is not explored as in depth as it deserves. Lady Philosophy is not merely a healer, teacher, or doctor—she is all in one—and such a role is aptly defined as our modern conception of a therapist. Through a close reading of the *Consolation of Philosophy* using the ancient practice of psychagogy as a framework with references to modern Cognitive Behavior Therapy, I will argue that Boethius’ personification of Lady Philosophy is performing the role of a psychagogue, and what contemporary readers may consider to be a therapist.
Chapter 2: Investigating Ancient and Modern Therapy

Philosophy and psychotherapy have a historical relationship. From the Classical Era of Ancient Greece, the concepts of psychagogy and psychagogues provide us with intriguing parallels and possible early origins for modern therapists and psychotherapy. Psychagogy comes from the Ancient Greek word ψυχαγωγία, a combination of the word ψυχή (soul) and ἄγω (lead), meaning an “evocation of souls from the nether world.” It is this sort of imagery that we should keep in mind as we explore the ancient figure of the psychagogue. Early Christian scholar Paul Kolbet explains psychagogy and its history in his book Augustine and the Cure of Souls.

Psychagogy, according to Kolbet’s account, involves rhetorical strategies and techniques for applying therapy to the soul. It was developed in the ancient world as a way to communicate truth through persuasive speech and, in doing so, enchant or charm the soul by guiding it toward said truth. In order to do this, the psychagogue—who for all intents and purposes is a rhetor—must be familiar with the truth concerning the subject matter of their speech, have an understanding of the soul, and possess the ability to convey this knowledge to various audiences or types of souls. The tentative nature of the psychagogue gives them a form of diagnostic capacity, allowing them to heal souls through their words. Kolbet says that:

[j]ust as medicine seeks methodically to determine the intricacies of the body in order to cure it, so psychagogic rhetoric, to achieve its therapeutic aim, must possess a thorough knowledge of that to which it pertains—the soul. Since psychagogy pertains to the soul, the manner through which a person is guided to the truth must vary in accordance with the type of soul the person possesses. This means that a

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48 Kolbet, Paul R. Augustine and the Cure of Souls: Revising a Classical Ideal, University of Notre Dame, 2010. P. 31
psychagogue must be able to distinguish between different kinds of souls so that they may be able to persuade any particular soul toward the truth. Giving a simple speech to a complex soul, for instance, would not be persuasive enough because the knowledge being shared by the psychagogue would not require the soul to think critically. Likewise, giving a complex speech to a simple soul would be ineffective because the soul would not be able to understand a subject matter higher than itself.

Comparisons to modern medicinal practices are easy to make. The soul is the patient, truth is the medicine, and the psychagogue is the doctor. In order to perform the proper treatment, a doctor must administer the medicine to the patient at the proper dosage. The same holds true for the psychagogue and their curative speeches. Additionally, if we are to view the psychagogue as a doctor, then we may conceive of the type of medical procedure as akin to a psycho-therapeutic one due to a) the concern relating to the soul or mind, and b) the oratory method through which the treatment is administered. Just as a modern day talk therapist often bases their advice on each individual patient to best assist them with their struggles, the ancient psychagogue assesses what type of soul they are working with to make a speech that will guide said soul to the truth. Psychagogic care is rhetorical, conversational, and personalized to each individual or soul.

Kolbet credits the foundational theory of psychagogy to Plato, looking specifically at his *Phaedrus*. For Kolbet, this text articulates clearly and for the first time the principles and goals of psychagogy, and also fundamentally connects this ancient therapeutic rhetoric to the work of philosophy. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates gives several speeches to the title character. Phaedrus’ soul is in love with eloquent speeches (thanks to the influence of his beloved Lysias) and Socrates
aims to shift that love toward what he views as the appropriate love: that of wisdom, i.e. philosophy. In the second and most notable speech in the dialogue, Socrates uses myth to speak indirectly to Phaedrus’ soul. He does this by describing the souls of the gods and human souls as charioteers. The souls of the gods are able to ascend to heaven through knowledge, but the human souls flounder with only their opinions, beliefs, and perceptions. Socrates explains that not all hope is lost, for human souls can imitate the gods through raising their minds and seeking the truth—in other words, through philosophizing. Telling the story of different types of souls is a psychagogic technique Socrates uses to inspire Phaedrus into reflecting on the state of his own soul. This speech is effective and Phaedrus moves from being interested in repeating speeches verbatim to being able to produce speeches on his own at any time through gaining the power of wisdom or philosophy. Socrates’ psychagogy manages to move Phaedrus so much that the dialogue ends with the two men philosophizing together before Phaedrus returns home to try and charm Lysias’ soul to philosophy as well.\textsuperscript{49} In this way, Kolbet’s analysis of Plato’s \textit{Phaedrus} frames it as a sort of metatext: being about psychagogy while also acting as a manual for how to perform psychagogy, complete with a case study showcasing its methodology and ultimate goal.

Kolbet’s interpretation of the \textit{Phaedrus} provides us with the core tenets of psychagogic practices. These tenets are \textit{orality, accommodation, opinion,} and \textit{ascension}. The oral aspect of psychagogy is crucial because it allows for the sharing of information to be conversational. Unlike with a written philosophical text, a psychagogue can speak back to their audience and rephrase things dynamically to make them more clear depending on who the audience is. In Plato’s \textit{Phaedrus}, Socrates says that written words are “words which cannot defend themselves

\textsuperscript{49} Kolbet, p. 32-33
by argument and cannot teach the truth effectually,“ making philosophical documents suitable for reminders in old age, but not in themselves sufficient for knowledge acquisition; text is for studying, not learning. Kolbet, who takes inspiration from Plato, says this is the “inadequacy” of writing as a medium since:

[s]peaking the same word over and over without explanation, writing can neither adapt itself to the state of the soul of the reader nor to the particularities of the occasion. Even the best of texts, therefore, are in need of oral supplementation.\textsuperscript{51}

Speech allows for information to be shared actively rather than passively. Textualized information is static and frozen in the original words of an author on a page. On the other hand, a psychagogue can vary their spoken words, altering their phrasing to convey the same meaning, but with optimal effectiveness with respect to the listener. Plato similarly places an importance on the conversational aspect of teaching. In the Phaedrus, Socrates stresses that it is not only written work which one should view as of limited philosophical value—serving “only to remind us of what we know,”—but also recitations delivered “without opportunity for questioning and teaching."\textsuperscript{52} This indicates that any serious work of philosophy must take the form of a dialogue, for learning is brought about through the asking and answering of questions. For Plato, spoken word is necessary for sharing and discovering knowledge. Psychagogy relies on open conversation. All psychagogy is rhetorical, but not all rhetoric is psychagogic.

Although Plato’s \textit{Phaedrus} is itself a written work, the text emphasizes the importance of a spoken dialogue between two people. The text is a medium to convey knowledge and train


\textsuperscript{51} Kolbet, p. 34

psychagogues in their methodology, but is not the cure in and of itself. This contradiction is part of what makes the *Phaedrus* metatextual. The dialogue between Socrates and Phaedrus serves as an example for how psychagogy ought to be performed and is not itself the act of psychagogy. Reading is a solitary activity whereas conversation is not. The *Phaedrus* provides a commentary on psychagogy by representing its performance in text.

The oral aspect leads into the next tenet of psychagogy: accommodation. A psychagogue needs to be attuned to the particularities of their patient in order to share their wisdom in a way that will resonate with that specific soul. According to Kolbet, psychagogic theory requires that the “speech encouraging the positive movement [toward wisdom] is accommodated to the state of the soul of the conversation partner.”

In Plato, the soul is a necessary characteristic of an animate and living being that is similar to our modern conception of the mind, with some major caveats—Plato’s “soul” being simultaneously broader and narrower in definition. Plato’s characterization of the soul breaks it down into three distinct parts: reason, appetite, and spirit. The soul is capable of cognitive and intellectual reason and judgment, though its faculties are limited to only a subset of psychological activities. Though all the peculiarities of Plato’s theory of soul exceed the scope of this project, there are important ramifications for psychagogy. Most importantly for psychagogues is that the soul has its own desires separate from those of the body.

The soul will not be moved toward wisdom unless the information is conveyed in a way that addresses the desire of the soul, and reaches the listener in understandable terms tailored to that desire. It is the psychagogue’s job to make sure that the speech they use aligns with the

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53 Kolbet, p. 36
particular soul to whom they are speaking; the psychagogue’s understanding is not just of the knowledge they are imparting, but of their conversation partner as well. Psychagogy is dependent, therefore, on both a personal relationship, as well as the psychagogue’s conception of the nature of souls in general, which falls in the domain of philosophy. For this reason, accommodation is not just a key feature of psychagogic practice, but a fundamental part of what makes a dialogue psychagogy, and part of what relates psychagogy to philosophy. Outside of dialogue, though, there are a range of discursive techniques at the disposal of a psychagogue for reaching any given soul. In psychagogy, it is not always a matter of what truth is said, but how it is said to a person that makes the difference. Kolbet notes that “‘Poetry and oratory’ in the hands of such an able psychagogue then ‘can do more than make lies sound like truth. They are also means for making truth sound like truth—the only means, on many occasions, that are available.’” Depending on what type of soul a psychagogue is working with, poetry may be a more compelling manner of speech than traditional oratory. It is up to the psychagogue to not only evaluate what type of soul they are working with, but to be skilled in various methods of disseminating information to ensure that they are getting their message across.

Since psychagogues are working with various types of souls, it also means that they are dealing with a wide array of opinions held by individual souls. Everybody holds opinions about themselves and the world. It is part of the psychagogue’s job to navigate these opinions and redirect them toward the truth. Kolbet states that, guiding “souls to become literate in the ‘letters of everything’ requires working with the opinions that they already possess.”

Think about it this way: imagine you are a mathematician with the goal of teaching someone algebra. You

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55 Kolbet, p. 37
cannot expect this person to be able to solve for unknown variables in long algebraic expressions if they do not already know basic arithmetic (i.e. addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division). Therefore, before you can teach them algebra, you must first teach them arithmetic. This sort of instructional scaffolding is the type of procedure Plato insists the psychagogue must follow. Indeed, Plato “believes, nonetheless, that the process of coming to full understanding for human beings includes intermediate steps involving belief.” Just as the mathematician needs to guide someone through the basics of mathematics before teaching more complicated equations, the psychagogue has necessary intermediate steps involving the adjustment of opinions and prejudgments. This means that psychagogic speech “requires the use of words and concepts that are less than ideal as the guide descends into the murky water of opinions, judgments, and beliefs rather than knowledge.”

Opinion is merely a stepping stone on one’s way to true knowledge. Plato believes ignorance has more to do with what someone presumes to know rather than what they do not know. Plato’s allegory of the cave is about people living chained in the dark where they watch shadows on the wall in front of them. These people are ignorant that there is a world outside of the cave and, for this reason, believe the shadows to be true since it is all they can see and do not know any better. Kolbet says that these people in Plato’s cave have “become too accustomed to darkness to tolerate sudden daylight” of the outside world. It is possible that natural light could blind these people if they are not gradually guided out of the cave. That dangerous and potentially blinding power of the sudden exposure to daylight—the truth—is why a psychagogue is necessary. The psychagogue works to help a person gradually shift their preconceived beliefs to

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56 ibid.
57 Kolbet, p. 36
new ones that are closer to, if not explicitly, the truth. Kolbet says that through the process of psychagogy as seen in Plato’s dialogues, “the professed beliefs of Socrates’ interlocutors are used as evidence that reveals upon examination the real beliefs that inform their judgments. Through this joint inquiry, reflection is used ‘to lift the knowledge we already possess into consciousness.’” People cannot come to true knowledge unless they know how to test the truth of their beliefs and prejudices. Psychagogues bring these preconceptions held in people’s consciousnesses to the surface where they are then examined and redirected. The psychagogic “procedure attempts to lead people to enough self-knowledge that they ‘lose their inflated and rigid beliefs about themselves,’” allowing them to progress toward knowledge of the outside world.58 It is only once someone has conquered self-knowledge that they can then move on to discovering other, higher forms of knowledge.

When self-knowledge is mastered, a person can move on to the final step in the psychagogic process: ascension. There is no point in attempting to philosophize with someone who does not possess the ability of self-reflection, for it is this ability that allows a person to remove previously held beliefs about themselves and the world and replace them with new ones. As Kolbet puts it, “The beautiful words of the philosopher could seduce people away from that with which they were familiar toward an understanding of the true nature of themselves and the world. This process entailed, first of all, a thorough, critical assessment of prior convictions that as often as not led to their abandonment.”59 Having critically assessed their prior knowledge, a person is then able to move forward and ascend toward a more enlightened version of themselves and the world they inhabit.

58 Kolbet, p. 35
59 Kolbet, p. 40
Paul Kolbet is not investigating Boethius or his Consolation exactly. Instead, his summary of Platonic psychagogy is foundational to his analysis of a predecessor of Boethius: Saint Augustine (354-430 CE). Kolbet’s book is about how Augustine develops this Platonic philosophical and rhetorical tradition for the sake of Christianity in the fourth century—roughly one hundred years before Boethius’ time. Augustine’s work involves a number of tropes and themes that Boethius, a later Neoplatonist and Christian, will pick up on and further expand upon in the Consolation.

The earliest works in Augustine’s corpus are all philosophical dialogues. These dialogues, written in Cassiciacum in the late 380s CE, predate his ecclesiastical career and are his only writings to take on a dialogic form. They are not, however, his only works to contain Platonic philosophical thought—and many of those strands have psychagogic resonance. His famous memoir, the Confessions, contains anecdotes of his encounters with Platonic philosophy that follow a psychagogic pattern, to some extent. Book VII of the Confessions has a famous passage of Platonic “ascent” that is inspired by reading Neoplatonist texts on contemplation and cosmology. Prepared by a reading of Neoplatonic texts (Book VII.9.13), Augustine undergoes an intellectual experience in which he claims through contemplation of a Platonic sense of God. Elsewhere, in Augustine’s Sermon 38, one of the roughly 500 sermons of his to survive, contains an extended metaphor of Christ as a physician—an image that gives insight into the way Christian teachings were thought to have therapeutic qualities. This is particularly pertinent to


psychagogy due to the explicit reference to souls and the health of souls. Augustine says that “For as the soul is better than the body, so is the saving health of the soul better than the health of the body,” and that this healing of souls comprise the “greater cures” the Lord provides. We don’t want to digress too far into the depths of Augustine’s thought here. The main point, and one I want to develop in later sections of this project, is that Augustine serves as a primary intermediary between Plato and Boethius in the psychagogic tradition.

Part of this project is historical—continuing the line of psychagogy’s development through antiquity from point A (Plato) to point (B) Augustine to point C (Boethius). However, this project is not purely interested in describing Boethius’s Consolation as the logical fulfillment of this ancient, psychagogic tradition. The ensuing reading of the Consolation will not merely show that it contains elements of Platonic or Augustinian psychagogy. Learning about this ancient tradition also calls to mind present forms of therapy. Looking to modern ideas of therapeutic discourse, this project wants to discover the ways in which contemporary practices of therapy, and in particular Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT), may help us to understand the rhetoric and therapeutic activity that takes hold in the Consolation. Doing so will allow us to more clearly look at the role Lady Philosophy performs within the text and what exactly it is that she is doing to alleviate BN’s illness. First, we must ensure that we know what CBT is and how it works.

A Modern Reinvention of Psychagogy?

Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) has its origins in the 1960s with Dr. Aaron T. Beck as a psychotherapeutic method for patients dealing with mental health concerns, predominantly

63 Sermon 38.3
Major Depressive Disorder (MDD), more commonly referred to as depression. In his search to empirically validate psychoanalysis, Beck instead found a new explanation for depression, identifying “distorted, negative cognition (primarily thoughts and beliefs) as a primary feature of depression” and then went on to develop a form of “short-term treatment, one of whose primary targets was the reality testing of patients’ depressed thinking.”

Beck’s model focuses on the cognitive formulations that characterize specific disorders and applies techniques to modify a patient’s thinking and behavior. His “cognitive model proposes that dysfunctional thinking (which influences the patient’s mood and behavior) is common to all psychological disturbances” and that people have “automatic thoughts,” which they can be taught to recognize and make more realistic or rational. A triumphant discourse emerged around the efficacy of this new treatment in the late 1970s. It was “one of the first times that a talk therapy had been compared to a medication.”

To help explain and spread this mode of psychological treatment, in 1995 Beck’s daughter, Dr. Judith S. Beck wrote Cognitive Behavior Therapy: Basics and Beyond, now one of the leading textbooks in psychology and adjacent fields. Her work details the ins-and-outs of Cognitive Behavior Therapy and gives crucial insight into the methodology CBT clinicians use in modern psychotherapeutic practices.

Dr. Judith Beck breaks down the basic foundations of Cognitive Behavior Therapy into ten principles. She says that Cognitive Behavior Therapy:

1. is based on an ever-evolving formulation of patients’ problems and an individual conceptualization of each patient in cognitive terms
2. requires a sound therapeutic alliance

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65 Beck, p. 3
66 Beck, p. 5-6
3. emphasizes collaboration and active participation
4. is goal oriented and problem focused
5. initially emphasizes the present
6. is educative, aims to teach the patient to be her own therapist, and emphasizes relapse prevention
7. aims to be time limited
8. sessions are structured
9. teaches patients to identify, evaluate, and respond to their dysfunctional thoughts and beliefs
10. uses variety of techniques to change thinking, mood, and behavior\textsuperscript{67}

In addition to these ten principles of Cognitive Behavior Therapy, Beck asserts that a cognitive behavior therapist should be “proficient in basic counseling skills: listening, empathy, concern, positive regard, and genuineness, as well as accurate understanding, reflection, and summarizing.”\textsuperscript{68}

This list of principles overlaps nicely with the four core tenets of psychagogy outlined earlier. In what follows, I will analyze those areas of overlap with the goal of coming away with an enriched, psychologically critical idiom that we can then apply to our reading of Boethius’s therapies in the \textit{Consolation}. In summary, the overlap between psychagogy and CBT is seen in the “active participation” and “collaboration” that is involved in working with the “ever-evolving” thoughts held by a patient and the “educative” goals of both practices. However, we can be even more specific. The work a cognitive behavior therapist performs is fundamentally \textit{conversational}, in line with the first tenet of psychagogy. During therapeutic conversation, the practitioner of CBT must assess their patient’s individual problems and modes of thinking in order to provide personalized care, \textit{accommodating} for them as a psychagogue would for their audience. Dr. Beck says that:

\textsuperscript{67} Beck, p. 7-10
\textsuperscript{68} Beck, p. 13
Treatment is also based on a conceptualization, or understanding, of individual patients (their specific beliefs and patterns of behavior). The therapist seeks in a variety of ways to produce cognitive change—modification in the patient’s thinking and belief system—to bring about enduring emotional and behavioral change.\(^6^9\)

A cognitive behavior therapist works with these current thoughts or—as a psychagogue might call them—opinions to bring about self-awareness in the patient and redirect those thoughts to new, healthier ones. A main point of CBT is to teach a patient to recognize and understand their thinking so that they are able to navigate and reshape their thoughts on their own. In a way, this makes the patient ascend to a higher version of themselves—to enter into a self-sufficient state in which they are able to take on the role of a therapist on their own. Already, we can see parallels between a modern cognitive behavior therapist and a psychagogue.

The connections between Cognitive Behavior Therapy and psychagogy are even more apparent in the description Dr. Beck provides of how CBT works. She says that:

For lasting improvement in patients’ mood and behavior, cognitive therapists work at a deeper level of cognition: patients’ basic beliefs about themselves, their world, and other people. Modification of their underlying dysfunctional beliefs produces more enduring change. For example, if you continually underestimate your abilities, you might have an underlying belief of incompetence. Modifying this general belief (i.e., seeing yourself in a more realistic light as having both strengths and weaknesses) can alter your perception of specific situations that you encounter daily. You will no longer have as many thoughts with the theme, “I can’t do anything right.” Instead, in specific situations where you make mistakes, you will probably think, “I’m not good at this [specific task].”\(^7^0\)

A cognitive behavior therapist is working with not just any dysfunctional thoughts, but the “basic beliefs” a patient holds about themselves, the world, and other people. These are analogous to the sort of core beliefs that the psychagogue focuses on in their dialogues in order to guide souls.

\(^6^9\) Beck, p. 3

\(^7^0\) ibid.
toward the truth. A psychagogue, like a therapist, would focus on the belief that “I can’t do anything right.” They might compel their interlocutors to question their notion of “do” and “right.” They might also shift that statement away from its opinionated form into a more objective one of “I’m not good at this [specific task].” In order to reveal the true nature of things, the practitioner—whether therapist or psychagogue—must work through the preconceived beliefs someone holds about themselves to shed light on what thoughts of theirs are dysfunctional and why. For this reason, mastering self-knowledge is the primary step toward gaining knowledge about the general world in both ancient and modern therapeutic practices.

These overlaps suggest that the practice and/or idea of therapy might be a transcultural and transhistorical phenomenon. People in the sixth century were just as capable of using methods like conversation and accommodation to address unhealthy conditions of the mind as practitioners of CBT in the twenty-first century are. CBT, then, might not be the brand new invention of a novel mode of therapy, but one in a series of reinventions and reconfigurations of methods that existed and were applied at various points in the ancient world. CBT serves as a solid foundation for these connections, but future projects should explore other modern forms of therapy as well, such as Humanistic Psychotherapy and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy or ACT for short (spoken as a single word and not an acronym).  

Equipped with these idioms of therapeutic activity, and a new appreciation for their various techniques—many of which overlap from antiquity to modernity—we are now ready to pick back up a thread we left at the end of Chapter One. Critics of the Consolation have often remarked that the role Lady Philosophy plays in the text is a therapeutic one. However, they have

not elaborated on that observation in any rigorous way, informed by the traditions of psychagogy or modern ideas of therapeutic practice. Now we can try to say something more explicitly about whether and how Lady Philosophy is performing the role of a therapist.
Chapter 3: Lady Philosophy the Psychagogue

Scholarship analyzing characters within Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy* often place their focus heavily on the character of Boethius Narrator. This project seeks to further explore the *Consolation* through broadening character analysis and turning the focus to the other–often glossed over–main character in the text: Lady Philosophy. The following section will provide an investigative close reading of Lady Philosophy’s character, and her relationship to BN, and explore her peculiarly therapeutic role within the text.

The *Consolation* begins with BN–much like the text’s author–imprisoned and thinking about his current state of affairs. He has been sentenced to death, thrown in jail at the hands of his friends and fellow senators. He now suffers because of that betrayal, and has lost all: his social status, material possessions, and himself. Seeking comfort, BN turns to the Muses and their song–poetry–as a form of relief. It is after he laments his downfall through these initial poetic verses–fittingly composed in elegy–that the figure of a woman appears at his bedside. This woman is the personification of philosophy, aptly named Lady Philosophy. The therapeutic ways Lady Philosophy responds–in poetry and rhetorical prose arguments–to BN and his unfortunate predicament are the subjects of the following chapter’s study. Through a close reading of Book I and a brief look at Book V, I will show that the methodology Lady Philosophy uses to treat the ailments of BN’s soul align with the core tenets of psychagogy as discussed in the previous chapter. As discussed in the previous chapter, the affinities between ancient psychagogy and modern CBT also allow us to draw on the latter in discerning and describing Lady Philosophy’s activity in the text. Specifically, her use of *orality, accommodation, opinion*, and *ascension* makes the work she is doing not that of a philosopher generally, but of a
psychagogic philosopher. My commentary will take each of these facets of psychagogy one-by-one to show how Lady Philosophy applies them in her communication with BN. With this framework in mind, we can then begin to ask deeper questions about the historical and contemporary relationship between the disciplines of philosophy and psychotherapy.

**Orality in the Consolation**

Before turning to the central figure of this project, we must first familiarize ourselves with the context of the situation in which she arrives. The *Consolation* opens with Boethius Narrator composing poetic verses under the encouragement of the Muses. The text begins:

> Verses I made once glowing with content;  
> Tearful alas, sad songs must I begin.  
> See how the Muses grieforn bid me write  
> And with unfeigned tears these elegies drench my face.

*Carmina qui quondam studio florente peregi,*  
*Flebilis heu maestros cogor inire modos.*  
*Ecce mihi lacerae dictant scribenda camene*  
*Et veris elegi fletibus ora rigant.*

Equipped with our insights from Chapter 2 on psychagogic methods, the first thing we notice in the *Consolation* is its self-conscious reflection on the nature of the communication happening. The Muses *dictant scribenda*; that is, they command that BN must write poetry. The key here is to remember what Plato had said about the written word in the *Phaedrus*, discussed in the previous chapter. Written word, as Socrates claimed, is inferior to the spoken word when it comes to philosophy. It cannot change the mind of the person engaging with it because it cannot

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respond: there is no dialogue with the written word. Poetry, being a form of written word, is not a medium for changing one's position. Furthermore, poetry is doing nothing but cementing BN in his present state. There is no conversation between BN and the dictating Muses, only transcription. Rather than alleviating his suffering, poetry is allowing him to wallow in his sorrows—potentially making it worse. Elegies are a type of poetry and they *ora rigant*, wet his face with *veris fletibus*—genuine weeping. This phrasing implies that elegiac poetry, and not BN himself, is the thing crying; there is a dissociation implied from himself. Already, Boethius Author has set up the text in a way that positions the written word as conducive to negative feelings, and emotionally stagnating. Turning from literature to oral communication will be a crucial aspect to the consolation of BN that occurs within the text.

Conversation is necessary here, and it is urgent. BN is dealing with great grief and mourning the loss of his life. He fears his premature death. He calls out to Death itself, but there is no response:

Death, if he come not in the years of sweetness,
But often called to those who want to end their misery
Is welcome. My cries he does not hear

*Mors hominum felix quae se nec dulcibus annis*  
*Inserit et maestis saepe vocata venit.*  
*Eheu quam surda miser os averit aur e.*

Death has *surda aure*—a deaf ear—and cannot hear BN’s cries for relief. Nevertheless, BN tries to call out to him. At this juncture, Boethius Narrator is looking for someone to alleviate his pain, but he finds no one to converse with him, only dictating Muses and Death who cannot hear him. BN needs someone to hear him—not just his words, but his voice. The medium of writing is not

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73 Boethius, p. 131-130 (1m1)
suitable for the type of engagement BN desires because it will always be written to an audience that cannot respond in the moment. Boethius Narrator requires a conversation partner with whom he can discuss the tragedy that has befallen him and his all too abruptly stolen livelihood.

The combination of choosing to open the text with poetry and the small phrasing of details in this first passage demonstrate how imperative it is for BN to engage with something oral in nature. If in his current state of misery he is performing poetic verses and writing down his feelings to cope, yet he remains stuck in that state, then he requires a new approach to remove him from that state. This is where orality and Lady philosophy come more clearly into play.

Fully prepared to give up on speech after the lack of response from Death, BN begins to set down his pen to paper. Before he can write his lamentations in accord with the Muses’ dictations, a startlingly different female figure appears in front of him:

While I was thinking these thoughts to myself in silence, and set my pen to record this tearful complaint, there seemed to stand above my head a woman.

Haec dum mecum tacitus ipse reputarem querimoniamque lacrimabilem stili officio signarem, adstitisse mihi supra verticem visa est mulier reverndi admodum vultus

The woman who interrupts BN before he can even begin to write just so happens to be Lady Philosophy herself. She interrupts his silence with her presence and, although we as readers do not get any dialogue between the two until later on in the section, we are quickly informed that Lady Philosophy is a figure who will share knowledge with him. The text details the workmanship of her dress and BN remarks that Lady Philosophy made it herself, information he learned through speaking with this mystical figure:

She herself wove it, as I learned later, for she told me.

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74 Boethius, p. 132-133 (1p1)
Although it may seem insignificant at first, it is notable that the first interaction we witness between the two characters is one of sharing knowledge. This sets up the dynamic between BN and Lady Philosophy for the remainder of the text. Lady Philosophy is a figure who will impart knowledge onto BN through their conversations. She is a teacher and he is her student.

Furthermore, Lady Philosophy is aware of the importance of speech and the meaning it holds. BN is initially so shocked by her appearance that he cannot speak. She attempts to get him to engage with her in conversation through asking questions:

Do you recognize me? Why do you say nothing? Were you silent because you were ashamed or stupefied? I should like to think that you were ashamed, but I can see that you were stupefied.

_Agnoscisne me? Quid taces? Pudore an stupore siluisti? Mallem pudore, sed te, ut video, stupor oppressit._

Lady Philosophy, in this case, is making it apparent that one of her goals with BN is to have a conversation with him; she cannot do this if he is silent (_siluisti_). She wants to know why he is silent, _quid taces_, so that she might rectify the situation. Not only does this speak to her goal (metaphorically and literally), but it also provides insight into her methodology. Lady Philosophy will attempt to cure Boethius Narrator through speaking with him, asking questions along the way to gauge his progress and readjust her actions accordingly. The asking of questions allows for her to gain knowledge from BN, as her patient, to his current mental state, which she can then use to provide better, more precise treatment. Without this type of back and forth–again, a major turn from the dynamic dictation that first occupied BN and the Muses—it would be like leaving

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75 Boethius, p. 132-133 (1p1)
76 Boethius, p. 138-139 (1p2)
stitches in a wound permanently; sometimes previous treatments need to be removed for proper healing.

**Accommodation**

The following tenet of psychagogy, accommodation, builds on the groundwork laid by the previous one, orality. Through an open conversation, the psychagogue and the soul with which they are working can establish a relationship where the former is able to meet the needs of the latter. This is done through accommodating the soul with speech that is specific to them in particular and their situation. Accommodation allows for information to be shared in a manner that will resonate more soundly with the soul because it is sympathetic and presented through language which they will better understand. We see this type of accommodating speech play out immediately between Lady Philosophy and Boethius Narrator in the *Consolation*.

During their initial interaction, we see several ways in which Lady Philosophy accommodates herself and her communication to the mental state and predilections of BN. When she first appears to him, Lady Philosophy is a mighty, grand figure who towers over the already distressed Narrator. In order to make him more comfortable and make herself seem less intimidating, Lady Philosophy physically brings herself down to his level by lowering herself to sit on his bed, and discursively accommodates herself to BN by coming to address him in poetry:

> Then she came closer and sat down on the end of my bed, and seeing my face worn with weeping and cast down in sorrow, she bewailed my mind’s confusion bitterly in these verses:
Here, we see Lady Philosophy’s customized response to her student’s emotional distress. Not only does she react sympathetically to his sorrow, but she brings herself physically closer to him and situates herself on the end of his bed. Her response to his emotional distress is not detached, for she herself becomes emotional. Lady Philosophy is moved by the distress of BN’s mind (*de nostrae mentis pertubantione*) and she laments such a sight (*conquesta est*). It pains her to see one of her students’ minds in such a state of grief and confusion—and she shows him as much.

Then, we are provided with a subtle but effective example of linguistic and formal accommodation: Lady Philosophy speaks to Boethius Narrator through poetic verses. Poetry is what BN is most comfortable with at the present moment; it is the medium through which we are introduced to his character, it is what he is preparing to write before Lady Philosophy appears. Somewhat paradoxically, it is also the medium that Lady Philosophy—on the surface—appears to condemn the Muses for. If Lady Philosophy is so against poetry, then why would she take it up herself? There are two explanations. One: the poetry the Muses were performing was wrong because it was being done for the wrong reasons. And two: poetry is what BN is most readily able to engage with in this moment and she is taking into consideration his predisposed mental state and communicative capabilities. This behavior is accommodating BN by meeting him where he is at presently. Additionally, we know that Lady Philosophy can speak in prose because we see her do this when she scares off the Muses. That makes her choice to take up poetry all the

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77 Boethius, p.134-137 (1p1)
more noteworthy. She is not doing so because it is the only way she knows how to speak, rather she actively decides to speak to BN in verse in order to more effectively communicate with him.

By accommodating BN through poetic speech, Lady Philosophy is able to teach him ways to overcome and cope with his emotions instead of wallowing in self-pity. Lady Philosophy’s accommodation has an educative and corrective aspect: her use of poetry shows BN an alternative, higher purpose for this type of speech. This step is crucial because it aids in relapse prevention. Modern medical and therapeutic practices place an emphasis on preventative care, and relapse prevention is a foundational part of Cognitive Behavior Therapy. Remembering what we learned about CBT from Chapter 2, we know that the sixth principle given by Dr. Judith S. Beck states that “Cognitive Behavior Therapy is educative, aims to teach the patient to be her own therapist, and emphasizes relapse prevention.” An ultimate goal of CBT is to get the patient to a place where they are equipped with the confidence and skills necessary to perform self-therapy. Lady Philosophy’s poetry showcases that BN already has a tool which he can use to perform therapy on his own. In this instance, she is helping him realize that he already possesses the capability to alleviate his own pain.

When Lady Philosophy finally speaks to BN, she is not accommodating him using poetic speech alone. She is also careful to ensure that the first things she says to him are sympathetic and acknowledging of the distress he is feeling. She says:

    Ah! How steep the seas that drown him!
    His mind, all dulled, its own light fled,
    Moves in to outer dark, while noxious care
    Swollen by earthbound winds
    Grows beyond measure.

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78 Beck, p. 9
Lady Philosophy involves metaphorical imagery. Boethius Narrator’s suffering is so terrible that it is a deep sea (*praecipiti profundo*) in which he drowns (*mersa*). Drowning is a fitting metaphor for the situation: a drowning person is not necessarily someone who does not know how to swim, but someone who overestimates their abilities against the force of the water, or someone who has been fighting the current for so long that they are too exhausted to stay afloat. Most importantly, a drowning person needs someone to save them; they cannot save themselves from the waters. With these words, Lady Philosophy is expressing that she can see the trouble BN is in and that she knows he needs someone to come to his rescue. These opening lines show that Lady Philosophy is gentle and attentive. She can see that his mind has grown dim (*hebet*), abandoning (*relict*) its own light (*propria luce*), and saying so is her way of telling him that she knows he has lost himself. She calls the care given to BN by the Muses immeasurably harmful (*noxia cura*). Through using the same means of communication as the Muses, but working carefully to accommodate BN and his mental state, Lady Philosophy provides an example of poetry that is not harmful. Poetry is useful if it adds something to a conversation, like if it is used to communicate a deeper understanding between people. In this instance, poetry proves that Lady Philosophy will make a good conversation partner for BN because she listens attentively and responds sympathetically.

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79 Boethius, p. 136-137 (1m2)
Lady Philosophy’s accommodation shows its effectiveness quickly. When BN eventually returns to poetry, he picks up on the natural metaphors that Lady Philosophy had used with him and begins to incorporate them into his poetic speech as well. He says:

Then was the night dispersed, and darkness left me;
My eyes grew strong again.
Just as when north-west winds pile up the weather
And rain-clouds fill the sky and the sun is hidden,
And before the stars come out
Night comes flooding down upon the world;
And then the north wind from the Thracian cavern
Sweeps away night and lets the daylight out
So that the sparkling sunlight
Suddenly flashes on our wondering eyes.

*Tunc me discussa liquerunt nocte tenebrae*
*Luminibusque prior reedit vigor;*
*Ut, cum praecipiti glomerantur sidera Coro*
*Nimbosisque polus stetit imbris,*
*Sol latet ac nondum caelo venientibus astra,*
*Desuper in terram nox funditur;*
*Hanc si Threicio Boreas emissus ab antro*
*Verberet et clausam reseret diem,*
*Emicat ac subito vibratus lumine Phoebus*
*Mirantes oculos radiis ferit.*

Now it is the darkness that flees from BN (*liquerunt tenebrae*). The winds (*terrenis flatibus*) that once caused harmful care to swell are the same winds that cast away the nighttime (*hanc verberet*) and release daylight (*clausam reseret diem*). He is regaining his strength (*prior reedit vigor*) and using the language Lady Philosophy provided him to do so, revisiting the metaphors of darkness, winds, and light. This corrective return to poetry indicates the success of Lady Philosophy’s move to accommodate him.

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80 Boethius, p. 138-141 (1m3)
The communication between Lady Philosophy and BN is clear and effective because she accommodates his present mindset and engages with him in a way that resonates and promotes engagement. If BN does not understand what Lady Philosophy is saying, then there is little to no chance that he will be receptive to her speech. By choosing to speak to BN through poetry rather than prose, Lady Philosophy is not only accommodating his mental state and his discursive predilections, but also increasing the chances of him understanding the significance behind her words.

This is important to note when comparing Lady Philosophy’s behavior toward Boethius Narrator against that of the Muses. The Muses, like Lady Philosophy, are aware of BN’s current state. One could argue that they are also accommodating him and his needs based on the poetry they offer. BN even says that the Muses were:

helping me find words for my grief

\textit{fletibusque meis verba dictantes} \textsuperscript{81}

However, this helping is not help at all, but rather \textit{dictantes}. In fact, we are again told—this time from Lady Philosophy’s observational perspective— that the Muses have been dictating to BN how he feels. There is no discourse—no back and forth—between the grief ridden narrator and the Muses. These Muses of poetry do nothing to attempt to change his mental state to the better or offer any form of alleviation of his pain. They simply indulge it, and feed off of it. Lady Philosophy exclaims that the Muses are doing nothing to habituate BN to a cure and are only habituating him toward his own sickness:

\textsuperscript{81} Boethius, p. 134-135 (1p1)
Not only have they no cures for his pain, but with their sweet poison they make it worse. These are they who choke the rich harvest of the fruits of reason with the barren thorns of passion. They accustom a man’s mind to his ills, not rid him of them.

*quae dolores eius non modo nullis remediis foverent, verum dulcibus insuper alerent venenis? Hae sunt enim quae infructuosis affectuum spinis uberem fructibus rationis segetem necant hominumque mentes assuefacciunt morbo, non liberant.*

A main point of contention here for Lady Philosophy is the lack of cures the Muses can provide. Even worse, they “habituate” (*assuefacciunt*) rather than “free” (*liberant*) human minds (*mentes*), allowing a man to grow accustomed to his own mental suffering rather than leading him away from it to freedom. While it may seem that the Muses are accommodating the soul of BN because they are speaking with him through the language of poetry, they do not have his best, long term interest in mind. Their accommodations are warped and wrongheaded. This makes them selfish and inconsiderate since they are motivated by finding a way to stick around rather than help. If Boethius Narrator is healed of his mental anguish, then he would lose interest in the Muses and their melancholic poetry; they will allow poetry to continue to wet BN’s face rather than use it to dry his tears. Lady Philosophy, on the other hand, desires to find a way to get BN to a place where he is able to have enough knowledge to do the work on his own; she is teaching him methods he can use to perform self-therapy. For her, poetry is a medium still viable for the conveyance of her message–her message can be accommodated to Boethian poetry–but it has to be used properly.

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82 Boethius, p. 134-135 (1p1)
Accommodation (II): To What End?

The structures and idioms of CBT again help us to appreciate Lady Philosophy’s work here and her goals to restore BN to health. A key element to keep in mind when thinking about the overlap in the goals of CBT and Lady Philosophy is that CBT is specifically designed to have an end, clinically referred to as “termination.” Cognitive Behavior Therapy aims to get a patient to be self-sustaining, able to do therapeutic work on their own without the aid of a therapist. Dr. Judith S. Beck dedicates an entire section, Chapter 18, in her book *Cognitive Behavior Therapy: Basics and Beyond* to the concepts of “termination and relapse prevention.” In this chapter, she says that after a patient experiences both a reduction in symptoms and has learned basic therapeutic skills, the therapist and patient may agree to gradually decrease their number of therapy sessions. The reduction of therapy sessions would occur “on a trial basis,” moving from meeting weekly to “once every 2 weeks and then to once every 3 to 4 weeks.” A slow reduction in the number of sessions helps a patient adjust to being on their own. Dr. Beck further stresses this point, adding that “patients are encouraged to schedule “booster” sessions approximately 3, 6, and 12 months after termination,” which ensures that, although the patient is ending their clinical therapeutic practices, they will be well set up to continue doing the work alone, independently from the assistance of a professional therapist. 83 Therapy in a formal, clinical setting is not meant to go on indefinitely. It is designed and intended to taper the sessions until a final termination.

The aims of termination of CBT sessions prompt us to delve deeper into the purpose of BN’s peculiar working relationship with Lady Philosophy, especially in his incarcerated context.

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83 Beck, p. 316
Why perform therapy—here understood in terms of ancient philosophical psychagogy—on a person who is scheduled to die in the near future? Unlike the “platonic ideal” of a CBT patient, for whom there would be a clear plan for termination, BN is awaiting his execution, complicating the expected and traditional therapeutic path. Despite the challenges the anticipated death of BN raises for a modern, formal therapeutic termination, Lady Philosophy’s work still proves itself to be beneficial.

We have to turn to the end of the text to see how this works. Around the last sections of the Consolation, Book V, we come to see that BN’s character has undergone a change from its original state. Now, he has become an attentive listener. He interrupts less often and, when he does, there is a greater demonstration of his grasp on the philosophical concepts at hand. In fact, BN is the sole speaker for several consecutive passages (5p3-5p4), reiterating and working through the argument Lady Philosophy has put forth to clarify his understanding. In other words, the back-and-forth of the conversation becomes less rapid as BN becomes more self-assured. At the same time, he appears genuinely interested in the conversation and gaining knowledge for the sake of knowledge itself. He knows that he does not have much longer to live, yet continues to remain engaged in the conversation about free will, God, divine providence, and virtue. This change is apparent in Book V when BN revisits poetry as he has done throughout the text. He says:

Therefore whoever seeks the truth
Is of neither class: for he neither knows
Nor is altogether ignorant of all,
But the whole he keeps, remembers and reflects on,
All from that height perceived goes over once again,
That he might to those things he has preserved
Add the forgotten parts.
The BN we see versifying in this final book of the Consolation is someone willing to do the work necessary to gain knowledge. He is reflective (retines) and seeks advice (consulit), and he does so with a higher purpose. BN and Lady Philosophy now share a common goal of remembrance. Language of forgetting and remembering are consistent in these poetic verses. He remembers (meminit) his past teachings, revisits (retractans) those lessons, and restores what he has forgotten (oblitas partes). This enables the conversation to change its focus from where it was at the beginning of the text, when it centers on emotions, to its final notes on metaphysics. BN’s soul has shifted from wanting to know the cause of his predicament to wanting to know the cause of all things: he has found some greater good and greater want beyond the wounded self. Lady Philosophy’s psychagogic cure proves itself effective.

Medical Metaphors: An Interlude

Lady Philosophy applies medical language to her interactions with BN repeatedly and explicitly throughout the Consolation. This metaphorical habit has the effect of compelling the reader to draw connections between the presumed intellectual dynamic between BN and Lady Philosophy—student and teacher—and a more curious one—patient and doctor. We gain special

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84 Boethius, p. 402-405 (5m3)
insight, I think, into the work Lady Philosophy does in this text when we attend to her peculiar habit of speaking in medical metaphors: the work is not just of teaching, but of healing. Lady Philosophy is self-aware of her dual position as teacher and therapist, and in constantly expressing that position, she teaches BN and readers of the therapeutic powers of learning philosophy.

We have already seen that Lady Philosophy takes issue with the Muses because they have no cure (*nullis remediis*) for BN’s predicament. Treatment is an important concept for Lady Philosophy; it is her main objective. She says:

Leave him to *my* Muses to care for and restore to health.

*meisque eum Musis curandum sanandumque relinquite.*

Lady Philosophy is directly stating that she will work to provide care (*curandum*) and health (*sanandumque*) to BN. Notably, these are verbal concepts. Looking closely at the Latin, we see that these words are in their verbal-adjective (gerundive) form rather than nominal form, which works to place emphasis on how Lady Philosophy will be taking action to restore BN to his health. These words imply action on the part of Lady Philosophy (or her “muses”). Philosophy is not inactive knowledge or idle contemplation; she is an animated body in the text, and thinks of her own work as embodied.

The use of medical language is not exclusive to Lady Philosophy describing herself and her role: BN uses it as well. He describes Lady Philosophy as a “healer” (*medicantis*) and a “nurse” (*nutricem*). He is aware of the therapeutic role she performs in his life from the

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85 Boethius, p. 134-135 (1p1)
86 Boethius, p. 140-141 (1p3)
beginning. Lady Philosophy is a nurse who will tend to his wounds. She knows this, too, for she says to him:

If you are looking for a healer’s cure, you must lay bare the wound.

*Si operam medicantis exspectas, oportet vulnus detegas.*\(^{87}\)

The two are aware of their dynamic as healer and patient. Lady Philosophy is direct, telling BN that if he wants to receive a cure, then she must first know what type of wound (*vulnus*) she is healing; there is a need for collaborative work. In order to provide the proper treatment—to *accommodate* him—he must have a conversation with her—engage in *orality*. The medical metaphors woven throughout the *Consolation* strengthen the interconnection of the psychagogic tenets and reveal a deeper, intentional meaning to Lady Philosophy’s philosophical work.

Furthermore, Lady Philosophy uses medical language to explicitly name—or diagnose—the illness that BN must overcome: lethargy. She says:

He is in no real danger, but suffers only from lethargy, a sickness common to deluded minds.

"*Nihil,*" *inquit, *"pericli est; lethargum patitur communem inlusarum mentium morbum."

\(^{88}\)

This statement does two things: one, it gives an air of authority to Lady Philosophy by showcasing her knowledge and allowing her to formally name the illness BN suffers from; and two, it provides the readers with a named illness that we can look into to better contextualize the situation. *Lethargus,* often associated with *morbus* (illness), is defined as “lethargy, illness

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\(^{87}\) Boethius, p. 144-147 (1p4)

\(^{88}\) Boethius, p. 138-139 (1p2)
involving loss of memory or drowsiness.” The source of this illness—and therefore the area in need of treatment—is the mind (mentium). The definition explicitly referring to lethargus as a type of illness also makes the word hold more weight when reading the Consolation through a medicinal and therapeutic lens. Now that an illness has been named and its symptoms uncovered, Lady Philosophy can create an appropriate treatment plan.

**Opinion**

With the knowledge of what specific illness Lady Philosophy is working to cure, we can look to the next tenet of psychagogy and its application in the Consolation. What Lady Philosophy is really aiming both to accommodate and reconfigure are the opinions held by Boethius Narrator. Opinions and preconceived beliefs about oneself and the world fundamentally shape and impact the way in which a person goes about their life. BN’s current opinions when we find him in the beginning of the Consolation are entrenched in his current state of affairs. How is a man awaiting his execution supposed to remember the positive things about himself and his life? What is the point of recovery if one is to die, regardless? The task at hand is difficult, but Lady Philosophy has a solution.

Early on in their conversation, around the same time Lady Philosophy makes her diagnosis, she makes her own analysis of his “lethargic” state. She remarks that:

He has for a little forgotten his real self. He will soon recover—he did, after all, know me before—and to make this possible for him, let me for a little clear his eyes of the mist of mortal affairs that clouds them.

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Lady Philosophy wishes to redirect opinions, which BN has recently formed due to his circumstances. It is implied that she has done this—that is, exerted influence on his beliefs—once before (ante cognoverit) and he has simply forgotten himself (sui oblitus est). His opinions are clouded (caligantia) by mortal affairs (mortalium rerum). All BN needs is some patient reminders of who he is—someone to lead his soul, which has gone astray, back to its proper path, i.e. a psychagogue.

As a psychagogue, it is a part of Lady Philosophy’s job to help BN sort through the opinions he currently holds and guide his rational soul to a better place. In order to understand the opinions she will be working with, BN must first tell her what they are. Having a conversation is an integral part of the psychagogic process; without conversation, there would be no way to accommodate or learn the opinion of the patient or their soul. And a conversation, indeed, takes place.

BN spends nearly the entirety of 1P4 detailing his downfall and the events that led him to his illness. He reveals how he defended the common good against corrupt Roman politicians in accordance with what philosophy and God had taught him, and, in doing so, he had “offended those more powerful than [himself].”  

He discloses the accusation against him, asking Lady Philosophy:

Do you want to know what, in a word, was the charge against me? That I wanted to preserve the Senate. And how did I do that? I am charged with preventing those accusers from bringing forward proofs whereby the Senate might have been convicted of treason.

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90 Boethius, p. 138-139 (1p2)
91 Boethius, p. 146-147 (1p4)
Quid igitur o magistra censes? Infinitiabimur crimen, ne tibi pudor simus? At volui nec umquam velle desistam. Fatebimur? Sed impediendi delatoris opera cessavit.\textsuperscript{92}

BN believes strongly in the good of the Senate for the Roman people and did not want to cause its downfall. These charges were implied to be brought against him by three people seeking a lesser punishment for their own crimes: Basil, who denounced BN due to his own debts, and Opilio and Gaudentius, who were supposed to be branded on their foreheads for refusing to obey an order of exile, but on the day they were set to receive their punishment, BN was accused of protecting the Senate.\textsuperscript{93} The injustice of the whole ordeal deeply frustrates and disheartens BN, leaving him with his severe case of \textit{lethargus}.

Once Lady Philosophy hears BN’s story, she has a better understanding of his emotions. He believes that he himself has suffered a great injustice–and it is in part the fault of philosophy. BN asks her:

\textit{Are these our rewards for obedient service to you?}

\textit{Haecine praemia referimus tibi obsequentes?}\textsuperscript{94}

BN holds resentment against philosophy for his mistreatment. He wonders if his punishment and misfortune is his reward (\textit{praemia}) for obedience. He continues, giving his understanding of what philosophical teachings man ought to follow:

\begin{quote}
It was you who established through the words of Plato the principle that those states would be happy where philosophers were kings or their governors were philosophers. You, through that same Plato, told us that this was why philosophers must involve themselves in political affairs, lest the rule of nations be left to the base and wicked, bringing ruin and destruction on the good.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{92} Boethius, p. 150-151 (1p4)
\textsuperscript{93} Boethius, p. 150-151 (1p4)
\textsuperscript{94} Boethius, p. 146-147 (1p4)
Atqui tu hanc sententiam Platonis ore sanxisti: beatas fore res publicas, si eas vel studiosi sapientiae regerent vel earum rectores studere sapientiae contigisset. Tu eiusdem viri ore hanc sapientibus capessendae rei publicae necessarium causam esse monuisti, ne improbis flagitiosisque civibus urbius relictis gubernacula pestem bonis ac perniciem ferrent.95

It is his opinion that it is necessary for philosophers to involve themselves in political affairs to protect men against those who are base and wicked, wishing to destroy the good. He did what he believed was the right thing to do in accordance with philosophy and, as a result, he is awaiting his execution. BN feels betrayed by philosophy. He feels hurt and confused. Most importantly, he does not believe that this punishment is deserved:

But surely I deserved differently from the Senators themselves? [...] But you see what the result of my innocence has been: instead of being rewarded for the good I did, I am punished for the evil I did not do.

Sed num idem de patribus quoque merebamus? [...] Sed innocentiam nostram quis exciperit eventus vides; pro verae virtutis praemiis falsi sceleris poenas subimus.96

He believes that his treatment is unjust and that he deserves (merebamus) better from his fellow senators (patribus). Instead, he was punished for crimes he did not do (falsi sceleris poenas) rather than being rewarded for the good he had done (virtutis praemiis). The repetition of the word praemia suggests that BN believes that it is important to receive a reward for doing good. That want is not doing good for the sake of doing good, but in search of public recognition of his actions. These are the opinions Lady Philosophy seeks to correct: it is proper for good to be done for the sake of the good itself and not external rewards.

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95 Boethius, p. 146-147 (1p4)
96 Boethius, p. 154-155 (1p4)
Lady Philosophy listens to BN and his explanation for abandoning both her and himself. She then thanks him for sharing his story and beliefs, saying:

When I saw you weeping in your grief I knew at once that you were wretchedly banished; but how remote was that banishment I should not have known if your speech had not told me.


The conversational aspect of psychagogy is crucial to the healing process. Like in modern therapy sessions, the source of any psychological problem is uncovered during conversation and then talked through with the aid of a therapist. If not for speaking with one another, then Lady Philosophy would never have learned (nesciebam) the cause of BN’s exile (exilium). The opinionated discourse helps Lady Philosophy adjust her curative methodology based on the state of BN’s soul as it develops over time. The first principle of CBT parallels the adaptability of psychagogic treatment. It describes the process of CBT as “based on an ever-evolving formulation of patients’ problems and an individual conceptualization of each patient in cognitive terms.” As a patient progresses in their treatment, the type of care they receive will shift based on their specific needs. This is done through the cognitive model.

The cognitive model is the foundation of CBT. Dr. Beck describes it as a way of understanding how people’s emotions, behaviors, and physiology are impacted by their perception of events. She says that “it is not a situation in and of itself that determines what people feel, but rather how they construe a situation,” giving more weight to the psychological impact of a situation on a person than the actual event that occurred. Cognitive behavior

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97 Boethius, p. 160-163 (1p5)
98 Beck, p. 7
99 Beck, p. 31
therapists seek to understand why a person has the particular emotional reaction they do to certain things. Therapists do this through evaluating the thought patterns their patients display. Dr. Beck describes thoughts as having two levels, the first of which is focused on collecting and integrating information, and the second are quick forms of evaluation. The latter is called automatic thoughts. These automatic thoughts are responsible for people’s instinctive reactions and emotional responses to things. For example, if you do poorly on a test and your first, flashing thought is “I’m a failure. I can never do anything right,” then this is an automatic thought—a judgment that seems to emerge without deliberation about the reality of a situation, and which is often accompanied by strong emotions and bodily discomforts. Therapists help patients to recognize when these thoughts occur and evaluate them, guiding them to reflect on why they might have these thoughts—what Beck calls “a reality check.” With practice and the assistance of a formal therapist, a patient can learn to recognize and reflect on automatic thoughts. Rather than feeling like a failure for a poor test grade, a patient can retrain their thinking to be more positive with new automatic thoughts, such as, “It’s okay. It’s only one bad test score. I can try to do better next time.” This thought is more grounded and less likely to reinforce the emotional distress a person experiences. However, we still have yet to uncover the reason these automatic thoughts occur and why people have particular emotional and behavioral reactions to events. Dr. Beck credits the origin of automatic thoughts to another cognitive phenomena: beliefs.

Cognitive Behavior Therapy works with beliefs in a manner similar to how psychagogy works with opinions. Dr. Beck says:

Beginning in childhood, people develop certain ideas about themselves, other people, and their world. Their most central or core beliefs are enduring understandings so

100 Beck, p. 32
fundamental and deep that they often do not articulate them, even to themselves. The person regards these ideas as absolute truths—just the way things “are.”

Core beliefs about oneself and the world influence how one responds to things emotionally and behaviorally. If someone holds a core belief that they are a failure and can never do anything right, then they have no reason to attempt to alter their behavior or learn how to better themselves; being a failure is a part of their identity and they cannot change that. Furthermore, Dr. Beck explains that core beliefs work as a lens through which situations are interpreted, which can lead people to disregard information that invalidates these core beliefs, distorting the processing of information.

If we apply this model to BN, then we could say that he has a core belief in the principles of philosophy as given by the word of Plato (sententiam Platonis ore), but more importantly, a belief that following these principles ought to ensure his physical security and grant material comfort (praemia). As a result, when he is imprisoned for his crime (crimen) against the Senate, he experiences a tremendous amount of grief as his core belief is shattered and abandons philosophy all together. His identity was that of a philosopher, but if being a philosopher is what brings on his untimely demise, then who is he truly? It is up to Lady Philosophy to apply her therapeutic remedies to untangle this web of distorted thinking and remind BN of who he is.

Through telling her the story of his exile, BN shares with Lady Philosophy more than an objective sequence of events, he gives his opinions on the matter. BN holds the opinion that he had done everything right in accordance with philosophical teachings, and yet suffered unjust consequences. This unexpected, dire outcome shatters his entire belief system and leaves him

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101 ibid.
102 Boethius, p. 146-147 (1p4)
103 Boethius, p. 150-151 (1p4)
questioning who he is and what is the point of philosophy. It is more important for Lady Philosophy to know these opinions than the facts of the matter because it gives her an explanation as to why a once devoted student has lost their way. Opinions provide the information necessary to begin guiding the soul back to its proper state. For how is one expected to learn from their mistakes unless they know why it was a mistake?

Ascension

Once Lady Philosophy has learned the opinions that BN has about the events leading up to and causing his illness—this lethargy—she has the required knowledge to begin to guide his soul to a higher state of being. This guidance produces psychagogic ascension. Through a combination of the previous three tenets of psychagogy, i.e. orality, accommodation, and opinion, Lady Philosophy will perform her true therapeutic healing. Mainly, she will work to alter BN’s opinions to help him remember who he is and the purpose of philosophy. In doing so, she will guide his soul back to its former state—a healthy, happy philosopher—and then guide it from there to an even higher position.

The importance of ascension is indicated from the very beginning of the text. When Lady Philosophy is first introduced, there is a description of the clothes she wears. BN gives an account of her dress:

Its form was shrouded by a kind of darkness of forgotten years, like a smoke-blackened family statue in the atrium. On its lower border was woven the Greek letter Π (P), and on the upper, Θ (Th), and between the two letters steps were marked like a ladder, by which one might climb from the lower letter to the higher.

Quarum speciem, veluti fumosas imagines solet, caligo quaedam neglectae vetustatis obduxerat. Harum in extrema margine ·ΙΙ· Graecum, in supremo vero ·Θ·, legebatur
Darkness clouds the dress, but even through this fog, BN can make out the Greek letters Π (pi) and Θ (theta). The letters represent the division of philosophy into the lower “practical” and the higher “theoretical.” Between the two letters there are what BN calls “steps marked like a ladder” (scalarum modum gradus quidam insigniti) that one might climb to raise oneself from the lower letter Π to the higher letter Θ (ab inferiore ad superius elementum esset ascensus). The comparison of the imagery on Lady Philosophy’s dress to a ladder signifies the importance of moving oneself from a lower position to a higher one, i.e. to undertake an ascent. Additionally, it divides the realm of philosophy into two parts: the practical and the theoretical. The position of these letters on Lady Philosophy’s dress tells us that practical work in philosophy is lesser than the theoretical. This applies to the psychagogic work she performs, which we see as she converses with BN and gets him to a point where he can philosophize about practical things (i.e. his illness, circumstances, opinions, etc.) before she is able to move on and teach him how to philosophize about higher, more theoretical concepts (i.e. god, free will, virtue, etc.).

The imagery on Lady Philosophy’s dress prefigures BN’s character growth. He turns from someone stuck not remembering himself or the purpose of philosophy in Book I to someone able to continue a conversation with Lady Philosophy patiently parsing through the complexities of metaphysics by Book V. Over the course of the text, BN goes from not even standing on the ladder to climbing his way from the bottom step (Π) to the highest step (Θ). Lady Philosophy gently guides him as he makes his ascension one step at a time.

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104 Boethius, p. 132-135 (1p1)
105 cf. citation from Tester, p. 132
The metaphorically lofty aims of philosophy are likewise seen in the physical description of Lady Philosophy. Her height is simultaneously ordinary and remarkably tall:

It was difficult to say how tall she might be, for at one time she seemed to confine herself to the ordinary measure of man, and at another the crown of her head touched the heavens; and when she lifted her head higher yet, she penetrated the heavens themselves, and was lost to the sight of men.

Nam nunc quidem ad communem sese hominum mensuram cohibebat, nunc vero pulsare caelum summi verticis cacumine videbatur; quae cum altius caput extulisset, ipsum etiam caelum penetrabat respicientiumque hominum frustrabatur intuitum.  

Lady Philosophy appears to be the same measure as man (hominum mensuram), yet also able to touch the heavens (pulsare caelum). Even then, when she raises her head higher, she goes into the heavens themselves (caelum penetrabat) where men can no longer see her (hominum frustrabatur). The complexity of her height plays into how philosophy is able to lower itself to the level of man and then raise them up to such an extent that they touch the heavens. Lady Philosophy can accommodate man and exist on a lower level, but can also help them to ascend.

It is a crucial characteristic of Lady Philosophy that she is both the height of men and tall enough to be in the unseeable heavens. BN himself comments on this quality. He ask Lady Philosophy:

“Why have you come, Queen of all the virtues, why have you come down from your high seat in heaven to these wastes where I am banished?”

“Et quid,” inquam, “tu in exilii nostri solitudines o omnium magistra virtutum supero cardine delapsa venisti?”

To which Lady Philosophy replies:

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106 Boethius, p. 132-133 (1p1)
107 Boethius, p. 140-141 (1p3)
“Should I desert you, my pupil?” she replied; “Should I not share your labour and help to bear your burden, which you bear because my name is hated? It could not be right that Philosophy should leave an innocent man companionless on the road.

“An,” inquit illa, “to alumne desererem nec sarcinam quam mei nominis invidia sustulisti, communicate tecum labore partirer? Atqui Philosophiae fas non erat incomitatum relinquere iter innocentis.”

By sharing his labor (communicate labore) and refusing to desert her student (alumne desererem), Lady Philosophy lowers herself to BN’s level. It is only from his getting down and meeting him at his level that she is able to lift him back up. The treatment process is not the task of an individual, but a joint effort shared by both the patient and therapis—the soul and psychagogue. Lady Philosophy says that it is wrong (non fas) to leave him without a companion (incomitatum) on this road, but it is less of a road and more of an iter, a journey. Together, Lady Philosophy and BN will find a cure; they will make a journey of ascension out of despair.

The drastic measure of BN’s ascent in this text, as guided by Lady Philosophy, is best observed by jumping ahead to near the end of the text, where we find the pair conversing not about worldly circumstances, bodily sickness, or emotion, but about theoretical topics of fortune and free will. Freedom is a sensitive subject for BN as he is still imprisoned and awaiting his execution. How can a man possess free will and yet be detained against his wishes with a death sentence? Lady Philosophy explains that every rational creature has free will because they have the power of judgment. Through this power of judgment they possess the ability to determine whether something is desirable or to be avoided. Since men can think and make judgments, they have the faculty for reasoning and can make decisions based on this reasoning. They have the

108 Boethius, p. 140-141 (1p3)
“freedom to will or not to will” (inest etiam volendi nolendique libertas). However, there are always going to be some exceptions that complicate the rules. Lady Philosophy elaborates on this and says:

For heavenly, divine substances possess penetrating judgment, an uncorrupted will, and the ability to achieve what they desire. But human souls must indeed be more free when they preserve themselves in the contemplation of the divine mind; less free, however, when they slip down to the corporeal, and still less free when they are bound into earthly limbs.

Nam supernis divinisque substantiis et perspicax iudicium et incorrupta voluntas et efficax optatorum praesto est potestas. Humanas vero animas liberiores quidem esse necesse est cum se in mentis divinae speculatiane conservant, minus vero cum dilabuntur ad corpora, minusque etiam, cum terrenis artubus colligantur.

Divine mind is distinct from human minds in that it will always have freedom without exceptions. This means that the closest human souls (humanas animas) can get to possessing total free will is by aligning (conservant) their contemplation with that of the divine mind (mentis divinae). Human minds are especially prone to suffering a diminishment of their freedom when they lower (dilabuntur) their thinking to the material world ( corpora), or worse, allow themselves to be bound by their earthly limbs ( terrenis artubus colligantur).

These points about free will resonate with BN, who has allowed his mind to descend from the divine and lower itself down to the corporeal, and even further to his body. The specific issue he takes with Lady Philosophy’s argument is significant in showing his progress in the healing process. He says:

For if God foresees all and cannot in any way be mistaken, then that must necessarily happen which in his providence he foresees will be. And therefore if he foreknows from

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109 Boethius, p. 390-391 (5p2)
110 Boethius, p. 390-393 (5p2)
all eternity not only the deeds of men but even their plans and desires, there will be no free will.

Nam si cuncta prospicit deus neque falli ullo modo potest, evenire necesse est quod providentia futurum esse praeviderit. Quare si ab aeterno non facta hominum modo sed etiam consilia voluntatesque praenoscit, nulla erit arbitrii libertas.\textsuperscript{111}

Providing a counter argument demonstrates a capacity for following a complex train of philosophical thought and elaborating on it. The task at hand of this project is not to explore this counter argument itself, but to consider its purpose within the text as it relates to the therapeutic qualities of Lady Philosophy. BN’s increased capacity for philosophical dialogue by the middle of Book V speaks to his growth as a person and his recovery from lethargy. He is no longer displaying the traits of someone who has forgotten himself, for he takes his conversation with Lady Philosophy a step further than simple engagement by challenging her assertions with confidence. He understands her speech to such an extent that he can point out what he considers flaws in her logic. Lady Philosophy’s cure is effective as evidenced by BN’s concerns with matters outside of himself–his regained curiosity toward deep philosophical questions. Through the guidance of Lady Philosophy, BN has managed to ascend the stairs from the personal and “practical” up into the higher realm of the “theoretical.” The ability to move the conversation in such a manner demonstrates the ascension of BN’s soul.

Through paying close attention to Lady Philosophy and her role within the text, we learn that she is acting as more than a friendly conversation partner for BN–she is acting as a psychagogue. Examining the medical metaphors woven throughout the text, namely in Book I, it

\textsuperscript{111} Boethius, p. 394-395 (5p3)
becomes apparent that they are not simply figurative, but rather they intentionally reference the dynamic between Lady Philosophy and BN. Lady Philosophy uses the core tenets of psychagogy to heal BN’s lethargy. She opens up a dialogue between them (orality), speaking with him in a manner that he will understand, prosemetry, and attentively engages with him (accommodation), uncovering his feelings about the matter at hand and why he feels that way (opinions), to ultimately guide his soul away from this low state to a higher one (ascension). These actions prove that Lady Philosophy is performing psychagogic rhetoric as a means to make her philosophical work curative. The therapeutic qualities that characterize Lady Philosophy in the Consolation are not too dissimilar from what we see in modern forms of therapy. Looking at the connections between psychagogy, CBT, and Lady Philosophy, unveils an interplay of methodology and motivation between the disciplines of philosophy and psychotherapy.
Conclusion

This project sought to investigate the role of Lady Philosophy within Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy*. In order to undertake this investigation, we first examined the current body of scholarly literature on the *Consolation* and their interpretation of Lady Philosophy as she functions within the text. These scholarly texts gesture to the therapeutic nature and tendencies of Lady Philosophy, but do not explore the idea further. This prompted a look at historical forms of therapy from the ancient world to the present, uncovering connections between the classical practice of psychagogy and modern Cognitive Behavior Therapy. The ancient and modern forms of therapy suggest that therapeutic methods and motivations are both transhistorical and transcultural. These insights allowed us to reread the *Consolation* with a psychagogic lens, examining Lady Philosophy’s speech and behavior in accordance with the four tenets of psychagogy: *orality, accommodation, opinion, and ascension*. In doing so, we reveal that the role Lady Philosophy plays is more than just a philosopher: she is also a psychagogue.

Through this focused rereading of the *Consolation*, we get a more vivid picture of Lady Philosophy that illuminates the text, but also raises questions about the disciplines of philosophy and psychotherapy. If Lady Philosophy is a psychagogue, does that mean all philosophy is therapeutic? Would a therapeutic nature to philosophy only apply to ancient forms of philosophy or can we extend this connection to contemporary philosophy? What other connections are there between psychotherapy and philosophy—where do they overlap and where do they diverge? These are some of the questions we are left to consider.

The work done in this project focuses exclusively on reading Boethius’ *Consolation* as a Platonic text, looking at the occurrence of dialectical philosophy. Future projects would benefit
from considering how a therapeutic reading of the *Consolation* may change if we examine its elements of *stoicism* with the same lens. Such a project should pay more attention to Boethius Author and his role in creating any metatextual qualities in the *Consolation*. Stoicism emphasizes mastery over one’s emotions as a means to become a more virtuous person through the use of logic. Most importantly, stoicism is highly individualistic: the burden of self-improvement is placed on the individual to discover alone. How might such a rereading impact the connections between philosophy and psychotherapy in the *Consolation* as it relates to Lady Philosophy?

Future projects may also wish to explore similar rereadings of the *Consolation* and its therapeutic elements in comparison to other contemporary forms of therapy. This may include, but is not limited to, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), Humanistic Psychotherapy, Psychoanalysis, and Logotherapy. Such projects would explore works by Steven Hayes, Carl Rogers, Sigmund Freud, and Viktor Frankl respectively. Doing so may reveal more possible connections between the discipline of philosophy and therapeutic methodology. If Lady Philosophy is a psychagogue, then is it possible that she acts as a psychoanalyst as well? What would this mean for the *Consolation*?

Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy* is the text central to this project, but the therapeutic rereading done here seeks to raise more questions than it answers. What would it mean for philosophy as a discipline to have an inherent therapeutic nature? Should contemporary philosophers be more aware and attentive to the therapeutic qualities of the work they produce? What is the effect of rereading ancient texts anachronistically—and how do we do so in a way that is simultaneously cautious and productive?
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