

# The Lady Philosophy

*On the Consolation of Philosophy* was written in AD 523 during a one-year imprisonment Boethius served while awaiting trial—and eventual execution—for the alleged crime of [treason](#) under the [Ostrogothic](#) King [Theodoric the Great](#). Boethius was at the very heights of power in [Rome](#), holding the prestigious office of [magister officiorum](#), and was brought down by treachery. This experience inspired the text, which reflects on how evil can exist in a world governed by God (an example of [theodicy](#)), and how happiness is still attainable amidst fickle fortune, while also considering the nature of happiness and God. In 1891, the academic [Hugh Fraser Stewart](#) described the work as "by far the most interesting example of [prison literature](#) the world has ever seen."



Miniatures of Boethius teaching and in prison from a 1385 Italian manuscript

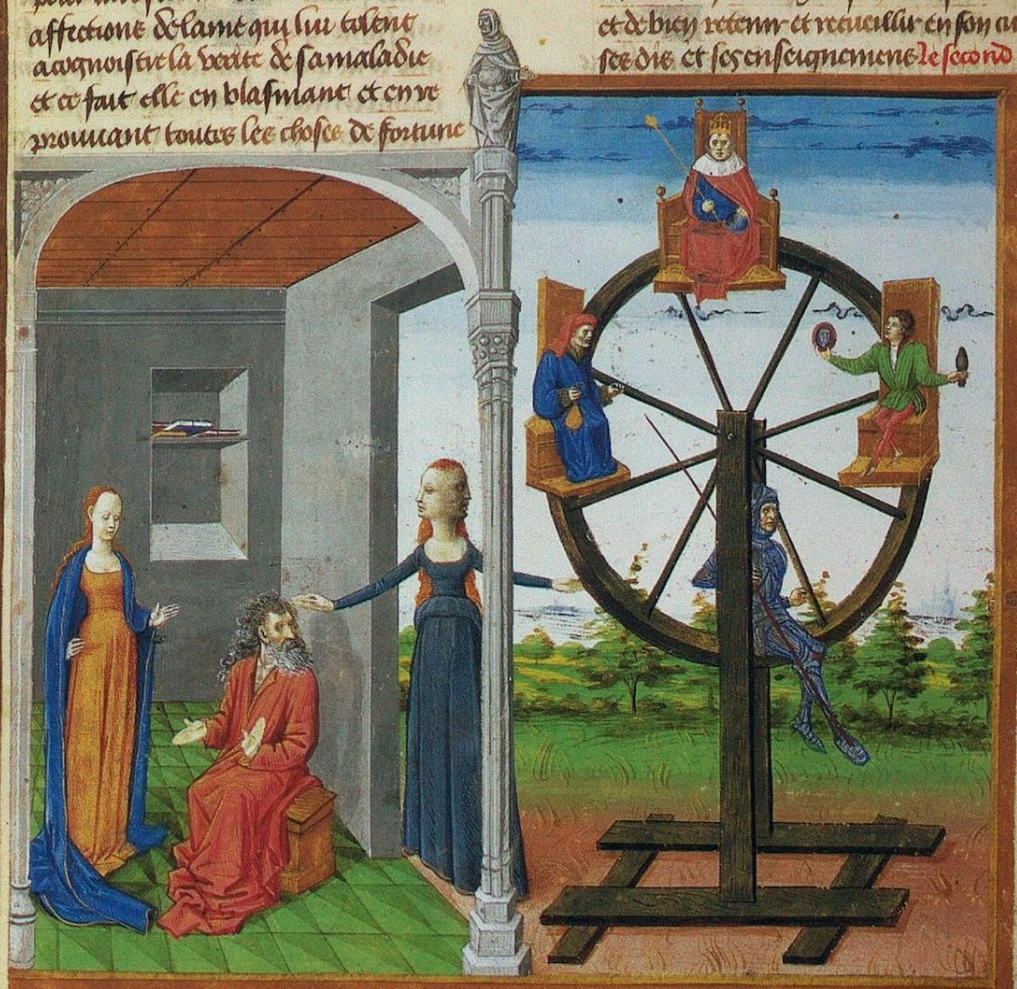
Boethius writes the book as a conversation between himself and a **female personification of philosophy**, referred to as "Lady Philosophy". Philosophy consoles Boethius by discussing the transitory nature of wealth, fame, and power ("no man can ever truly be secure until he has been forsaken by Fortune"), and the ultimate superiority of things of the mind, which she calls the "one true good". She contends that happiness comes from within, and that virtue is all that one truly has because it is not imperiled by the vicissitudes of fortune.

Boethius engages with the nature of [predestination](#) and [free will](#), the [problem of evil](#) and the "problem of desert", [human nature](#), [virtue](#), and [justice](#). He speaks about the nature of free will and [determinism](#) when he asks whether God knows and sees all, or whether man has free will. On human nature, Boethius says that humans are essentially good, and only when they give in to "wickedness" do they "sink to the level of being an animal." On justice, he says criminals are not to be abused, but rather treated with sympathy and respect, using the analogy of doctor and patient to illustrate the ideal relationship between prosecutor and criminal.

A page of a medieval French translation of Boethius' „[Consolation of Philosophy](#)“ in the manuscript Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Fr. 809, fol. 40r. The miniature shows Boethius (left) with Philosophia (the personification of philosophy); on the right side of the picture the [Wheel of Fortune](#).

quelles a promise a Boete Cest  
 a dire les legieres & aisies sentences  
 pour lui oster la douleur et les ailes  
 affections de lame qui lui talent  
 a connoistre la verite de samaladie  
 et ce fait elle en blasmant et enre  
 prouuant toutes les choses de fortune

et dit que cest signe de bon disciple  
 de soy bien taire et de bien oyr & en  
 tendre les paroles de son maistre  
 et de bien retenir et recueillir en son cuer  
 ses dis et ses enseignemens **le second li**



**Q**ue seut vng  
 pou & quant elle  
 aparut pour ce  
 que ie me taisoie  
 simplement et que  
 estoie enuoyez si commença a  
 dire philozophie **¶** Et lay bien  
 dit elle entendu la cause et la ma

mer de ton mal le desir et l'aspection  
 de ta premiere fortune te met a mesfa  
 se cest adire de retourner a ta pro  
 priete sicomme tu fais semblant  
 et sa nuance a trouble le estat de to  
 cuer et non aue chose Je entene tou  
 bien les fardemens de ce monstee  
 glose **¶** philozophie appelle for

---

Revision #6

Created 2026-02-10 02:43:57 UTC by Dara

Updated 2026-02-10 04:59:49 UTC by Dara