

The Literary and Theological Philosophy of Boethius

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Course Description

C.S. Lewis wrote of Boethius's *De consolazione philosophiae*, "To get a taste for it is almost to become naturalized in the Middle Ages," placing it on the top ten list of books which most influenced him. Theologians such as Anselm, Aquinas, and Peter Abelard were deeply influenced by Boethius's work, as was the medieval conception of the seven liberal arts and medieval literature in general. Translated by King Alfred's circle, by Chaucer into Middle English as well as by two other Middle English writers, and by Queen Elizabeth the I, *The Consolation of Philosophy* also profoundly inspired writers such as Dante, Thomas More, and Jean de Meun.

This course will examine Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* from its theological context and with an eye to its massive theological, philosophical, and literary influence. We will start by reading the *Opuscula Sacra*, Boethius's five theological tracts (two on the Trinity, one on Christology, one on the nature of created vs uncreated goodness, and one a general statement of the Christian faith). We will then spend most of the course reading *The Consolation of Philosophy* closely, and conclude the course by reading selections from Tolkien's *Silmarillion*. Tolkien was familiar with Boethius not only in the Latin but also its Old and Middle English translations (and had as well access to Aquinas's interpretations of Boethius), and we will see how he incorporated Boethius's thought deeply into the metaphysics of his mythology, especially as seen in texts such as "The Ainulindale" and "Beren and Luthien."

Course Objectives

Objectives for this course include: (1) understand Boethius's theological works, in terms of content, value and influence, (2) apply this knowledge to a reading of *The Consolation of Philosophy*, (3) articulate the philosophical and theological significance of *The Consolation*, and (4) consider and develop answers to major questions surrounding the text, especially, Why is Christianity not explicit in the *Consolation* though the text is clearly theistic in its philosophy? (5) Appreciate the profound influence of the *Consolation*, with Tolkien serving as a literary example.

Course Format

The format of the course will be predominantly one of mini-lectures followed by guided discussion. The instructor will often be doing most of the talking, but generally to illuminate and draw out themes from the text for discussion, rather

than in pure lectures. Thus, students will be expected to come having read and engaged with the text selection for the week, and with thoughts prepared to contribute.

Classes will meet via Zoom for two hours each week and will be recorded for later viewing by students who cannot participate. Additional student participation and instructor interaction can take place on our private discussion board.

Course Requirements

1. Weekly readings (due before our meeting each week).
2. Weekly interaction with fellow participants and the instructor in live class sessions.
3. Weekly participation in the online discussion forum.
4. For those taking the course for-credit: Composition of a 3k-5k argumentative essay that presents a thesis statement-driven position about Boethius's work or its influence. The paper should be 12-point Times New Romans font, with regular margins and standard citations (I will accept either MLA or Chicago Style).

Assessment and Weighting

Class Participation 25%

Discussion Forum Participation 25%

Essay 50%

Course Texts

Boethius. *Theological Tractates and The Consolation of Philosophy*. Loeb.

Tolkien. *The Silmarillion*.

Course Schedule

Week	Dates	Discussion Topics/Themes	Reading
1	9/28-10/2	Life, work, & influence	Introductions & <i>De fide Catholica</i>
2	10/5-10/9	Trinitarian thought	<i>Utrum Pater & De Trinitate</i>
3	10/12-10/16	Created vs uncreated goodness	<i>Quomodo Substantiae</i>
4	10/19-10/23	Christology	<i>Contra Eutychem et Nestorium</i>
5	10/26-10/30	Philosophical healing	<i>De consolatione philosophiae</i> Book 1
6	11/2-11/6	Fortune's Goods	<i>Consolatio</i> Book 2

7	11/9-11/13	Temporal vs Eternal Good	<i>Consolatio</i> Book 3
8	11/16-11/20	Privation, Fate & Providence	<i>Consolatio</i> Book 4
-	11/23-11/27	<i>Thanksgiving Break</i>	-
9	11/30-12/4	Chance, Free Will, Epistemology	<i>Consolatio</i> Book 5
10	12/7-12/11	A Case Study of Influence: Tolkien	<i>Ainulindale & Beren & Luthien</i>