The Happiness of the Philosopher
According to Boethius of Dacia

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There is a long-standing medieval view of the relationship between philosophy and religious belief wherein philosophy points towards and finds its completion in religion.[1] Although the roots of this argument are traceable to Porphyrian Neoplatonism's qualified embrace of theurgy, the most influential formulation of this argument is found in Book XIX of Augustine's *City of God*. There Augustine argues that ancient philosophy's eudaimonistic promises, in principle, cannot be fulfilled.[2] However, rather than reject eudaimonism altogether, Augustine argues that the promise can be fulfilled for the religious believer.[3] As we will see in part three, Aquinas revisits this argument in the thirteenth century. The general structure of the argument is as follows:

1. According to philosophy, X is necessary and sufficient condition for happiness
2. Philosophy cannot provide X
3. Philosophy cannot provide happiness
4. Either philosophy provides happiness or something else does
5. Something else provides happiness

In *The City of God*, Augustine works out a number of different versions of this argument, responding to specific claims of various philosophical schools, Neo-platonic and Ciceronian views in particular. This argument encourages communication between philosophy and religion, wherein philosophical arguments point toward to religious conclusions, and religious commitments can guide the interpretation of philosophical arguments. The Augustinian argument assumes that both philosophy and religious belief are striving for the same goal—happiness—and to that extent cannot be radically separated. With the influx of Aristotelian materials in the thirteenth century, a number of medieval thinkers argued for a sharper distinction between the two. St. Bonaventure claimed that that the wine of sacred doctrine ought not to be mixed with the water

of philosophy.[4] Indeed, Bonaventure suggests that philosophy has no place in sacred studies at all; at best it is an exercise that sharpens the mind or a tool for disputation, but to take it as anything more than that, as offering substantive conclusions is to reverse the miracle at Cana, turning wine into water.[5] Against Bonaventure's subordinatation of philosophy to theology, the account offered by Boethius of Dacia and other Latin Averroists offers philosophy considerable autonomy.

The precise nature of this autonomy is subject to scholarly debate. While few attribute the "double truth" theory to Latin Averroism any more, there is no consensus about what should replace it. One particularly attractive interpretation of Boethius' view, developed by Jan Pinborg and Sten Ebbesen, is that he understood truth in terms of provability in a system. This approach relativizes truth to particular sciences, prohibiting one from speaking of truth as such apart from particular systems.[6] Whence, in his commentary on Aristotle's *Topics* Boethius writes:

> We say that the dialectician insofar as he is a dialectician, neither can nor should determine syllogisms *simpliciter*. He cannot, because in dialectic it is not known what things are *simpliciter*; he should not, because syllogisms *simpliciter* are not considered in dialectic…. Dialectic only considers dialectical syllogism, their order and principles and what follows from these principles…. A universal or *simpliciter* syllogism transcends [these limits].[7]

So, Boethius maintains that one cannot make universal claims; instead, the practitioner of a science can only demonstrate what follows from the principles of his science. Neither philosophical nor theological claims are demonstrable absolutely, but only relative to their principles. If two sciences treat the same question (e.g. is the world eternal) but arrive at different conclusions (e.g., yes it is, no its not) this does not amount to a formal contradiction insofar as the answers are given in different contexts.[8] But, certainly, one has to decide which science to trust more when the conclusions are in conflict. Boethius sometimes suggests that theological claims "trump" philosophical ones because theological principles are of supernatural origin. While this seems an irenic solution—maintaining the autonomy of philosophy and the supremacy of theology—it is problematic for both disciplines. It is bad for theology because it creates an incorrigible theology that can never be corrected by anything outside itself. It is bad for philosophy because it makes philosophy dispensable; whatever conclusions philosophy might reach are jettisoned in the name of theology.[9] Moreover, it is hard to see how this trumping is supposed to work: if theology trumps philosophy because of its supernatural principles, those are precisely the principles philosophers cannot recognize. If philosophy and theology are completely sealed off from each other, there is no philosophical motivation for the decision in favor of theology when there is a conflict. This may be why Boethius, in the beginning of *de Aeternitate Mundi,* says that one accepts theological truths because of the law, not because of reason.[10]

That said, let us return to the argument I alluded to at the start of this paper: roughly the claim that philosophy makes eudaimonistic promises that it is unable to fulfill, but which are fulfilled in religious belief. If this argument is correct, then the philosopher's principles point towards something higher than philosophy and Boethius'

methodological division of the sciences into hermetically sealed zones of competence is incorrect. Philosophy, through natural principles is able to develop an account of human happiness and, through those same principles, realize that it cannot deliver said happiness. This, the Augustinian argument goes, gives the philosopher reasons to look for something beyond philosophy that can satisfy the demand for happiness. Given this background, Boethius' defense of the autonomy of philosophy requires more than the methodological considerations seen in the commentary on the *Topics*: it needs a response to the Augustinian argument. This response, I believe, is found in *de Summo Bono*'s claim that the philosopher is completely happy. After all, if the philosopher is completely happy, the Augustinian argument is short-circuited. Whence, Boethius has to offer a necessary and sufficient condition for happiness that philosophy can plausibly provide. He does this by claiming that wisdom is sufficient for happiness. This is an essentially stoic thesis, and this embrace of stoicism is often missed by readers of Boethius, who—given his affiliation with Latin Averroism—tend to focus on the peripatetic elements of this thought. To see his stoicism, we will have to look more closely at his text. My discussion of *de Summo Bono* will move in three stages. First, I introduce the central difference between stoicism and peripateticism, so that Boethius' stoicism will be more apparent. Second, I describe the grafting of stoicism onto the Peripatetic architecture of Boethius' argument. Third, I explain how the stoicism of *de Summo Bono* relates to Boethius' understanding of the relationship between philosophy and theology.

<div align="center">I</div>

I will now state the salient differences between the peripatetic tradition and stoicism. For what follows I will base my discussion on the testimony of Cicero. Although not an orthodox stoic, he provided principle sources for medieval understandings of stoicism. Cicero's *On Duties*, *Tusculan Disputations* and *Stoic Paradoxes* circulated widely in the middle ages, and although *de Finibus* was not as widely circulated in the thirteenth century, our oldest manuscripts extend to past the eleventh century and we have a Parisian text from the twelfth century. This means that is possible that Boethius of Dacia could have come across the *de Finibus* in his time at the University of Paris. As far as I know, however, there is no evidence that he did.[11] From any one of these sources, Boethius could have imbibed (a) the stoic doctrine that virtue is necessary and sufficient for happiness,[12] and (b) the claim that this doctrine provides better support for a philosophical way of life than the peripatetic view that wisdom is necessary but not sufficient. In Book V of the *Tusculan Disputations*, Cicero discusses Theophrastus' claim that wisdom is necessary but not sufficient for happiness. According to Theophrastus—taken by Cicero as an authentic spokesperson for the peripatetic school— happiness requires both wisdom and external goods. A similar claim is made in Book IV of *de Finibus* and criticized in Book V. In the *Tusculans* Cicero argues that if (a) both wisdom and external goods are necessary for happiness and (b) philosophy does not supply external goods—fortune does that—it follows that (c) philosophy cannot provide happiness.[13] Cicero comments that if this is the case, one has little motivation to study philosophy.[14] After all, Cicero wonders, if philosophy cannot supply happi-

ness, why bother with it? Interestingly, this Ciceronian argument seems to be the distant ancestor of the Augustinian one I mentioned at the outset. The crucial difference is that Cicero sees this as suggesting that the peripatetic account of happiness should be rejected, while the Augustinian argument takes it as suggesting the insufficiency of philosophy. These considerations lead Cicero to endorse, with some qualifications, the stoic claim that wisdom is necessary and sufficient for happiness.[15] Since philosophy can supply wisdom, it follows that it leads one to the happy life, giving us good reasons to practice philosophy. Cicero gives those interested in responding to the Augustinian argument reason to prefer the stoic claim that wisdom is sufficient for happiness to the Aristotelian view. But do we find stoicism in Boethius of Dacia?

II

For the most part, the stoic elements of *de Summo Bono* are unnoticed. As a Latin Averroist, it is not surprising that Boethius' text begins with a psychological discussion that follows a familiar Aristotelian path—beginning with a consideration of the three kinds of soul—vegetative, sensitive, and intellectual. On the basis of this psychology, Boethius argues that the highest good for a human being should be related to the highest part of the soul, and this turns out to be the intellectual part. Boethius then divides the intellectual part of the soul into two parts, the practical and speculative. Boethius claims complete happiness consists in knowing and doing the good, and the delight [*delectatio*] that accompanies this. The bifurcation of the philosopher's life into two parts—knowing and doing—is overcome a few lines later when Boethius describes the principle action of the philosopher as contemplation: *actio autem philosophi est speculatio veritatis*.[16] In his commentary on Chapter 7 of Book X of the *Ethics*, Averroës connects action and knowing in the philosopher when he speaks of "the act of wisdom and speculation."[17] In fact, the more one speculates, the happier one is.[18] Both Aristotle and Averroës point out that the speculative activity is the most pleasant insofar as it is the best use of the best power, and we have seen the Boethius includes delight in his account of the philosophical life. So far Boethius has followed the typical peripatetic path; however, if we look a bit closer we will see that he gives this path a stoic twist. I will point to three ways.

First, we should look at scholastic usage of the word "philosopher." It is widely known that for scholastic writers, *the* philosopher was Aristotle and *the* commentator was Averroës. Whence, one might assume that Boethius' discussion of the life of the philosopher is devoted to expounding the peripatetic view. However, the word "philosopher" was also used generically to refer to non-Christian thinkers, either pagan or Muslim, working in any philosophical tradition. When Aquinas wrote *Contra Errores Greacorum*, the Greeks in question were the Greek Christians, not Greek philosophers. So, when Boethius argues that philosophers are happy, he is implicitly locating happiness *in partibus infidelium*.[19] But even then, Boethius uses the word "philosopher" somewhat differently than most scholastics.[20] For him, the philosopher is not characterized merely by non-belief, but by a life according to nature. In a fairly stoic move, Boethius maintains that living according to nature is coextensive with a life of virtue, which in turn is the happy life. This life according to nature is predicated, in turn, on

a proper and complete understanding of nature, up to an including knowledge of the first cause, i.e. God.[21] The connection of nature, virtue, wisdom, and happiness is a mainstay of stoicism and excludes any external goods. The peripatetic tradition, on the other hand, is fairly unanimous in requiring at least a bare minimum of external goods in addition to virtue for happiness.[22] Second, the Boethian philosopher is happy all the time, regardless of what happens to him; every occurrence contributes to his happiness by either being a work of happiness (*opera felicitatis*) itself or an opportunity to exercise virtue.[23] Even sleeping, he is happy. This runs counter to Aristotle's claim that happiness extends only as far as study extends.[24] The expansion of happiness from a particular activity to life is a typically stoic move, as one can see in Cicero's *Tusculans*.[25] Third, he claims that only the philosopher lives rightly, reproducing the classical stoic claim that only the sage lives rightly.[26] In stoic philosophy, it is precisely the wisdom of the sage that accounts for his virtue. Because the sage knows the good, he does the good; without wisdom, the stoics argue, one cannot be virtuous. In Boethius' case, the philosopher is characterized by knowledge of the first cause, and this knowledge, he suggests is necessary and sufficient for living rightly. The upshot of this is that within the broadly peripatetic framework in which Boethius develops his account of the philosophical life, the actual life of the philosopher is conceived along stoic lines. So while Boethius' psychology, cosmology, and metaphysics are clearly and self-consciously derived from the Philosopher and the Commentator, the happiness of the philosopher is conceived along stoic lines.

III

To see the relevance of Boethius' stoicism for understanding his view of the relationship between philosophy and religion, allow me a brief contrast between Boethius and Aquinas on happiness. In Aquinas' version of the Augustinian argument, an important difference between imperfect earthly happiness and perfect heavenly happiness is that earthly happiness requires external goods while heavenly happiness does not.[27] Aquinas uses the precarious nature of earthly happiness to demonstrate the need for a more prefect and secure heavenly happiness: the external goods that we need for earthly happiness are by nature transitory and, to that degree, unsatisfying.[28] In the Thomistic account the peripatetic view correctly includes external goods in its account of imperfect earthly happiness, and this implies that true happiness is to be found elsewhere. Whence Aquinas' version of the Augustinian argument:

1. According to Peripatetic accounts, virtue and other goods are necessary for happiness
2. Philosophy cannot provide other goods
3. Philosophy cannot provide happiness
4. Either philosophy provides happiness or something else does
5. Something else provides happiness

The stoic position, however, undercuts this argument: insofar as virtue is sufficient for happiness, the precarious nature of external goods is irrelevant. In fact, stoicism

appeals to precisely this point in their argument for the sufficiency of virtue! With the stoic account of happiness, one can argue as follows:

1. According to stoicism, wisdom is necessary and sufficient for happiness
2. Philosophy provides wisdom
3. Therefore, philosophy provides happiness

This, in a nutshell, is the argument of *de Summo Bono:* the philosophical way of life accomplishes *hic et nunc* what the Augustinian argument locates in the afterlife. [29]

There is one important objection to this reading of Boethius, and since it turns on one sentence in his text, it is worth looking at carefully. Boethius writes: "He who is perfect in [this] happiness, which we know, by reason, to be possible in this life, is closer to the happiness in the future life we expect through faith." The key phrase is the last part, regarding the future life. In Latin it reads *ipse propinquior est beatitudini quam in vita futura per fidem expectamus*.[30] Noted scholar John Wipple translates this as "draws closer to that happiness which we expect in the life to come on the authority of faith."[31] This rendering suggests that the happiness of the philosopher part of a larger process of attaining the happiness of the blessed in heaven. This reads philosophical happiness as a stepping stone towards heavenly happiness; the philosopher is not *completely happy*, but only somewhat happy, and this happiness is in large part due to the fact that it moves him closer to heavenly happiness. This can be taken as either drastically watering down Boethius' argument, or one of those moments when the Averroist allows religious belief to trump philosophy. However, there are two reasons to reject Wippel's translation. First, this rendering requires that *propinquior* be taken as a verb "draws closer" but it is, in fact, a comparative adjective. The phrase should be translated as "is closer to that happiness." Second, in Wippel's version, the philosopher is in transit towards a superior kind of happiness; in the second the philosopher is stationary. Second, "is closer" better matches the understanding of happiness described both stoicism and Aristotelianism: happiness is an end in itself, not a means or a route to something higher. For both the peripatetic and stoic philosophers, if it is not the end, it is not happiness.

We can then read the last clause, *per fidem expectamus* in a slightly different way: the philosopher here and now is closer to the kind of happiness that the faith teaches us to expect in the next life. On this reading, the *expectamus* is taken in the sense that given the supernatural principles of faith, the believer expects to find happiness heaven. The philosopher, of course, does not expect to find happiness in heaven insofar as the philosopher operates on the basis of natural, not supernatural principles. Boethius' earlier claim that it is rational for the philosopher to desire a long life makes more sense on the second reading.[32] If philosophical happiness was merely preparatory for a superior happiness, it makes little sense to wish to delay the obtainment of that superior post-mortem happiness. On the other hand, if philosophical happiness is an end in itself, not preparatory to anything else, it makes sense that the philosopher would desire a long life, so as to extend the enjoyment of that happiness.

But, one could easily object that the use of the first person plural—*expectamus*—indicates that Boethius counts himself among the believers rather than among the phi-

losophers. This is an important objection, since it raises the question, does Boethius consider himself to be a philosopher. Given his account of the philosopher, it is fair to say that Boethius probably does not consider himself a philosopher—just as few stoics considered themselves wise. The text in question is a description of the life of the philosopher, but it does not purport to be autobiographical. So, Boethius' self-understanding is relatively unimportant. Anyway, I think we can take the first person plural as a general statement about what "we" do, in the way I said that "we" have a copy of *de Finibus* from the 12th century, when I don't actually have it, and I wager, neither does anyone else in this room.

In sum, Boethius of Dacia's adaptation of the stoic account of happiness into an Averroistic context enables him to short circuit the Augustinian argument for the inter-action of philosophy and religious belief.

NOTES

1. In an ancient or medieval context, it makes more sense to speak of "religion" than "theology" since—as ancient and medieval philosophers would be quick to point out—there are both Platonic and Aristotelian theologies, as in Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1026a20-30; for a medieval version of this point, see Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia libri Metaphysicae*, Proomeium.

2. See Augustine, *de Civitate Dei,* XIX.4; for a discussion of Porphyrian neoplatonism in this context, see the bulk of book X.

3. For a discussion of this point in Augustine, see B. Harding, *Augustine and Roman Virtue* (London: Continuum, 2008).

4. Bonaventure, *In Hexaemeron Collatio,* (in *S. Bonaventurae Opera Omnia* V: *Opscula Varia Theologica*, ed. Studio et Curia pp. Collegii a S. Bonaventura Quarrachi: Ad Claras Aquas, 1891), XIX, 422.

5. Bonaventure, *In Hexaemeron Collatio*, 422

6. See Sten Ebbesen, "Boethius of Dacia: Science is a Serious Game" (in *Topics in Latin Philosophy from the 12th-14th Centuries*. London, Ashgate, 2009)

7. Boethius of Dacia, *Quaestiones Super Librum Topicorum* (in *Boethii Daci Opera* VI.1: *Topica*, ed. N. Green-Pedersen. Copenhagen: Corpus Phiosophorum Danicorum Medii Aevi, 1976), 51 (or, if you prefer, I C. 1 q. 15). Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

8. Boethius of Dacia, *de Aeternitate Mundi* (in *Boethii Daci Opera* VI.2: *Opscula*. Ed. N. Green-Pedersen. Copenhagen: Corpus Phiosophorum Danicorum Medii Aevi, 1976), 352-353.

9. G. Klima, "*Ancilla Theologiae* vs. *Domina Philosophorum*: Thomas Aquinas, Latin Averroism and the Autonomy of Philosophy," (in *What is Philosophy in the Middle Ages? Proceedings of the Tenth International Congress of Medieval Philosophy (SIEPM)*, eds. J. Aertsen & A. Speer, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1998), 393-402.

10. Boethius of Dacia, *de Aeternitate Mundi*, 335.

11. Of course, there are other possible sources—Seneca was well known in the 13th century, and an anonymous commentary on Aristotle's *Ethics*—a commentary dripping in Latin Averroism—begins with a reference to Seneca. See M. Grabbmann, *Der lateinische Averroismus des XIII. Jahrhunderts und seine Stellung zur christlichen Weltanschauung* (Sitzungsberichter der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1931), 37-38.

12. Cicero, *Stoic Paradoxes* (in *On the Orator: Book 3. On Fate; Stoic Paradoxes; On the Divisions of Oratory*, trans. H. Rackham. Loeb Classical Library 349. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1942).

13. See Cicero's remarks regarding Theophrastus' view in *Tusculan Disputations,* V.9.24-26.

14. Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, V.1.2.

15. I am passing over a great deal of technicalities regarding the specifics of Cicero's position, which is something of a heterodox stoicism; for more details see B. Harding, "The Virtue of Suicide and the Suicide of Virtue: A Reading of Cicero's *On Ends* and *Tusculan Disputations*" (*Epoché: A Journal for the History of Philosophy,* 14.1), 95-111.

16. Boethius of Dacia, *de Summo Bono* (in *Boethii Daci Opera* VI.2: *Opscula*. Ed. N. Green-Pedersen. Copenhagen: Corpus Phiosophorum Danicorum Medii Aevi, 1976), 375.

17. Averroës, *Commentum Averrois super libros Ethicorum ad Nicomachum Aristotelis,* trans. Hermannus Alemannus, ed. Nicoletus Vernia (Venice, 1483), chunk 141. (Available online at <http://dare.uni-koeln.de>.) The original reads: "*Hoc igitur actus felicitatis est, intendo actum sapientiae et speculationis*".

18. Averroës, *Commentum Averrois super libros Ethicorum ad Nicomachum Aristotelis*, chunk 141.

19. This though is not original to me, but I cannot track down the source; my suspicion is that it comes from either Remi Brague, Alain de Libera, or John Marenbon.

20. For a brief discussion of this change in terminology, see S. Ebbesen "Where were the Stoics in the Middle Ages?" in *Stoicism: Traditions and Transformations*, ed. S Strange and J Zupko (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004).

21. Boethius of Dacia, *de Summo Bono*, 375.

22. At times Averroës *seems* to flirt with the stoic view—in his commentary on chapter 8 of book 10 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* he writes that the wise man can rely solely on his thoughts and wisdom [*opinione et sapientia*], but later he takes this back, endorsing Aristotle's view that he will need a few, although not many, external goods: *Etenim rebus necessariis in vita indiget sapiens, sicut indiget eis alius*. (Averroës, *Commentum*, chunk 142). Averroës' point is that the Wiseman needs only his wisdom to exercise the virtue of wisdom, but needs other goods beyond that for the happy life. In the first passage, he means that unlike other virtue whose exercise depends on heteronomous conditions (e.g., magnificence requires large sums of money to be exercised), wisdom is self-sufficient, needing only itself for its exercise. In the second, he affirms that while wisdom is sufficient for the exercise of wisdom, it is not sufficient for the happy life. In the end, it is the traditional peripatetic position.

23. Boethius of Dacia*, de Summo Bono*, 372.

24. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1102b5-10 and 1178b25-1179a5.

25. Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, V.16-17.

26. See Boethius of Dacia, *de Summo Bono*, 375 and 377; it is worth mentioning that this claim was also condemned in 1277: 166. *Quod, si ratio recta, et voluntas recta*. For references to the condemnation, I use the text and numbering printed in Pierre Mandonnett, *Siger de Brabant et l'averroïsme latin au xiiie siècle*, (Fribourg (Suisse): Librairie de l'Université, 1899) Vol. 2, 175-191; a more recent edition of the condemnation, with slightly different numberings can be found in D. Piche & Cl. Lafleur, *La condamnation parisienne de 1277* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1999). Piche and Lafleur have largely superseded Mandonnet; I use Mandonnett because it is the version most readily available—it can be found online at <www.archive.org>.

27. Aquinas, *Summa Theologia*, I.II, q 4, a. 7 et passim. Aquinas actually develops at least two arguments along these lines, one epistemological (dealing with the mind's incapacity for *quod est* knowledge of God) and the other moral (dealing with nature of happiness). In this paper I will focus on the moral argument, i.e. the argument advanced in the treatise on happiness. Aquinas makesthe epistemological argument at *Summa Theologia* I q 1, a. 1 and *Super Boetium De Trinitate* q. 1 a.2 and q. 3 a.1. So, for Aquinas, philosophy cannot demonstrate that God is a trinity of persons, but one who wants to know about God needs to know these things, therefore, while philosophy can bring some knowledge of God, it does not provide exhaustive knowledge. However, this sort argument is only available to those who accept certain theological principles

that the Boethian philosopher does not accept. For a discussion of Aquinas epistemological argument, see James Lehrberger, O. Cist, "Aquinas' Philosophical Critique of Philosophy" *Verbum: Analecta Neolatina* 6 (2004): 39–49.

    28. Aquinas, *Summa Theologia*, I.II, q.5, a. 3

    29. Boethius of Dacia, *de Summo Bono*, 371-372; this thesis was also condemned in 1277: 172. *Quod felicitas habetur in ista vita, et non in alia.*

    30. Boethius of Dacia, *de Summo Bono*, 372.

    31. Wippel, 29.

    32. Boethius of Dacia, *de Summo Bono*, 372.

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