

Boethius
God's Knowledge and Human Freedom

"Since every judgement comprehends those things subject to it according to its own nature, and God has always an eternal and present nature, then his knowledge too, surpassing all movement of time, is permanent in the simplicity of his present, and embracing all the infinite spaces of the future and the past, considers them in his simple act of knowledge as though they were now going on...

"But if the comparison of the divine and human present is a proper one, just as you see certain things in this your temporal present, so he perceives all things in his eternal one. And therefore this divine foreknowledge does not alter the proper nature of things, but sees them present to him just such as in time they will at some future point come to be. nor does he confuse the ways things are to be judged, but with one glance of his mind distinguishes both those things necessarily coming to be and those not necessarily coming to be, just as you, when you see at the same time a man walking on the earth and the sun rising in the heavens, although the two things are seen simultaneously, yet you distinguish between them, and judge the first to be moving voluntarily, the other of necessity...

"[T]here are two kinds of necessities;

one is simple: a necessary fact, 'all men are mortal';

the other is conditional; if you know that a man is walking, he must be walking.

Whatever anyone knows cannot be otherwise than as it is known, but this conditional necessity by no means carries with it that other simple kind. For this sort of necessity is not caused by a thing's proper nature but by the addition of the condition; for no necessity compels a voluntary walker to proceed, even though it is necessary that he is going at the time when he is walking."

From The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: "Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (born: circa 475–7 C.E., died: 526? C.E.) has long been recognized as one of the most important intermediaries between ancient philosophy and the Latin Middle Ages...Boethius was born into the Roman aristocracy...[and] lived most of his life under the rule of Theoderic, an Ostrogoth educated at Constantinople, who was happy to let the old families keep up their traditions in Rome, while he wielded power in Ravenna...Boethius's final years are well known to anyone who has read his most popular work, The Consolation of Philosophy. He agreed to become Theoderic's 'Master of Offices', one of the most senior officials, but he quickly fell out with many others at court, probably because he attacked their corruption. Accused of treason and of engaging in magic, he was imprisoned and (probably in 526) executed, but not before he had the chance to write his literary masterpiece.