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The Pursuit of Happiness: A Review of the Relevance of Boethian Philosophies in the 21st Century with a Ceramic Component

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Carroll College

The Pursuit of Happiness: A Review of the Relevance of Boethian Philosophies in
the 21st Century with a Ceramic Component

By Ellie Duty

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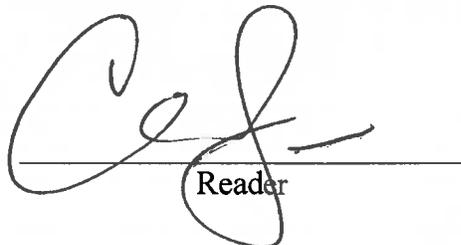
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Abstract

This thesis is a collaboration of a written essay and a collection of pottery based upon Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius and his work *The Consolation of Philosophy*. Each ceramic piece symbolically represents a main character in Boethius' book. The personalities and individual qualities of each role were analyzed and used collectively to form five unique vessels. The pieces signify the part each played in reviving the dejected Boethius as well as revealing the keys to true happiness to readers. The essay is divided into five parts, the first of which is the history of Boethius himself, followed by a brief section showing the importance of each chosen character, a small segment on art form and expression, and explanation relating the features of each piece of pottery to each character. The conclusion will explain this invaluable wisdom written in the 6th century and its relevance to the 21st century.

Introduction

This introduction will provide insight into the formation of this thesis, the organization of each section, and the purpose for writing it. This work is a direct reflection of my love of pottery as well as the Medieval author Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius and specifically his work *The Consolation of Philosophy*. After having studied both previously in classes at Carroll College, I have endeavored to combine both art and philosophy to successfully create my thesis. My hope is that the presence of both a concrete physical object and a written piece will better relay Boethius's wisdom to readers. Though a scholar of the 6th century, the timeless insights of Boethius still remain relevant in the midst of life's greatest struggles. One must only seek out his lessons in order to simplify life and see clearly once more.

Boethius tells readers through his characters that the true secret for a happy life is many sided, but yet very simple. He points out that bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people, but this cannot determine one's happiness. Possessions, wealth, fame and power only provide false happiness. Above all, he expresses that happiness is found within a person, not in outward circumstances. To gain this inner peace a relationship with God is of utmost importance. Furthermore, one finds God's peace in the present, not the future.

In an attempt to portray significant meaning from Boethius's work, I will take a deeper look into the persona of each character. I intend to show that Boethius's wise words are a timeless source of advice concerning the secret of personal happiness. I will use two separate techniques to reach this goal and fully convince the audience of my previous statement; the first is a carefully written essay-style paper, and the second, a

collection of five ceramic pieces. The essay contains five diverse sections that each holds a unique yet relevant purpose; to help the reader understand Boethius' ultimate happiness as a result of giving up concern for self.

Since the most logical way to begin a proof is relaying the background story of the author, the first portion consists of a history of Boethius's life. The mind that constructed this book was influenced by his surroundings, family, friends, and experiences. Therefore, each event that shaped Boethius's life proves important and relevant. The next section will explain the importance of art, symbols, and ceramics in expressing internal feelings, relaying history, and providing insight to observers. I describe the value of shape and texture when expressing a concealed or interpretable meaning. I will demonstrate the link between an intangible thought or philosophy and the actual pottery piece. The third part explains in detail the importance of each character that takes part in consolation of Boethius. This section will illustrate the interdependence that each role plays in describing the truth and allowing for self-reflection of Boethius. The absence of one character would inevitably have a negative effect on the overall meaning of the book. This lays the foundation for the creation of each piece of pottery as well as shows the significance of Boethius's work in the present. The fourth section tells the readers the relevance of each unique ceramic piece in connection with the main characters. Each small detail in the pottery represents either a stated or observed trait for the roles. The purpose of this section is to concretely unite the two techniques, essay and ceramics, to successfully portray the depth of Boethius's work. Finally, the last portion will explain the relevance of Boethius's philosophies in light of the 21st century and touch on the timelessness of these ideas.

History of Boethius

The individuals present during Boethius's life influenced him greatly, and the controversies of his time had a definite impact upon his writings. One who is unaware of these happenings in Boethius's life may very well interpret the meaning of his work inaccurately. Readers may presume the book merely a fiction and others a solemn reflection on philosophical concepts of life. However, without delving deeper into the history of Boethius's life, one cannot make either of those assumptions. To correctly and accurately discuss Boethius, it is necessary to provide a detailed history prior to Boethius's compilation of *The Consolation* and his execution.

Early Years

Though scholars have recovered only a limited account regarding Boethius's childhood, the history regarding his most influential years is well supported. Boethius was born to an aristocratic family during the 480's in Italy, which will turn out to be the epicenter of Roman turmoil for several years (Walsh xii). Boethius's Anicii kin held importance in the Ravenna court and Roman Empire, and left paganism for Christianity during the rule of Constantine (Walsh xiii). Until his death soon after, his own father continued the Anicii's tradition and served as a city-prefect and consul in 487 (Walsh xiv). Quintus Aurelius Memmius Symmachus, an equally influential Roman, adopted Boethius and raised him as his own child (Walsh xiv). This man is rightfully credited with a prominent role in Boethius's ideals and development. A devoutly Christian man, Symmachus preached piety as a necessary component to uphold throughout one's lifetime (Welsh xiv). He expressed a passion for classical literature and spent his life

studying these ancient books. Boethius's writings, lifestyle, and accomplishments closely reflect these same values that Symmachus held important in life. Symmachus, who had treated Boethius as his own son, eventually allowed Boethius to become betrothed to his daughter, Rusticiana (Walsh xv). They married and she bore two sons, deemed Symmachus and Boethius, named after their grandfather and father, respectively.

Education and Accomplishments

Based on the mental capacity required to develop the philosophies in the *Consolation*, Boethius's education must have been extensive. However, little has been discovered as to the source or origin of his knowledge. His father had been recorded as serving in the Alexandrian school in 470, but no verifications prove Boethius attended classes there (European Graduate School). Boethius's scholarly knowledge of Greek philosophy and language led historians to believe he studied in Athens (Shiel).

Boethius explored several subjects such as astronomy, music, theology, and he even delved into the systematics of math and arithmetic. Consequently, Boethius's understanding of mathematics, mainly based on Nicomachus, proved inaccurate, and his writings on arithmetic were not reliable (European Graduate School). Surprisingly, Boethius's rendition of the Pythagorean Theorem was correct and led many Medieval thinkers to a deeper understanding in geometry (European Graduate School). Cassiodorus claimed Boethius wrote works on astronomy, which could have been possible considering his mention of the skies in the *Consolation*, although none have been recovered (Walsh xxii). Addressing the debated topics of faith and divinity, Boethius completed five theological tractates that served as direction for St. Thomas Aquinas

among other theologians (Walsh xxvii). The topics addressed correlate with those relating to God in the *Consolation*. Specifically, the third tractate demonstrates the goodness of God, a prime factor in the search for happiness in the *Consolation* (European Graduate School). Scholars propose that the Arian Theoderic overlooked the depth of these treatises when appointing Boethius to Master of Offices (Walsh xxx).

Boethius did not limit his studies and even focused upon a liberal arts study in music relating to sound waves based upon Nicomachus's *Introduction to Music* (Walsh xxii). Boethius created the *quadrivium*. This method of study later was used as curriculum for monastery students (Walsh xxii). His philosophy, as well as many of the ancients, stated that education should begin with a mathematical stage, then logic, and combine the two as a tool to delve into metaphysics (Walsh xxii). The *quadrivium* reflected these theories of education.

Unlike his failures in mathematics, Boethius's talents were evident in his ability to translate and rewrite classical works of past philosophers. As one of his life goals, he took on a translation and interpretation of the writings of Plato and Aristotle in an attempt to compare their ideas and discover hidden similarities (European Graduate School). He strove to portray these ancient writings so the public could read and analyze them without extensive background knowledge in language and philosophy. Due to his later incarceration, he never completed this massive undertaking, but he provided a commentary *On Interpretation* that consisted of Aristotle's works *Categories* and *De interpretation* (Walsh xxiii). Also before his death, Boethius completed an in-depth commentary explaining the logic of Porphyry's *Isagoge* and others not mentioned (Walsh xxiii). Decades after Boethius's era students benefitted immensely from his

explanations of Aristotle, Porphyry, and Cicero. Boethius's works are said to possess a literal interpretation that provides a gateway into the theories of these great philosophers (European Graduate School).

Political Career

Boethius's intellectual abilities allowed him to accomplish much in his short time as a logician. Soon Theodoric the Great, King of the Ostrogoths, noticed his successes and determined to have this promising candidate on his side, and he offered Boethius a position working with the state (European Graduate School). Boethius served as a state official, senator, and eventually in 510 as a consul (Walsh xv). At this point in his political career, Boethius, only in his twenties, had already achieved an influential and important role in Roman politics. In order to honor the success of Boethius, Theodoric offered a consulship to both Boethius' sons in 522 (Walsh xv). Theodoric—impressed with Boethius's social, political, and logic advances—promoted him to Master of Offices or *magister officiorum* in Ravenna (Shiel). This esteemed position placed him as the only connection between Theodoric and any who wished to consult with the king (Walsh xvi). According to Cassidorus' biography of Boethius, this position included many duties such as compiling negotiation documents, impressing foreign ambassadors, and control of the Imperial Guard, and conducting parties (Walsh xvi).

Arrest and Imprisonment

Boethius began work on reuniting the churches of Rome and Constantinople in 520 (Shiel). Consequently, the senators had an increasing amount of contact with Justin I,

and Theoderic became suspicious of these interactions (Shiel). Since Theoderic remained an Arian, this uncertainty rose because of the differences in faiths between himself and the Byzantine emperor. The idea of Arian Ostrogoths residing in Rome, the capital of Christian traditions, stimulated an uprising in both the inhabitants of the east and west (Walsh xvi).

At this point, Theoderic was frail, old and increasingly paranoid of possible conspirators (Walsh xvi). He condemned Albinus, a Roman senior senator, for treason after having supposedly written negative letters to the Emperor Justin regarding Theoderic's religion (Shiel). Boethius expressed great disapproval for the outcome of Albinus, and said so in the *Ravenna Chronicle* (Walsh xvii). He stated, "Cyprians' charge is false. But if Albinus so acted, then I and the whole senate acted with one mind. It is false, my lord king" (Walsh xvii). Theoderic did not take Boethius' opinions lightly, and accused him and the entire senate of conspiracy (Walsh xvii). Theoderic arrested Boethius alongside Albinus and charged him with treason, sacrilege, and the use of the black magic (European Graduate School).

The court gave a death sentence to Boethius without any opportunity to defend his actions (Walsh xvii). Symmachus stood against these accusations toward his adopted son, and was condemned and put to death eventually (Walsh xix). The records are unclear as to the actual execution date of Boethius since at this time there were growing tensions between Constantinople and Rome. It is theorized that, as their relationship became irreparable, Theoderic sent orders to kill both Boethius and Symmachus sometime from 524 to 526 (Walsh xix).

The place of exile that Beothius complains about in the *Consolation* cannot be verified. Historians believe Beothius had books available so he may have been under house arrest in Ager Calventianus close by to Pavia (Walsh xix). Others interpret his words in a different context and assume he was held captive in a jail of sorts (Walsh xix).

Explanation of the Characters in the *Consolation*

Each character in Boethius's work has an important role in the overall lesson that he teaches in the *Consolation*. The absence of one would inevitably alter the others and change the effect. In the *Consolation*, Boethius personifies four highly debated philosophical ideas as women and presents himself as the only mortal human character. Entering at different points in the book, the four women represent a prime component of the overall message. Each intertwines with the other and plays a vital role in the unhappiness and eventual happiness of the doomed Boethius.

Boethius

In the *Consolation* Boethius portrays himself as the troubled main character desperately seeking help in the short hours before his death. His lack of trust in philosophy and aimless search for happiness are the root of his sorrow. His personal struggles originated long before his predicament and provide the ultimate problem and climax for the book. Of the five roles presented, Boethius proves to be the most essential character for the success of the lessons taught in this brief philosophical work.

In the opening of the book, Boethius explains to Lady Philosophy his dire situation and the reason for his misery. He states, "For myself I have been parted from my possessions, stripped of my offices, blackened my reputation, and punished for the services I have rendered. . . This is what stirs my cry of lament" (Boethius 13). Boethius assumes this loss of material belongings and status has triggered his unhappiness. He admits his lack of attention to philosophy in the recent years, which could have been an immediate aid to him in his anguish (Boethius 6). Boethius begins the book in a

despondent and sick state, but gradually Lady Philosophy's strong words and shared realizations nurse him back to health. The pitiful demeanor of this man is absolutely necessary for the readers to connect and grow with Boethius as he discovers the key to "true happiness" (Boethius 17).

Lady Philosophy

Lady Philosophy plays the role of teacher, nurse, confidant, and friend to her dispirited pupil, Boethius. She states, "'What?' she rejoined, 'Was I to abandon you, my own pupil?' . . . It would have been sacrilege for Philosophy to forsake you, and to leave you, an innocent man, unaccompanied on your journey" (Boethius 7). Though Boethius had ignored philosophy in recent years, she would not forget her apprenticeship in his struggles. Her presence as primary counselor and guide holds equal importance in comparison to the character of Boethius. For if there was no one to tutor and mentor the progress of the depressed man, the book would be meaningless and lack the wisdom readers seek. Her unfaltering guidance gives Boethius the strength to climb out of his depths of despair and understand the circumstances that have left him feeling hopeless. Lady Philosophy guides Boethius through the faults and follies of humanity, and shows how temptations of wealth, rank, glory, and pleasure destroy the best laid plans of all.

Fortune

Fortune is presented as an unpredictable and invisible part of every person's life. "I hedged you round with the glittering panoply of all those riches rightfully mine. It not suits me to withdraw my gifts. You owe me a debt of gratitude for having enjoyed

possessions not your own; you have no right to complain as if you have lost what was indisputably yours” (Boethius 21). Just when Fortune has shown kindness toward someone, at any moment she may retract and replace it with tragedy. She sees no wrongdoings in her actions, for all she has given by her hand is under her power to be snatched away without warning. Fortune feels that humanity should have no power over her reign and cannot bind her to consistency. She relies upon no one but herself and does not care about the miseries she often causes in the world. After all, it is a human folly to rely upon the delusional character of Fortune and not upon the steady hand of God (Boethius 27). However, without her part in the rises and falls of life, Boethius would have no misery, Lady Philosophy would not be needed for consolation, and no lessons could be learned. The light to true happiness could not have been discovered if Fortune had continued to dote upon Boethius’s perfect life (Boethius 24).

Providence

The character of Providence cannot be described as literally as the three previous roles. Lady Philosophy carefully explains to Boethius that God beholds and composes a “complex plan of the [future] course of events” (Boethius 87). When the divine mind refers to this plan it is called Providence; however, if a mortal relates to this same plan, it is specified Fate. (Boethius 87). It appears the two names refer to the same concept, but both hold diverse capabilities. “Providence indeed embraces all things alike, however different and boundless, whereas Fate organizes the separate movement of the individual things, and allocates them according to place, shape, and time” (Boethius 88). Providence does not possess order and cannot be united with time in any way. Providence consists of

the forecast of events within God's control and can only be fully understood by the divine intelligence (Boethius 88). She decides the blessings and sorrows that occur in life based upon the purity of each man's mind (Boethius 92). Often times a good soul is not the only recipient of blessings. Providence may bless a wicked person rather than display wrath in order to stimulate a change of heart. Her presence in *The Consolation* assists Boethius in realizing that God and not Fortune has the stronghold on the events that occur in one's life.

Fate

Fate is the unfolding of events in a manner that humanity can abstractedly understand (Boethius 88). "Whereas Fate is the movable nexus and the ordering in time of what God's undivided nature has planned to be carried out" (Boethius 88). She holds order and time in the procession of events that God pre-determines. Unlike Providence, Fate can be partly understood by the simple minds of mortals (Boethius 89). In a way, she is the gateway connection between humanity and the divine regarding the events that take place on earth. "The chain of Fate moves the heavens and the stars, intermingles the elements and transforms them by their interchange; it also renews all things which come into existence and die, by the generation of like offspring and seeds" (Boethius 89). Without the presence of Fate, each day would not start with a sunrise and end with a sunset. Instead all these familiar events would be out of sequence and appear randomly. Fate ends the confusion that would arise without concrete order, and allows the unknown realm of Providence to appear less chaotic to the mortal eye (Boethius 89).

The consistency she shows through the rising of the sun, rotation of the moon, and changing of the seasons gives man a false feeling of control over the world they live in.

Visual Art to Convey Meaning

Boethius's work discusses difficult concepts that prove meaningless if readers cannot comprehend them. In order to ensure the audience realizes the main ideas, a clear connection must be made between Boethius's wisdom and reality. The depth of Boethius's philosophies can be amplified through the use of art. Conveying Boethius's thoughts in a tangible way allows viewers to create a deeper understanding of his advice for happiness. Furthermore, the struggle to comprehend Boethius's guidance is simpler when paired with a concrete structure such as pottery.

Visible Form to Give Knowledge

Using a visible art form to improve the reader's understanding can be effective. The struggle to form a mental image is not necessary, and the effort can be channeled to further explore the philosophical concepts. In John Casti's book *Art and Complexity*, he touches upon the ability of visual forms and shapes to provide knowledge to their audience. The foundations of his theories on art are based upon the ancient beliefs of Aristotle and Plato, Boethius's main scholarly focus. He states,

Both Plato and Aristotle recognized that an essential aspect of art is that it is different from real things. Their views part company only on the point of whether we can learn about real things from this difference. For example, Plato would argue that there is nothing to be learned about late-nineteenth-century Parisian life from gazing upon Renoir's famous painting *Luncheon of the Boating Party*. Aristotle, on the other hand, may well argue that this painting encapsulates an enormous amount of information about how people of a certain social class interacted and how they lived in fin-de siècle Paris. (Casti 22)

Aristotle's viewpoint more accurately describes the intent of most postmodern artists who attempt to close the gap between art and physical forms (Casti 22). The

connection between an art form and a concrete idea can often times prove rewarding for the audience.

Specific Art Elements

The use of shape in a piece allows the artist to bluntly state an important idea. The juttred edges of a square may symbolize a strict person in the same manner that rounded corners may emphasize one's easy going nature. A tall form versus a short form could represent the importance or unimportance of a person in the eyes of society. Visible structure is one of the most obvious techniques to express a concept to an audience.

The silhouette of a piece opens the eyes of the viewer to new possibilities and undiscovered wavelengths. This feature brings enlightenment to a certain topic using angles and shadows. The symmetrical nature of an art form may express a predictable person while an asymmetrical appearance could express spontaneity.

Detail on the exterior of an art form can express a multitude of emotions or ideas. Dull colors may represent a melancholy person while vibrant colors could illustrate new life or perhaps a joyful crowd. The texture often indicates age or quality. An antiqued surface shows the wrinkles of an elderly person or a sleek glaze could indicate an untouched or new idea.

These elements all help to capture the essence of the concept or knowledge. In the pieces explaining Boethius's struggles and self-realizations, the fundamentals of shape, outline, and details prove incredibly important.

Analysis of Ceramic Pieces in Relation to Main Characters

The five characters, though extremely diverse, share an intimate bond that develops over the course of the book. The good vs. evil, free will vs. divine control, and the secret to the ultimate happiness of mortal man could not have been expressed so eloquently and effectively without the presence of Philosophy, Fortune, Providence, Fate, and Boethius. This next section functions to connect the verbal qualities of the characters with a visual form. The philosophical language used to describe the roles and their interactions throughout the text is excellent, but to show these relationships thoroughly a more concrete technique is necessary. I created ceramic pieces that show the characteristics, personalities, and necessary elements of each role on a deeper level than words can accomplish.

Lady Philosophy

Of the five characters, Lady Philosophy alone has a complete external description of her appearance. Boethius explains her demeanor as “awe-inspiring” as her height seemed to be continually changing and her piercing eyes gazed into his soul. She wears an impressive cloak complete with an ascending ladder and two Greek letters at either end. Her person is covered in a layer of ancient dust showing her pupil’s neglect, and the trim of her clothes shows evidence of small rips from men that assumed stealing a piece of Philosophy would deem them wise. After casting away the insolent Muses of poetry, Philosophy at once takes on her role as nurse and comforting confidant for

Boethius. However, her soothing knowledge does not just seep into the minds of others; it must be desired greatly by a person, be truly deserved, and sought after.

In recreating the “tireless energy” of Lady Philosophy in clay, I first decided the shape. This piece holds all the components required of a typical teapot, but it also differs in several aspects. The body of the pot has a small base with a rippling band of clay representing the flowing folds of Philosophy’s magnificent robe. The width greatly increases and doubles in size towards the middle of the body. This large growth in surface area portrays the vast wisdom, knowledge, and power that Lady Philosophy holds within her. Towards the top, the width decreases drastically and the neck of the pot is slender in contrast to the swollen midsection. This change symbolically represents that, though a voluminous quantity of wisdom resides within Philosophy, it does not escape easily or without a specific intent. A lid at the top of the piece completes the shape. The lid in a normal teapot holds in heat cascading off the steaming tea; however, this specific lid acts as a barrier between the limited knowledge of the mortal world and Philosophy. Though Lady Philosophy often times is anxious to share her intelligence, it must only be to those men worthy, open-minded, and ready to receive such secrets.

Since the top of the piece is sealed off, there must be one route for Philosophy to connect with her pupils. Placed upon the lid is a small clay padlock, but a key is nowhere to be found. A scholar must obtain the key to unlock Philosophy and then absorb this knowledge. When Philosophy finds this deserving student, she pours out her knowledge freely as she has done with Boethius. A good-sized spout has been incorporated into the top quarter of her body for this very purpose.

Boethius describes her as shouldering a pile of books in one hand and sceptre in the other. A handle connected to the middle and top section of the body is provided to symbolize the ancient sceptre. Three small clay book replicas are on the teetering edge of the spout to represent Philosophy's other hand.

Lady Philosophy is further described as "advanced in her years" so I used a crackle technique to achieve an antiqued look. With acrylic black paint as the foundation, I chose gold for the topcoat since this rich color best embodies the "robe made from imperishable material, and sewn with delicate workmanship from the finest thread" (Boethius 12). The ladder present on Philosophy's robe with rungs begins and ends with two Greek symbols. I painted this detail overtop the crackling robe using a metallic paint. I antiqued the handle of the piece with patina to appear as the crusty, green-aged copper of a sceptre. The small books were painted to resemble the works of Plato and Aristotle, both of whom Boethius studied extensively. The top of the piece transitions from the crackled robe to a pure metallic finish. This iridescent paint symbolizes the varying height of Lady Philosophy, "Her height was hard to determine, for it varied; at one moment she confined herself to normal human dimensions, but at another the crown of her head seemed to strike the heavens, and when she raised it still higher, it even broke through the sky, frustrating the gaze of those who observed her" (Boethius 4). The optical illusion created by the shimmery finish represents this unique characteristic of Philosophy.

Boethius

I constructed this piece to demonstrate the personal progress that Boethius makes from Book 1 until Book 5 in the *Consolation*. In the text his external features are not told in full, but a detailed account of his misery, confusion, and anger are included.

Locked up to await his doom, Boethius grieves and reflects on his misfortune and unfair treatment. According to Philosophy, he has forgotten all she has taught him including his perspective on life (Boethius 17). Instead he has remained stuck in his mortal melancholy state, and bemoans the cruelties of Fortune (Boethius 17). With the guidance of Lady Philosophy, Boethius realizes how unjust and foolish the anger he holds with Fortune. The false happinesses of possessions, wealth, fame, and power are the only realms that Fortune can affect. True happiness cannot be achieved in this way and a person is irrational if he depends upon the hand of Fortune (Boethius 27). God, who is the perfect good, is humanity's only hope to achieve true happiness (Boethius 59). Through the hand of Providence, God rewards the good and the evil. Often times, the wicked men appear to have been rewarded and the good men ignored (Boethius 82). However, the mortal mind does not understand the works of God and cannot judge these actions. An evil soul may be given a good fortune, which in turn affects his conscience for the better of mankind (Boethius 91). This same fortune given to a virtuous man would not have the same effect.

The intense growing progress that takes place in the mind and body of Boethius is fruitful in comparison to his starting point. Lady Philosophy creates a miracle for this miserable man within the small confinements of his prison cell. Boethius' realization that the destruction of power, possessions, family, wealth, and fame did not truly matter is an unbelievable relief. Reaching his absolute and true happiness did not depend upon such

mortal fantasies. Having a prosperous and trusting relationship with the perfect good, God, is the only key to his happiness (Boethius 61).

I best captured Boethius's learning process in the form of a ceramic goblet. In the first pages of the *Consolation*, the goblet would be perceived as quite empty, but as he gained knowledge through Lady Philosophy the cup would begin to fill. The exterior design of the mug describes the path of knowledge that Boethius took to reach self-realization. The base of the piece consists of tree roots deep within the soil, which represents the beginning of his journey. The roots are strong in the hardened soil and symbolically depict his foundation in the concepts of philosophy. However, lost in his misery, he could not use his intelligence to reap any fruit from his misfortune. At this point, he could not see the blessings brought by his incarceration. Slowly, working up the side of the goblet a trunk appears, tiny branches, leaves, and finally fruit can be seen. This representation of the tree of knowledge shows how Boethius prospers through his foundation in philosophy and counsel of Lady Philosophy. In all, the fruit represents the inner peace that Boethius was able to make with God regardless of the misfortunes that occurred in his life. His realization that no possessions or worldly matters can give men true happiness lessened his anger.

In the beginning Boethius's strong foundation in philosophy, his open mind, and desperate desire and need to be cured deemed him suitable to receive the aid of Lady Philosophy. Therefore, hanging on the handle of the decorated goblet is a ceramic key that matches perfectly the padlock atop Lady Philosophy's lid. Boethius has earned the privilege to bask in the overflowing knowledge of Lady Philosophy. She grants him the key to the padlock and allows his empty mug to be abundantly filled with answers. A

transparent glaze coats the exterior of the mug that represents Boethius. It shows that once his misery had been dissipated and his questions quieted, a film of happiness and peace enveloped his soul.

Fortune

Lady Philosophy reveals the characteristics of Fortune as she accurately represents Fortune's relationship with mortals. Lady Philosophy states, "I well know the manifold deceits of that monstrous lady, Fortune, in particular, her fawning friendship with those whom she intends to cheat, until the moment when she unexpectedly abandons them, and leaves them reeling in agony beyond endurance" (Boethius 19). Lady Philosophy explains Fortune's inclinations and reprimands Boethius for placing the blame for his sorrows upon the shoulders of Fortune. Like a foolish man, he leaned upon the fickle hand of Fortune rather than God in his life. Fortune believes she has no fault in the circumstances since she has the right to bless mankind and "withdraw her gifts" just as readily (Boethius 21). As simply as the seasons change with time, wealth and power are Fortune's possessions and she takes them away as she pleases (Boethius 21). She treated Boethius as her favorite for countless years, which allowed Boethius to depend upon her gifts (Boethius 24). Now that "she has cast a malevolent eye" on him, he can realize that he had been leaning his faith upon the wrong being (Boethius 24). Fortune's disappearance in his life allowed for Boethius's realization that happiness cannot be sought after but instead discovered within oneself (Boethius 27).

Fortune's demeanor can be described as no less than two-faced. One day she may provide indescribable joy and the next absolutely crush hopes and dreams. She dangles

false happiness in front of people, and without warning snatches it away. The ceramic piece created in the likeness of Fortune has a large yet distorted figure without any consistency. As simply as Fortune herself lacks regularity, so does this replica. On each side of the piece protrudes the face of a woman slightly tilted to the side. The peaceful faces represent the fickle two-faced tendencies that accompany Fortune.

Using acrylic paint, the piece was painted half black and half white to show the contrast of Fortune's actions. To symbolize her active part in advocating humanity's four greeds, these selfish desires are made evident through a bouquet protruding from the piece. In the bouquet, sticks with dollar bills resemble humanity's false understanding of the association of money with happiness. Small items of food, large houses, and giant flat screen TVs and other images will be shown as examples of pleasure. Fame and power are represented by gold stars and wooden mallets. The star is chosen to encompass the attribute given to famous movie actors and actresses, singers, and athletes. The wooden mallet represents humanity's fickle desire to hold power over other human beings. These "false happinesses" remain under the hand of Fortune, which she may bestow or snatch away at any given time (Boethius 53).

Providence

The "unchanging oneness" of Providence proved hardest to represent in a clay model since the idea itself is challenging to comprehend (Boethius 89). As stated previously, Providence is the divine understanding of the events that occur on earth (Boethius 87). The mortal mind only understands that this realm is indivisible and does not change. Time has no link to the hands of Providence. Often times, her actions do not

appear fair or just. For example, rewarding someone who possesses an evil soul with a bountiful supply of food and wealth for his family does not seem just (Boethius 91). The person with a good heart who lends a hand to his neighbors should be on the receiving end of this fortune not an evil person. However, the good fortune that has befallen the evil person may stimulate feelings of guilt in his conscience, and allow a change of heart for the better to occur. Such betterment of society would not have occurred if the good fortune had blessed the virtuous man.

To represent the unity of Providence, I devised a shape that represents an ongoing circle of events. I constructed a slender slab of porcelain clay and twisted the piece once before connecting the two ends. The final result, though incredibly simple, displays all the characteristics of Providence. The pure white clay shows her intimate relationship with God. The circular silhouette of the piece represents the indivisibility, the unified manner, and the unchanging pattern of Providence. The slight twist within the perfect form shows that, although bumps may appear in the plan of future events, Providence through the hand of God never fails. Holding up this humble piece is a pedestal to represent the majesty and importance that Providence possesses in the lives of all human kind and especially the insignificant life of Boethius.

The external decoration of Providence remains simple to represent the pure nature of a divine being. The white porcelain piece is covered by a layer of clear glaze in order to produce a slight shimmer. The shine represents the divinity of Providence and the unity about her.

Fate

The character of Fate often times blends into that of Providence, but a definite differentiation can be made. As Lady Philosophy explains to Boethius, Fate connects the predetermined decisions of Providence with the realm of time (Boethius 89). She carries out the changes that Providence orders to occur. Her character appears to be redundant in the shadow of Providence, but she allows humanity a faint look into the inner workings of God's plans (Boethius 89). However, Boethius struggles to see how free will can be present alongside the chain of fate. If all has already been decided and ordered, what choice does mankind have in their lives?

The only way to see the possibility of free will among the predestined plans of Providence and order of Fate is through the highest level of cognition: divine understanding (Boethius 99). Since this concept is beyond the understanding of mortals, it proves difficult for humanity comprehend free will. Lady Philosophy explains that God's knowledge resides not in the future, but in the present (Boethius 112) "Hence your judgment will be more correct should you seek to envisage the foresight by which God discerns all things not as sort of foreknowledge of the future, but as knowledge of the unceasingly present moment" (Boethius 112). From this vantage point, God has foreknowledge only of the necessary elements in one's life. These events are those that God has complete control over, and all others are of free choice. Therefore, the ever moving chain of Fate has not been set in stone beforehand. Fate is not the chosen destiny that has been decided for one since his or her birth, but a "shifting chain" that documents the movements of change with the constraints of time (Boethius 89).

I chose to represent her qualities through an old-fashioned ceramic mantelpiece clock. Using slabs of clay, I created the shape of such a timepiece and cut out a small

round hole to accommodate an actual clock-face. Since Fate moves only as fast as the second-hand, she has a close resemblance to that of a clock. Intricate designs of vines and flowers adorn the borders representing the growth of foliage from a seed to flora. Placed on the top of the piece are images of the moon as she moves through her phases. Both are examples of change as a product of time and act as a perfect analogy to Fate. The external design of this piece is intended to replicate the grains of a wooden timepiece to further enhance the ceramic clock.

Relevance of Boethian Philosophies in the 21st Century

Within the *Consolation*, several anti-Christian annotations can be found in the text, which leads scholars to criticize the legitimacy of Boethius's Christian allegiances (European Graduate School). Boethius's *Consolation* reflects many Platonic philosophies, and does not necessarily align with the beliefs of the Christian religion (European Graduate School). Notice his work never refers to Christ or Jesus, but only "God" or "divine being." Due to the lack of Christian foundations in this work, some philosophers assume Boethius reverted back to his family's original denomination, paganism, during his exile (European Graduate School). However, other scholars insist that Boethius died a Christian based upon the biography Cassiodorus composed (European Graduate School). Cassiodorus praises his wide-range of accomplishments and speaks widely of Boethius's theological tractates, which largely refutes the pagan hypothesis.

Either way, whether Boethius possessed a true allegiance to Christianity or to paganism, this fact does not change the relevance of his wisdom that he left for future generations. Modern thinkers can reflect on his message in a productive sense equally in a Medieval setting as in the 21st century. In comparison to Medieval peoples, the internal character of humans has not changed in any significant way. Women and men struggle with misfortune, deaths, betrayal, sadness, and depression in the same manner as the minds of the past. Often times, these souls cannot see a light at the end of the tunnel much like the character Boethius felt before the appearance of Lady Philosophy. The coping mechanisms and lifelong lessons that Boethius shares with his readers are timeless and can easily be applied today.

One of the first methods of consolation from Boethius's tragic tale lies in his expression of emotions through writing and reading philosophy. Throughout antiquity, ancient writers pored over written works and composed their own books to calm their internal suffering (Donato). A clear example that may have had an influence on Boethius is Cicero's *Consolation*, which was written after the death of his daughter (Donato). Boethius uses this coping technique to self-evaluate and take a second look at the fortunate life he has lived. He delves deeper into the philosophical ideas that confuse and sadden him due to his unfortunate circumstances. In this way, Boethius widens his perspective of the value of life rather than pinpointing small unfortunate details that left him in this saddened state.

Boethius's technique of expressing his emotions through written words broadens his mind to evaluate the deeper picture. He sets a perfect example for modern individuals who feel they have been trodden upon and forgotten. Inadvertently, Boethius shows that through reading and writing one can be guided to a vague understanding of the world's happinesses and failures. Boethius's misery stems from his inability to remember the concepts of philosophy that he doted upon for so many years (Boethius 6). At once, when Lady Philosophy enlightens him of the forgotten philosophy, Boethius begins to see that faint light of hope. This is a prime example illuminating the theory that new knowledge and teaching give a light to the meaning of life. Using external resources to open one's eyes and evaluate humanity's flaws allows one to realize that misfortunes occur for a reason. As explained above, the wrath of Fortune and Providence can hardly be contemplated by a mere mortal. In all, knowledge and a broader perspective on life can be a perfect therapeutic tool for a downtrodden individual.

In the *Consolation*, Boethius provides insight that proves applicable to the rejuvenation of the saddened and depressed. In Book 1, Boethius gives the readers a detailed synopsis of the supposed reason for his misery (Boethius 10). Amidst his moanings, Lady Philosophy mentions a few key points that Boethius has forgotten. The afflictions that Fortune allows to appear in people's lives are not rooted in evil, but merely chance. Furthermore, a person who trusts upon the actions of Fortune is foolish (Boethius 24). At this point, Boethius lays the foundation for the most valuable concept for a happy life.

Boethius himself searches for the true meaning of life and specifically the key to happiness. Through his writings, he provides modern readers insights into the dangers of Fortune's tricks and humanity's greed. He explains, through the lips of Lady Philosophy, that the struggles during one's life journey revolve around our perceived notion of happiness. "So, why, mortal men do you pursue happiness outside yourselves, when it lies within" (Boethius 27). Boethius refers to the "lifeless goods" that countless individuals strive to possess in the pursuit of happiness (Boethius 30). Money, power, fame, and pleasures encompass our image of contentment. These same components of livelihood are those which Fortune holds discretion over, and may suddenly snatch away with no notice. We are inconceivably distraught at the retraction of these fake happinesses. Although these mere positions and objects had never provided any sense of peace previously, their absence stems a realization of the bitter emptiness that resonates in place of happiness. In terms of achieving contentment, this material direction will only lead one farther away from one's goal.

As simply as Medieval readers used Boethius's knowledge to enhance their lives so can modern readers. Life's bliss cannot revolve around the material objects on earth, and placing one's happiness upon the chance of Fortune will not work. The destruction of one's home, loss of a job, betrayal of friends, or death of a loved one do not constitute the loss of happiness. Boethius stresses this repeatedly and reiterates the importance that we stray from our false perception of happiness in search of truth.

Boethius does not complete his advice regarding contentment at this point, but renders a cure for the ailing men and women in search of meaning. "So to prevent the argument advancing into infinity, we must allow that the highest God is totally full of the highest and perfect good. Now we have established that the perfect good is true happiness, so true happiness must reside in the highest God" (Boethius 58). Lady Philosophy explains the only key to true happiness is through God, the only good. However, one simply cannot not bask in this happiness through a knowledge that a God exists. A thriving and trusting relationship with God must be present to feel contentment and purpose while on earth. If one's vision remains clouded by material objects, no such relationship could begin to exist. Only through a trust in the highest divine and with an unselfish soul can mortal men achieve such a rewarding companionship.

Boethius's philosophies have provided light to countless individuals from the time the *Consolation* was composed in that fateful prison cell until the 21st century. The pursuit of true happiness remains a classic search throughout the centuries. The overwhelming sea of material objects continues to act as false hope for happiness. Time and again, individuals travel through life frantically searching for a "saving grace," but

their efforts remain unrewarded. These lost souls are searching for contentment in the wrong realm: that of money, power, fame, and pleasure.

Discovering meaning in life proves to be an adventure of trials and tribulations, but Boethius's words provide impeccable guidance. His philosophies prove the value and importance of a relationship with God and the irrelevance of personal goods. Though written fifteen centuries ago, the woes of humanity addressed in the *Consolation* have not changed in the least. Boethius's famous wisdom has steadily guided leaders throughout the decades and will not be outgrown in the age of technology and fast-paced society.

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Appendix:



Fate



Providence



Fortune



Lady Philosophy



Boethius