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Boethius and the Importance of Basic Logic and Mathematics for Philosophy

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III. Applications of Basic Logic and Mathematics in the Theological Tractates

At the beginning of Chapter I, I set out that the fields Boethius mainly wrote about were mathematics, logic and theology, and that Boethius regarded all of them as philosophy. From the above chapters, it has become clear that mathematics and logic are elementary disciplines in Boethius' curriculum. In the chapter on logic and mathematics,¹³⁷ I gave a short introduction into some basic ideas of these two disciplines and I promised to show how Boethius employs them in his philosophical writing. From this chapter onwards, I will discuss the applications of basic logic and mathematics. In this chapter, I first investigate their use in Boethius' theology.

Boethius' theological works are usually called *Opuscula Sacra*.¹³⁸ The traditional order of these five theological tractates is the order in which the tractates were found in the manuscripts and in which they are generally printed: *De trinitate*, *Utrum pater*, *Quomodo substantiae*, *De fide*, and *Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*. However, this is not the chronological order. I follow Chadwick in regarding *De fide* as the first in the chronological order. Then Boethius wrote the *Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, followed by *De trinitate* and *Utrum pater*. The relative position of *Quomodo substantiae* remains uncertain.

Why did Boethius see the need to write on Christian theology? In the age of Boethius, religious and political affairs were often inseparably bound

¹³⁷ Cf. Section II.1.2, Section II.2.1.3 and Section II.2.2.3.

¹³⁸ Cf. Bradshaw (2009), "The *Opuscula Sacra*: Boethius and Theology," in Marenbon (ed.), pp. 105-128; Mair (1981), "The Text of the *Opuscula Sacra*," in Gibson (ed.), pp. 206-213; Reiss (1982), pp. 58-79. — Thomas Aquinas wrote two works on Boethius' *De trinitate*; cf. Aquinas (1953 and 1987). He also wrote a work on Boethius' *Quomodo substantiae*; cf. Aquinas (2001). McInerny has argued that Thomas Aquinas was a reliable interpreter of Boethius' thought (McInerny, 1990 and 1992). On Boethius and Aquinas, cf. Hall (1992); Hankey (1981).

up with each other.¹³⁹ As a consul, therefore, Boethius had to closely follow the theological developments of his day.¹⁴⁰ Among his five theological tractates, only the *Contra Eutychem et Nestorium* gives us clear information on the circumstances of its composition.

“I have been long and anxiously waiting for you to discuss with me the problem which was raised at the meeting. ... You no doubt remember how, when the letter was read in the assembly, it was asserted that the Eutychemians confess that Christ is formed from two natures but does not consist of them ...” (*Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, 1-2; 6-7)

The meeting Boethius refers to took place in the year 512 A.D..¹⁴¹ In 512 A.D., some Eastern European bishops from the Byzantine Empire were caught between Eutychemians and Nestorians, so they appealed to Pope Symmachus¹⁴² for his advice and help. In the same year, an assembly of high clergy and Roman senators was held, and Boethius and John the Deacon, to whom *Contra Eutychem et Nestorium* is addressed, attended this meeting. At this assembly, the letter that Boethius refers to was read; it contained a plea for help from the Eastern bishops.¹⁴³ In this letter, a formula was submitted, to the effect that Christ both consisted *of* two natures and subsisted *in* two natures (“*ex duabus naturis et in duabus naturis*”). Boethius agrees to this formula, and he says that “among followers of the true Faith He is equally believed to be of two natures and in two nature” (*Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, 9-12). This formula is different from that of Eutychemians, who “confess that Christ is formed from two

¹³⁹ Cf. Charanis (1974); Dvornik (1951). — In section II.2.1.3.d above, I noted that Boethius added chapter 45 of Book II to his work on arithmetic, discussing “which medial proportions are compared to what things in the state of public affairs”, which shows that even in the context of arithmetic, Boethius’ interest in state affairs persists.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Reiss (1982), “The Philosopher as Public Administrator”, “Theological Controversies”, and “Joining East and West”, pp. 55-58, pp. 64-66, and pp. 76-79.

¹⁴¹ Cf. Chadwick (1981b), pp. 180-190; Marenbon (2003), pp. 68-69.

¹⁴² Pope Symmachus (died 19 July 514 A.D.) was the head of the Catholic Church from 22 November 498 to his death in 514. His tenure was marked by a serious schism over who was legitimately elected pope by the citizens of Rome. Cf. Davis (1989), pp. 43-46 and Richards (1979), pp. 69-99 on the Symmachian Schism; see Townsend (1937) on councils held under Pope Symmachus.

¹⁴³ For the text of the letter, see Mansi (1901-1927) (V.8), pp. 224-225.

natures but does not consist of them” (*Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, 7-8). In the letter, the Eastern bishops say that, there is a middle way between Arius¹⁴⁴ and Sabellius¹⁴⁵. Since the position of Nestorius resembles that of Arius, and the position of Eutyches resembles that of Sabellius, therefore, they in fact asked Pope Symmachus to give them a middle way between Nestorius and Eutyches. Boethius attaches importance to this issue raised by the bishops and thus effectively lends them his aid by means of a tractate against Eutyches and Nestorius. He provides them with the requested middle way, which is the position of the Christian faith. He says that he was struck by the novelty of the assertion in the letter that was read in the assembly. Here we see Boethius’ motivation for writing the *Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, together with its political significance.

After the completion of the treatise *Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, Boethius turns his interests to the doctrine of the Trinity. He wrote two treatises on the Trinity, in both of which there is no certain information to show what caused Boethius to focus on this issue. From the study of the religious and political events at that time, it is clear that issues concerning the Trinity directly resulted from the Christological debate, especially from an anti-Nestorian slogan.¹⁴⁶ This slogan “*unus ex trinitate passus carne* (one of the Trinity suffered in the flesh)” was offered in 519 A.D. by Scythian monks from the East to protect Christ’s divinity by allowing for his suffering as a human, i.e. in his passible nature.¹⁴⁷ The theology of the Scythian monks sounded dangerously close to making an intimate link between Monophysite Christology and a strongly pluralistic doctrine of God, in antithesis to Nestorius’ tendency to link a diphysite Christology with an

¹⁴⁴ Arius (250 or 256-336 A.D.) was an ascetic North African Christian presbyter and priest in Alexandria, Egypt, of the church of Baucalis; Arianism originated with him. Arius asserted that the Son of God was a subordinate entity to God the Father. Cf. Anatolios (2011), p. 44; Williams (2001).

¹⁴⁵ Sabellius is a theologian and priest from the 3rd century A.D.; the theological teaching attributed to him is Sabellianism. In Christianity, Sabellianism (also known as modalism, modalistic monarchianism, or modal monarchism) is the nontrinitarian belief that the Heavenly Father, the Resurrected Son and the Holy Spirit are different modes or aspects of one God, as perceived by the believer, rather than three distinct persons in God Himself. Cf. Pelikan (1975), pp. 179-181.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Chadwick (1981b), p. 211.

¹⁴⁷ Bark (1944), p. 417. Cf. Marenbon (2003), pp. 76-77.

exclusively unitary doctrine of God.¹⁴⁸ This event led to a schism in the Church, beginning in the year 482 A.D.. In 482 A.D., the Emperor Zeno had issued a document known as the *Henotikon* aimed at upholding the Nicene and Constantinopolitan creeds. The original purpose of the *Henotikon* was the reconciliation of the theological differences, so it avoided any definitive statement on whether Christ had one or two natures. This document condemned the teachings of Nestorius and Eutyches, but Zeno's attempt to appease the parties was not successful, and it was followed by the schism of the Eastern and Western churches.¹⁴⁹ Boethius undoubtedly realized the importance of the question for the restoration and maintenance of peace within the Church. Thus, Boethius set down to discuss the doctrine of the Trinity in his next two theological tractates, *De trinitate* and *Utrum pater*.

Besides the three treatises introduced above, Boethius also composed a tractate named *Quomodo substantiae*, in which he does not discuss any point of Christian dogma. Despite this difference in character, these four works (*De trinitate*, *Utrum pater*, *Quomodo substantiae*, and *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium*) adopt a similar method: Boethius uses numerous applications of basic logic, but very few applications of mathematics, to throw further light on the issues at stake. In the *De fide* Boethius makes no use of basic logic and mathematics at all.¹⁵⁰ The *De fide* is by far the least studied work of the theological tractates, but this treatise is of great importance, for it gives a brief sketch of the central doctrines of Christianity and covers the topics which are discussed in other tractates. For this reason, I shall investigate *De fide* first and point out how it prepares for the other theological treatises. Then I shall discuss the three tractates on Christian doctrine in chronological order. The last treatise I shall analyze is *Quomodo substantiae*, for it looks like a philosophical essay, and is therefore closer to his last work, the *Consolatio*, which I shall discuss in Chapter IV.

Mair points out that “the relationship between the logical and

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Chadwick (1981b), p. 212.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Baker (1973), pp. 17-22; Bark (1944); Bury (1958), pp. 314-347; Dvornik (1951); Matthews (1981), “Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius,” in Gibson (ed.), p. 33.

¹⁵⁰ The authenticity of *De fide* has often been discussed by scholars, but now it is generally accepted as one of Boethius' theological works. Cf. Bark (1946); Chadwick (1980a).

theological works of Boethius himself¹⁵¹ still awaits detailed examination, which is what I am trying to do now. In this chapter, I will examine applications of basic logic and mathematics in Boethius' theological tractates, and establish the relationship between Boethius' logical and mathematical works, and his theological works.

III.1. On the Treatise *De Fide Catholica*

The title of *De fide* was lacking from the manuscripts. It is Renatus Vallinus, in the Leyden edition of *Consolatio* and the tractates (1656), who first gave it the title under which it appears in subsequent edition.¹⁵² Although the time of writing is uncertain, I agree with Chadwick that *De fide* was probably written first.¹⁵³ The Catholic faith is the basis of Boethius' arguments in other theological tractates. For example, at the beginning of *De trinitate*, he emphasizes this: "I think that the method of our inquiry must be borrowed from what is admittedly the surest source of all truth, namely, the fundamental doctrines of the Catholic faith." (*Utrum pater*, 3-5) In addition, if any argument is against the Catholic faith, Boethius will come to the conclusion that it is impious, "for the truth of the faith and the unwontedness of the miracle alike remain, for Catholics, unshaken." (*Contra Eutychen et Nestorium*, IV.61-62) Secondly, *De fide* is composed of a succinct survey of the Bible history and some great truths of Christianity, especially the doctrines of the Trinity and Christ's Nature and Person, which will be tackled in *De trinitate*, *Utrum pater*, and *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium*. And finally, *De fide* sets out the range of problems Boethius' other theological treatises will deal with, and leaves detailed explanations for later discussions. For instance, several heresies are discussed briefly in *De fide*, but Boethius leaves the refutation of these heresies for later discussions. Take Arius and the Manichaeans for example. Boethius introduces Arius and the Manichaeans in *De fide*. "Arius, for instance, who, while calling the Son God, declares Him to be vastly inferior

¹⁵¹ Mair (1981), "The Text of the *Opuscula Sacra*," in Gibson (ed.), p. 212.

¹⁵² Cf. Stewart (1974), p. 139. Also cf. Chadwick (1981b), pp. 175-180; Marenbon (2003), pp. 66-68.

¹⁵³ Cf. Chadwick (1981b), p. 180.

to the Father and of another substance.” (*De fide*, 32-34) But the error of the views of the Arians is pointed out by Boethius in Chapter I of *De trinitate*. And in the case of the Manichaeans, they refuse the divine nature of Christ, and also refuse the Virgin birth of the Son. Boethius does not further consider these points here. He says that “the points will be presented in the proper place as the proper arrangement demands (*De fide*, 52-53),” which may imply the treatise against Eutyches and Nestorius.

Therefore, of the five theological treatises I will discuss *De fide* first. In this section, I focus on two important issues discussed in *De fide*, i.e. issue of the Trinity and Christology, and point out the relation between these two issues and Boethius’ other theological treatises.

III.1.1. The Issue of the Trinity

The first important issue is on the Trinity¹⁵⁴, upon which Boethius says the Christian and Catholic religion is chiefly based (*De fide*, 7-9). This implies that issue of the Trinity is essential to discuss other Christian issues.

Boethius begins *De fide* with the sentence that “the Christian Faith is proclaimed by the authority of the New Testament and of the Old (*De fide*, 1-2)”. In the Scripture, the word “trinity” is not found, but thoughts of the Trinity are deemed to emerge from Scripture by theologians. For example, the verse “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19) is taken to imply the faith that baptism is administered in God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but in his “name” in the singular (not “names”). That is the required unity-in-diversity. Although three names are provided, no explanation of the plurality is supplied. This is not a trinity (though trinity is not excluded) but a triad.¹⁵⁵ Phan believes that the understanding of Christian faith in the Trinity should not be based exclusively on explicitly triadic formulae such as the verse in Matthew 28:19.¹⁵⁶

The word *trias* was first used in the East by Theophilus of Antioch in

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Davis [etc.] (1999/2002); Phan (2011); Wolfson (1956).

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Grant (1986), p. 151.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Phan (2011), p. 3.

the second century. In the West, in the third century, the African theologian Tertullian¹⁵⁷ (160-about 225 A.D.) coined a Latin word *trinitas*, meaning “three persons in one substance”.¹⁵⁸ At first the word “trinity” only implied the threefoldness of the Godhead, but later came to include the unity as well. The doctrine of the Trinitarian unity, says Grant, is not a product of the earliest Christian period. As a matter of fact, before the end of the second century, we could not find this doctrine expressed carefully.¹⁵⁹ Before Nicaea¹⁶⁰ the main problem was to derive the Trinity of persons from the unity of God; while after Nicaea the main issue was to achieve the unity of God from the Trinity of the persons.¹⁶¹

For the inquiry of the Trinitarian doctrine, Boethius writes two tractates, namely *De trinitate* and *Utrum pater*. There are some similar thoughts in these two tractates, which they have in common with *De fide*. For example, when Boethius introduces the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, he says, “there has existed one divine substance of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in such wise that we confess the Father God, the Son God, and the Holy Spirit God, and yet not three Gods but one God.” (*De fide*, 9-14) And later in *De trinitate* and *Utrum pater*, the alike thoughts, words, and phrases relating to the Trinity are repeated.

“I take together all three, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the result is not three substances but one substance. The one substance of the Three, then, cannot be separated or divided, nor is it made up of various parts, combined into one: it is simply one.” (*Utrum pater*, 12-14)

¹⁵⁷ On the introduction on Tertullian, cf. Barnes (1985); Dunn (2004).

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Phan (2011), “Developments of the Doctrine of the Trinity,” in Phan (ed.), p. 8.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Grant (1986), p. 156.

¹⁶⁰ The First Council of Nicaea took place in 325 A.D.. According to the Nicene Creed, the belief “in one God, the Father; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God” implies that there is unity between them. Cf. Ayres (2004).

¹⁶¹ McKim (1988), p. 19. Barnes summarizes the form of Latin theologies of the Trinity from Tertullian to Augustine thus: “there is an explanation for how the Three are understood to be one”; “there is an explanation for how the Three are distinct from one another”; “there is a statement that the Three are eternally irreducible and unconvertible”; and “there is a word for what is three in God — that is, person (*persona*)”. Cf. Barnes (2011), “Latin Trinitarian Theology,” in Phan (ed.), p. 71.

“For instance if we say ‘the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God,’ then Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God.”
(*Utrum pater*, 19-21)

“The belief of this religion concerning the Unity of the Trinity is as follows: the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God. Therefore, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God, not three Gods.” (*De trinitate*, I.6-9)

In *De fide*, Boethius states that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have one divine substance, and they are not the same. However, he does not give the reason why they are not the same, which is the main topic of *De trinitate*.¹⁶²

III.1.2. The Issue of the Nature and Person of Christ

In *De fide*, Boethius uses a long passage to state Christ’s birth from the Virgin, his assumption of manhood, and Nestorius’ and Eutyches’ distortions of the orthodox teaching on the subject. The thought here is wholly concordant with which Boethius sets forth in his tractate against Eutyches and Nestorius. It should be said that *De fide* introduces the vital issue discussed in *Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, which focuses on Christology, concerning the identity of Jesus Christ, or in other words, relating to Nature and Person of Christ.

In the first three centuries of the church, formulations of Jesus’ identity were not explicit.¹⁶³ Jesus Christ stood in common with other humans in terms of his human characteristics, but he is also seen as one in whom God is realized and known in a special and unique way. Jesus Christ is considered both divine and human at the same time. Two important terms related to Jesus Christ, *ousia* and *hypostasis*, were first used as synonyms, and Basil of Caesarea (329 or 330-379 A.D.) was the first to attempt to distinguish explicitly between them: “*ousia* is related to *hypostasis* as the common to the proper; the Son is *homoousion* with the Father, but the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit must each be confessed in his own

¹⁶² Cf. Section III.3.

¹⁶³ Cf. McKim (1988), p. 25.

hypostasis.”¹⁶⁴ However, Basil was concerned with the words in a Trinitarian content rather than in a Christological context.

The terminology of Christ “two substances or natures in one person” was coined by Tertullian. He was the first theologian to deal with the issue of Christ’s two natures, using the term “substance”. He believes that both substances, divine and human, belong to the same person¹⁶⁵, excluding any division in God. In Christ, the divinity and humanity maintain their own distinctive qualities and activities.¹⁶⁶ Similar with Basil, Tertullian discusses the issue on “two natures, one person” by citing the Psalms and the apostle, so he did not have an explicit idea about nature and person of Christ from the Christological perspective. As a result, he did not give an exposition of what unity of Person in Christ means and how two natures united in one person. The point is mainly significant for him in the discussion on the two natures or the two substances. A new christological significance of discussions on one person finally appeared in the writings of Augustine in 411 A.D..¹⁶⁷

Concerning Christology, there are two important heresies, which are refuted by Boethius in his fifth tractate, namely Nestorius and Eutyches. Nestorius was a Syrian monk who became patriarch of Constantinople from 428 A.D. and was deposed in 431 A.D.. He believes that the divine and human in Christ maintain their own properties. According to him, Nature and Person always exist side by side: Person could not exist without Nature, and when Nature exists, there must be Person. Therefore, for Nestorius, there are two persons with their respective natures in Christ.¹⁶⁸ In the year 444 A.D., in an attempt to stop a new outbreak of Nestorianism, Eutyches, an aged monk from Constantinople began teaching a subtle variation on the

¹⁶⁴ Davis [etc.] (1999/2002), pp. 103-107.

¹⁶⁵ Tertullian believes “there are two natures present in Christ Jesus, a divine and a human.” Cf. Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, 29; Souter (1920).

¹⁶⁶ Tertullian sums all up these ideas in a scriptural quotation: “Learn, therefore, with Nicodemus that ‘what is born in flesh is flesh, and what is from spirit is spirit (John III.6).’ Neither does flesh become spirit nor does spirit become flesh. However, they can, to be sure, be present in one. Of these Jesus consisted, as man, of flesh, as God, of spirit.” Cf. Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, 27; Souter (1920).

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Grillmeier (1975), pp. 124-125, p. 129, and p. 131.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Wolfson (1956), p. 451-463.

traditional Christology. Eutyches denied that the human nature of Christ was consubstantial with ours, and held that there had been two natures before the Incarnation, but after the Incarnation, the human nature of Christ was completely absorbed by his divine nature. So this leaves Christ with a single, divine nature.¹⁶⁹ In the treatise *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium*, Boethius analyses the errors of Nestorius and Eutyches, and interprets orthodox Christology.

III.1.3. Conclusion

From the analysis of two important issues in *De fide*, it is clear that *De fide* is closely related to Boethius' other theological tractates. It is a summary of Christian doctrine, and it can also be regarded as the prologue of *De trinitate*, *Utrum pater*, and *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium*, introducing issues briefly and leaving detailed explanations for later discussions. From *De fide*, we can best understand the outlook of Boethius' theological works, so it may well be written first. Next, I will discuss how Boethius discusses the two issues of the Trinity and Christology in detail using his theory of basic logic and mathematics.

III.2. On Christology — *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium*

The motivation of the treatise *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium*¹⁷⁰ is the assembly described in the preface to Chapter III. The distinction between unions formed from two natures and unions that consist in two natures, in Boethius' perspective, had not been solved, and Boethius believed no one really touched the edge of it. In this situation, he decided to inquire the issue in order to solve it. The goal of this treatise, as Boethius says (*Contra Eutychen et Nestorium*, Pref. 54-58), is to clear away the extreme and self-contradictory errors of Nestorius and Eutyches, and then by God's help, to set forth the middle way of the Catholic faith, in response to the request

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Mair (1981), "The Text of the *Opuscula Sacra*," in Gibson (ed.), p. 207.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Marenbon (2003), "Against Eutyches and Nestorius: The Argument," pp. 70-76.

of the Eastern bishops.¹⁷¹

While refuting Nestorius and Eutyches, Boethius employs basic logic, especially the theory of definition, to demonstrate where and how these two heresies are at fault. Boethius is not the first to use this method in this context, but by his use of the method he clarifies the issue of Christology considerably, and develops the application of logic to theology.

III.2.1. Interpreting Terms “Nature” and “Person”

The terms “nature” and “person” were first used as synonyms. Even though later the distinction between these two terms was discussed, most people are concerned with these terms in a Trinitarian context. For instance, Pope Leo I (440-461 A.D.) takes over the distinction between Person and Nature from the Latin tradition for the theology of the Trinity. His primary interest was not in terminology and its definition, but in the theological contents which he wanted to combine by means of it.¹⁷² Unlike him, Boethius begins the interpretation of these two terms with their definitions, for in Boethius’ logical works, definition is very important. The discussion of any problem begins from the definition of terms. Nature and Person are two important terms to understand the identity of Christ.¹⁷³ And the dispute in Nestorius and Eutyches also centers on these two terms. Thus, the correct interpretation of these two terms is indispensable. Boethius’ method in opting for definitions is in line with the thoughts in his logical works.

III.2.1.1. Definition of Nature

The definition of Nature¹⁷⁴ had been discussed a lot before Boethius. In his works, Boethius does not give a new definition of this term, but he lists other people’s opinions, analyzes them, and finally chooses the best one.

Boethius lists four definitions of Nature belonging to different types of definition, which are stated in Boethius’ commentary on Cicero’s *Topics*

¹⁷¹ Cf. the preface to Chapter III above.

¹⁷² Cf. Grillmeier (1987), pp. 159-160.

¹⁷³ Cf. Chadwick (1981b), “Nature and Person”, pp. 190-202.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Catholic Encyclopedia on the definition of nature;
<http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=8348>.

(*C.Topica*, 323/1096)¹⁷⁵. The first kind of definition is that where accidents are gathered together into one thing and one thing is produced from them; it is a sort of enumeration of parts located not in substance but in a gathering together of accidents. This sort of definition is called a description. In this sense, Boethius lists the first definition of Nature, which is “Nature belongs to those things which, since they exist, can in some measure be apprehended by the mind.” (*Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, I.8-10) This definition describes all things, substantial or accidental.

The second kind of definition is at play if someone makes a definition by presenting species rather than members in the definition; this is called a definition from the division of species. In this sense, Boethius lists a definition of Nature that runs “Nature is either that which can act or that which can be acted upon.” (*Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, I.25-26) This definition refers to corporeal substances or incorporeal substances.

The third kind of definition is that when a definition is constructed of genus and differentiae, we unfold substantial parts. This is called definition in the strict sense of the term. In this sense, Boethius lists two definitions of Nature: one is “Nature is the principle of movement properly inherent in and not accidentally attached to bodies” (*Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, I.41-42); the other is “Nature is the specific difference that gives form to anything” (*Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, I.57-58).

Of these four definitions of Nature, it is the last one Boethius chooses to use in his argument.¹⁷⁶ In the last definition, Nature is the species of the genus “difference”, and it differs from other kinds of difference with differentiae “specific” and “that gives form to anything”. The same specific differences could not apply to both God and man, so Boethius assures that “both Catholics and Nestorians firmly hold that there are in Christ two natures of the kind laid down in our last definition” (*Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, I.58-63).

Thanks to the last definition, it can be understood that Christ has two

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Section II.1.2.2.

¹⁷⁶ The context of the last definition is the system of genera and species of Aristotle’s *Categories* which is put forward by Porphyry in his *Isagoge*. Cf. Marenbon (2003), p. 70.

natures. In other words, Christ has two specific differences: the specific difference for man and the specific difference for God. What exactly are the specific differences for God and man? This could be clear from the Porphyrian Tree of *Contra Eutychem et Nestorium* in Section III.2.1.2 (see Diagram III).

In the Porphyrian Tree of *Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, man is corporeal, living, sensitive, and rational substance; God is incorporeal, immutable and impassible, and rational substance. There seems to be one specific difference in common, namely “rational substance” which both God and man possess. If so, it would be contradictory to what Boethius believes that “the same specific differences cannot apply to God and man”. Actually, the contradiction does not exist, for the term “rational substance” is not used univocally. In this term, the two words — “rational” and “substance” — are both equivocal. In the case of “rational”, God falls under the genus “incorporeal substance”, while man falls under the genus “corporeal substance”, thus rationality for God and for man does not have the same meaning. As for the word “substance”, as Boethius says, substance is subject to accidents (*Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, III.48-49). God is the origin of all things, so substance could not be predicated of Him. When Boethius applies Person to God, we must understand that God is not a substance in the same way as a man is a substance. In *De trinitate*, Boethius calls the substance of God “supersubstantial” (*De trinitate*, IV.14-16). Consequently, the specific differences applied to God and man are not same. In Christ, there are two kinds of specific differences, that is, there are two natures in Christ.

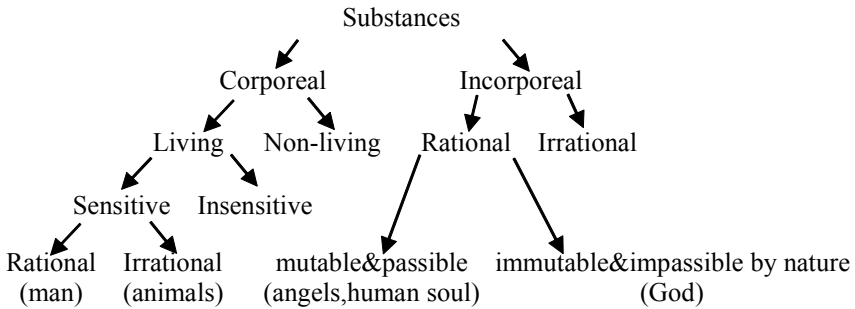
III.2.1.2. Definition of Person

The definition of Nature is given first, because “Person cannot be predicated apart from Nature.” Here Boethius returns briefly to the second definition of Nature: Natures are either substances or accidents. However, a person cannot come into being among accidents, thus Person is identified as something predicated of Nature in the sense of substance, that is “Person is properly applied to substances.” (*Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, II.13-18)

Nevertheless, this is not the definition of Person,¹⁷⁷ because the term “substance” needs to be explained more clearly.

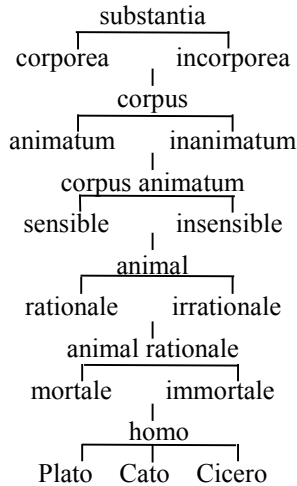
There are many types of substances, so to which substance is the term “person” properly applied? Boethius again uses the Porphyrian Tree to draw the distinction between substances (*Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, II.18-28). Following Boethius’ description, I illustrate the Porphyrian Tree as follows. (See Diagram III)

Diagram III: Porphyrian Tree of *Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*



The Porphyrian Tree here is similar to what Boethius describes in his commentaries on Porphyry’s *Isagoge*. (*2InIsag.*, 103A-104D) (See Diagram IV)

Diagram IV: Porphyrian Tree of *2InIsag.*¹⁷⁸



¹⁷⁷ The classic definition of person is that given by Boethius. Cf. Catholic Encyclopedia on definition of person; <http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=9193>.

¹⁷⁸ Diagram IV is from Boethius’ *2InIsag.* by Brandt (1906), p. 209.

From this kind of division of substances both in Boethius' logical works and in his theological works, it is clearly shown that "Person cannot be affirmed of bodies which have no life, nor yet of living things which lack sense, nor finally of that which is bereft of mind and reason." (*Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, II.28-35) Hence, Person only applies to man, God, and angels, who all belong to rational beings. Moreover, some substances are universal, and others are particular. From the Porphyrian tree, we can also find that individual persons, such as Plato, Cato, and Cicero, are located under *homo*, the particular. In any case, it is impossible that Person can be applied to universals, thus, Person is particular and individual (*Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, 47-49).¹⁷⁹

The idea can be found early in Boethius' commentary on Aristotle's *Categories*. In the third book of his commentary, Boethius makes a distinction between Socrates and Plato, saying that they "do not differ according to the species of humanity, but differ only by the quality of person of their own." (*In Categories*, 241D) This distinction implies that the term "person" is individual rather than universal substance.

From the Porphyrian Tree, it is easy to point out that the term "person" is properly applied to an individual substance of a rational nature. However, it is not enough to understand this definition of Person. Boethius deems the term "person" needs a further exposition. In order to expound the term "person", he discusses the etymology of the word "person". Boethius observes that it is good to go back to the Greeks for a clear understanding of this conception, for it originated with them, while the Latins only know it through translation.

According to Boethius, the Greeks sometimes describe the same object using many synonyms for which the spellings are totally different. Additionally, they sometimes use the same word to refer to different objects, so the same word has different significations. Nevertheless, the Latins may not understand these, thus they are likely to make mistakes. The second situation is analogous to the division of a spoken sound into its significations, which Boethius discusses in *Divisio*.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Koterski (2004) and Marshall (1950).

“Division of a spoken sound into its proper significations occurs whenever a single spoken sound is revealed as signifying more than one thing and its plurality of signification is shown.” (*Divisio*, 877d)

The Greek term *prosopon* has at least two meanings. The first one is “mask”, and the Latin *persona* is derived from this. This may lead to the error of Sabellianism.¹⁸⁰ God was said to have three “faces” or “masks”.¹⁸¹ Modalists note that the only number ascribed to God in the Holy Bible is One and that there is no inherent threeness ascribed to God explicitly in the Scripture. Tertullian and Augustine both believed that one should guard against interpreting *persona* as mask, and Boethius follows them. Moreover, the Greeks also use the term *prosopon* and the term *hypostasis* as a synonym. As a matter of fact, the definition of Person should be corresponds to this word. “Greece with its richer vocabulary gives the name ὑπόστασις to the individual subsistence.” (*Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, III.23-25) Consequently, the term “person” should be defined as “the individual substance of a rational nature.” (*Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, III.4-5)

III.2.1.3. A Problem of Boethius’ Definition of Person

When coining the terminology of Christ as “two substances or natures in one person”, Tertullian used *substantia* and *persona* as equivalents of *ousia* and *prosopon* (or *hypostasis*) respectively.¹⁸² Different from the translation of Tertullian, when tracing the etymology of terms “nature” and “person”, Boethius equals the term “nature” to *ousia* (essence) and the term “person” to *hypostasis*. In the view of Boethius, the Greek word ὑπόστασις is translated to *substantia*, and πρόσωπον to *persona*.

“But the Greeks called individual substances ὑποστάσεις because they underlie the rest and offer support and substrate to what are called accidents; and we in our term call them ‘substances’ as being substrate — ὑποστάσεις, and since they also term the same substances πρόσωπα, we too may call them ‘persons’.” (*Contra*

¹⁸⁰ Cf. the preface to this chapter.

¹⁸¹ Cf. Lossky (1976), pp. 51-55.

¹⁸² Cf. McManners (2001), pp. 49-50.

Eutychem et Nestorium, III.62-68)

By such translation, the word “substance” is identical to the word “person”, which leads Boethius in certain troubles. At the end of Chapter III in *Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, Boethius tries to apply the definition of Person he gives to the doctrine of the Trinity, saying that “And indeed, following this use, men have spoken of One essence, three substances and three persons of the Godhead.” (*Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, III.93-95) However, this application of substances and persons to God is not very successful. In *Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, Boethius equals the word “substance” with the word “person”, so there is no problem to say “three substances and three persons of the Godhead”. However, later in *Utrum pater*, Boethius says, “I take together all three, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the result is not three substances but one substance. The one substance of the Three, then, cannot be separated or divided, nor is it made up of various parts, combined into one: it is simply one.” (*Utrum pater*, 9-14) So the first problem is that Boethius’ views in *Contra Eutychem et Nestorium* and in *Utrum pater* are contradictory. Another problem is that “One essence, three substances and three persons of the Godhead” is not quite in line with the teaching of the Church. Augustine also points out this problem in his *De trinitate* mentioning that “Our Greek friends have spoken of one essence, three substances; but the Latins of one essence or substance, three persons.”¹⁸³

Boethius realizes the difficulty, but he does not want to abandon his definition of Person. He insists: “For did not the language of the Church forbid us to say three substances in speaking of God, substance might seem a right term to apply to Him.” (*Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, III.98-101) Even though, later he has to say that “all I have said so far has been for the purpose of marking the difference between the terms ‘nature’ and ‘person’. The exact terms that should be applied in each case must be left to the decision of ecclesiastical usage.” (*Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, IV.1-5) This confirms that Boethius writes his theological treatises as a philosopher but not as a theologian. Moreover, the connection between Boethius’ own logical works and theological works is also shown, and will become much clearer in our later discussions.

¹⁸³ Augustine, *On the Holy Trinity*, VII.7; Schaff (1887).

Although there is a flaw in the definition of the term “person”, the distinction between Nature and Person is sufficient to refute the heresies. Boethius goes on to refute Nestorius and Eutyches.

III.2.2. Refutations of Nestorius and Eutyches

The inability to distinguish between terms “nature” and “person”, in Boethius’ judgment, results in the errors of Nestorius and Eutyches. The forms of the reasoning of Nestorius and Eutyches are similar, which could be summaries as follows.

Nestorius may argue:

Person may be applied to every Nature.
There are in Christ two natures.
Therefore, there are likewise two persons.

Eutyches may argue:

Nature may be applied to every Person.
There is only one person in Christ.
Therefore, Nature in Christ should be regarded as single.

From these two statements above, we can see that the first proposition in each of the syllogisms has the same meaning, that is, Person and Nature are in the relationship of one-to-one correspondence. Accordingly, the errors of both Nestorius and Eutyches spring from the same source. Nestorius deems if Person were doubled, there could be a double Nature, so Nestorius confesses the double Nature in Christ. Just like Nestorius, Eutyches reckons that if Person was not double, Nature was not double, and since he did not confess a double Person, he thought it is a necessary consequence that Nature should be regarded as single. (*Contra Eutychen et Nestorium*, V.8-16)

The refutation of Nestorius is easier than the refutation of Eutyches, so Boethius first points out the errors of Nestorius and refutes him.

III.2.2.1. Refuting Nestorius

Boethius has confidence in definitions of Nature and Person he gives above. He believes these definitions are enough to prove Nestorius wrong (*Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, IV.14-15). According to the definition of Person Boethius gives, a Person is an individual substance of a rational nature, which implies that the presence of a person entails the presence of a nature. The reverse of this statement is not true. It is not necessary that the presence of a nature involves the presence of a person. Hence, although Nestorius rightly holds Christ's Nature to be double, it is not inevitable to come to the conclusion that in Christ Person is twofold.

In Boethius' opinion, the name of one thing denotes its singular number, a unity. And because being and unity are convertible terms, what is not one cannot be, and whatever is one, can be. According to Nestorius, if there were two persons, it would mean that there were two individual substances, so Christ would not be one, that is to say, Christ would not exist. Or, from two Persons it could be argued that there are two Christs, which is "nothing else than madness of a distraught brain" (*Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, IV.45-46). The same conclusion can be derived from the nature of definition, which Boethius discusses in his *In Ciceronis Topica*.

"Only a definition, which is produced by a phrase, unfolds what a thing is; a genus and the rest, which are expressed for the most part by a single name, do not unfold what a thing is. ... A definition does not unfold what it defines with respect to quality or quantity or any of the other categories. Rather, the definition shows what the thing defined is; that is, it shows its substance." (*C.Topica*, 319/1091)

From the nature of definition, we could know that one definition of a thing shows that it has one substance. It is the same with the definition of Christ. Then the very name of Christ, which is defined, shows that Christ has one substance. Two different substances could not be covered by the same definition. Nestorius himself also admits that he could not apply the substance of one definition to both his Christs. Boethius argues that Nestorius wrongly uses the same name for two utterly different natures. "For if the substance of God is different from that of man, and the one name

of Christ applies to both, and the combination of different substances is not believed to have formed one person, the name of Christ is equivocal and cannot be comprised in one definition.” (*Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, IV.51-59) Moreover, in his *Divisio* Boethius defines a genus as that “which is predicated of a number of specifically different things in respect of what it is” (*Divisio*, 880a). Accordingly, two different things could be united in one genus, but there are some conditions. “Men indeed and oxen are united in one animal nature, for by genus they have a common substance and the same nature in the collection which forms the universal.” (*Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, IV.106-109) If the distinction of persons continues under a difference in nature, God and man will be fundamentally different at all points. Then the salvation has not been brought to us, and the human race has not been saved. In other words, “the birth of Christ has brought us no salvation, the writings of all the prophets have but beguiled the people that believed in them, contempt is poured upon the authority of the whole Old Testament which promised to the world salvation by the birth of Christ.” (*Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, IV.112-118) This is an impious conclusion.

In order to confute the thoughts of Nestorius, Boethius sets up some assumptions and raises some questions about Nestorian opinions, and then all of these lead to the impious conclusion which is against the Catholic faith. “For the truth of the faith and the unwontedness of the miracle alike remain, for Catholics, unshaken.” (*Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, IV.61-62)

Boethius admits that his method is only one of many strong weapons to wound and demolish the Nestorian view, but he is content with this. Then he proceeds to refute Eutyches.

III.2.2.2. Refuting Eutyches

Eutyches rightly believes the Person of Christ to be single, but impiously professes that the Nature of Christ is also single. As stated above, the definition of Nature is “Nature is the specific difference that gives form to anything.” It is clear that divine nature is different from human nature. And Eutyches also seems to confess this, so he declares his belief to be “two Natures in Christ before the union and only one after the union” (*Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, V.23-25). The refutation of Eutyches is more

complicated.

Due to the vagueness of what Eutyches declares, Boethius puts forward some suppositions and begins his arguments on the basis of these suppositions.

The union which Eutyches holds may take place:

- (a) *either* at the moment of conception;
- (b) *or* at the moment of resurrection — in one of the following two ways:
 - (b1) Christ was conceived and did not assume a body from the Virgin Mary;
 - (b2) Christ did assume a body from the Virgin Mary.

The arguments based on (a) and (b1) suggest the falsehood of the Godhead. In these arguments, no basic logic or mathematics is applied. Concerning the argument based on (b2), Boethius believes if Christ received the body from Mary, and later the human and divine nature united and did not continue, then this situation may have happened in one of three ways (*Contra Eutychen et Nestorium*, VI.3-8):

- (b2.1) “Godhead was translated into manhood”
- (b2.2) “manhood was translated into Godhead”
- (b2.3) “both were so modified and mingled that neither substance kept its proper form”

Boethius demolishes these three ways by means of logic.

According to the Porphyrian Tree of *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium* in Section III.2.1.2 (See Diagram III), God falls under the genus “incorporeal”, and of manhood, which consists of body and soul, human body falls under the genus “corporeal” and human soul falls under the genus “incorporeal”. Therefore, the first two ways (b2.1-2) both concern transformations between the incorporeal and the corporeal. In the first commentary on Porphyry’s *Isagoge*, Boethius pays emphatic attention to the relationship of the incorporeal and the corporeal. In Boethius’ point of view, the corporeal could not be the genus of those things that are placed under the incorporeal

substances; and nothing corporeal in genus can fall under an incorporeal species, neither can a corporeal substance be changed into an incorporeal (*In Isag.*, 20A). There is a sharp disjunction between the corporeal and the incorporeal. Thus, Boethius says, “Only those things can be interchanged and transformed which possess the common substrate of the same matter, nor can all these so behave, but only those which can act upon and be acted on by each other.” (*Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, VI.24-27) But incorporeal things lack matter, so the corporeal and the incorporeal do not share any common underlying matter, therefore, they cannot be interchanged and transformed.

Accordingly, it is not possible for God, as a species of the incorporeal, and human body, as a species of the corporeal, to be changed into each other. Moreover, as a species of the incorporeal, God and human soul both lack matter, so they could not be translated into each other. In a word, it is irrational and also impious to say that God could be transformed into man; and it is impossible for man to be translated into God. “If neither body nor soul can be turned into Godhead, it could not possibly happen that manhood should be transformed into God.” (*Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, VI.75-77) Therefore, the first two ways are demolished.

As regards the third way (b2.3), Boethius takes an example of the mixture of honey and water.

“When honey is mixed with water neither remains, but the one thing being spoilt by conjunction with the other produces a certain third thing, so that third thing which is produced by the combination of honey and water is said to consist of both, but not in both.” (*Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, 87-91)

This example is similar to the mixture of wine and water used by Aristotle for illustrating what a mixture is. In *On Generation and Corruption*, Aristotle maintains that “if mixture has taken place, the compound *must* be uniform — any part of such a compound being the same as the whole.”¹⁸⁴ Mixture is a union of different constituents, and each constituent in this union, Aristotle says, changes out of its own nature towards a third property,

¹⁸⁴ Aristotle, *On Generation and Corruption*, 328a9-11; Barnes (1984a).

yet neither becomes the other, but both become that which is intermediate and common.¹⁸⁵ The third property is a compromise between the properties of the constituents. If Eutychians says that “Christ consists *of* two natures, but not *in* two natures” in this sense of union, a mixture, it means that God and man were mixed to become “a third property”. According to Aristotle, such “third property” is different from the properties of the constituents, and in case of Eutychians, Christ will be different from the properties of both God and man. This conclusion is absolutely impossible. Consequently, the third way, “both God and man were so modified and mingled that neither substance kept its proper form” is demolished.

All in all, the upshot of Boethius’ reasoning is that “no one of the three ways is a possibility” (*Contra Eutychen et Nestorium*, VI.108-109). In other words, Godhead could not be translated into manhood, nor could manhood be translated into Godhead, nor were both so modified and mingled that neither substance kept its proper form. Thus, the doctrine of the Eutychians is incorrect.

III.2.3. The Middle Way of the Catholic Faith

In the letter of the year 512, the Eastern bishops requested from Pope Symmachus a middle way between Nestorius and Eutyches. After clearing away the self-contradictory errors of Nestorius and Eutyches, Boethius sets forth the middle way of the Catholic faith.

From the refutations of Nestorius and Eutyches, it is clear that the terms “person” and “nature” are at the heart of the debate. Boethius lists four possible combinations of Nature and Person in Christ (*Contra Eutychen et Nestorium*, VII.80-93). In Christ, there are (1) two natures and two persons (as Nestorius says); (2) one nature and one person (as Eutyches says); (3) two natures and one person (as the Catholic faith holds); (4) one nature and two persons, which is manifestly absurd. The errors of (1) and (2) have

¹⁸⁵ Aristotle, *On Generation and Corruption*, 328a29-31; Barnes (1984a). Aristotle also describes a different situation in which “a great quantity (or a large bulk) of one of these materials be brought together with a liter (or with a small piece) of another.” If so, “the effect produced is not mixture, but increase of the dominant”: a small amount of wine in the ocean will turn into water.

already discussed by Boethius, and for (4), he only says that “there has never been anyone so mad as to believe that His Nature was single but His Person double.” (*Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, VII.90-91) Hence (3) is the only one left, and this is what the Catholic faith affirms, that is “Nature is double, but the Person is one.”

The question arises *how*, in accordance with the affirmation of the Catholic faith, Christ consists as one person *in* and *of* both natures. Boethius confesses that the term “to consist *of* two natures” is equivocal. There are two ways to interpret this. One way is the way Eutyches adopts — which has been proven false. The other way is a union consisting *of* two natures in which the two natures continue to exist without changing into each other (*Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, VII.12-15). This is the way to interpret the Catholic faith. Boethius illustrates this using an example of a crown that is composed *of* gold and gems. Just like a crown consisting of gold and gems, Christ consists *of* God and man. In a crown, the gold and the gems continue to exist without surrendering their proper forms (*Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, VII.16-20). And it is the same with Christ: neither is God converted into man nor is man turned into God, but both natures continue to exist in Christ, and they both remain perfect, as the Catholic faith confesses. Therefore, that “Christ consists both *in* and *of* the two natures” is to be interpreted thus: “*in* the two because both continue, *of* the two because the One Person of Christ is formed by the union *of* the two continuing natures.” (*Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, VII.29-30)

The Eastern bishops requested the middle way, and their reason was that there was a middle way between Arius and Sabellius, so in imitation of them, there should be a middle way between Nestorius and Eutyches. Boethius regards the Catholic faith as the middle between two false extremes, because he says it is “just as virtues also hold a middle place” (*Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, VII.74-76). The similar thought has already been stated early in Boethius’ arithmetical works, and was introduced in Section II.2.1.3.a. When Boethius discusses the property of “perfect number”, he makes an analogy. He says imperfect number and superabundant number are just like two unequal and intemperate elements, and between these two kinds of numbers, we can put a number “which holds

the middle place between the extremes like on who seeks virtue”. And this number that maintains the place of the middle is called perfect number.¹⁸⁶ Similarly, as the virtues we seek hold a middle place, the Catholic faith also holds the middle place, and it is the right way.

In the treatise against Eutyches and Nestorius, Boethius makes an exposition of his orthodox thoughts of Christology, that is to say, Christ is one Person with two Natures. With the definitions of Nature and Person he establishes, Boethius confutes the errors of Eutyches and Nestorius, and he succinctly interprets the union of two natures in Christ. Boethius relies on his logical ability to solve the question of the Natures and Person of Christ.

The discussion of these topics is not new, but Boethius, unlike the Church Fathers before him, adopts the knowledge of basic logic to make these Christian issues much more articulate and lucid. In *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium* there are more connections to Boethius’ own logical works, especially his theory of definition and his commentaries on Porphyry’s *Isagoge*, and there are also some similar thoughts in *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium* and his work on arithmetic.

The solution to the question of Christology is clearly stated by Boethius. Christ is One God with two natures, divine nature and human nature. And Boethius believes that “quaternity is not added to the Trinity by the addition of human nature to perfect Godhead, but that one and the same Person completes the number of the Trinity.” (*Contra Eutychen et Nestorium*, VII.51-55) Here Boethius just mentions the Trinitarian question, but later he makes a further elaboration about that. Thus, in the following section, I will go on to introduce applications of basic logic and mathematics in Boethius’ works on the Trinity.

¹⁸⁶ *Arithmetica* I.19. See Section II.2.1.3.a. In that section, I also explain that “mean” in the notion “virtue is the mean” used by Aristotle is not a point exactly in the middle, but a stretch of the continuum around the middle. And here the meaning of “Catholic faith as the middle between two false extremes” is similar to what Aristotle says “the third holds the middle, which is the right, position.” Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1116a7; Barnes (1984b).

III.3. On the Trinity — *De Trinitate & Utrum Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus de Divinitate Substantialiter Praedicentur*

In *De fide* Boethius says that the Trinity became the orthodox teaching in the Church. In *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium*, he also touches on this topic, but he does not penetrate into this question. The main reason is that Boethius' research of theological issues is not due to systematic theological study, but arises out of the political purpose mentioned in the preface to Chapter III.

The early Church Fathers only restated basic principles of Christianity in the manner of faith, so they did not truly argue why the Trinity is one God, not three. They wanted to translate the doctrines to the common people in order to convince them. In this way, the early Church Fathers were unable to confute various heresies. For example, from the overview the Greek patristic theology of the Trinity one can see that there are different acts in this period, but the continuous development of these acts has its own basis in biblical premises. Specifically, these acts mediate through the Church's lived experience.¹⁸⁷ Unlike them, Boethius thinks people who cast their thoughts before the common herd "would seem to bring discredit on the study of divinity" (*De trinitate*, 12-16), so he writes only to Symmachus and himself. Boethius believes that logic and reason must be used to make a reinterpretation of the theological issues including issue of the Trinity.¹⁸⁸

The interpretation of the Trinity, that is, God's identity, could be divided into two questions. One is the unity in God, and the other is the diversity in God. Boethius is also concerned with these two questions and examines the doctrine of the Trinity in *De trinitate*¹⁸⁹ and *Utrum pater*. Boethius admits that the truth about the Trinity, indeed, has already been established by

¹⁸⁷ Cf. McGruckin (2011), "The Trinity in the Greek Fathers," in Phan (ed.), p. 49.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Chadwick (1981b), pp. 211-222; Marenbon (2003), pp. 79-87.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. Marenbon (1982) examines the discussion by three medieval scholars of a passage from Boethius' *De trinitate*.

Augustine,¹⁹⁰ as I will set out in this section. Especially, *Utrum pater* comes near to Augustine's *De trinitate*, but it is a short treatise and does not make a further argument on the Trinity, which is continued in Chapter V of Boethius' *De trinitate*. Boethius hopes to throw some further light on this argument by means of his logical training. He wants to set forth the problem about the One God in logical order and cast it into literary form (*De trinitate*, 1-5). In this section, I will introduce how Boethius applies basic logic and mathematics to issue of the Trinity in his two treatises. This section is divided into two parts: one deals with the unity in God, which is discussed in *De trinitate*, the other part deals with the diversity in God, which is discussed in both *De trinitate* and *Utrum pater*.

III.3.1. The Unity in God

Boethius starts his discussions with the Christian faith on the Trinity, which is “the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God” (*De trinitate*, I.7-8). The statement of the Trinitarian orthodoxy in the formula of one *ousia* and three *hypostaseis* was finally fixed by the Cappadocian Settlement.¹⁹¹ The Cappadocian Settlement was raised to refute Arian teaching. In agreement with the tradition, Boethius' route to examine the doctrine of the Trinity also takes its starting point from the refutation of Arian views.

Generally speaking, the pastoral task of clerics is to express the truths of faith in ways that their contemporaries could understand. The theologians who were busy with this task but laid great stress only on one aspect rather than the whole of the Christian faith, are condemned as heresiarchs.¹⁹² Arius is someone who advocates the oneness of God to the detriment of the divinity of the Son. The Arians ascribe grades to Persons, and so they break up the Unity of the Trinity and convert it into Plurality (*De trinitate*, 12-13). Boethius sets forth the error of Arianism on account of their lack of

¹⁹⁰ Bradshaw gives an explanation between Boethius' *De trinitate* and Augustine's writings; cf. Bradshaw (2009), “The *Opuscula Sacra*: Boethius and Theology,” in Marenbon (ed.), pp. 109-115. And Marenbon discusses *Utrum pater* and Augustine's *On the Trinity*; cf. Marenbon (2003), pp. 77-79.

¹⁹¹ Cf. Davis [etc.] (1999/2002), pp. 99-121; Prestige (1952), p. 233.

¹⁹² Cf. Phan (2011), p. 5.

knowledge of difference, and demolishes Arianism on account of their theory of form. From these two respects, Boethius refutes Arianism, pointing out that the plurality in God is different from the plurality in men. If, however, there are three persons, how does the repetition of three persons in God *not* produce a plurality of number? Boethius tackles this question by means of a distinction between two kinds of number.

III.3.1.1. Arguing from Knowledge of Difference

The Arians covert the unity in God to plurality, which, Boethius informs us, is caused by difference or otherness, for “the essence of plurality is otherness” (*De trinitate*, I.13-14). Thus, Boethius begins his arguments from basic knowledge of sameness and otherness.

Sameness and otherness are the formal principles of the universe, which is elaborated by Nicomachus in *Introduction to Arithmetic*.¹⁹³ Nicomachus points out that when these two principles enter into the composition of things, sameness assures the things to preserve their identity, and to continue being in the same manner, and otherness causes things to “change from their original forms and assume others.”¹⁹⁴ Although in the *Arithmetica* Boethius omits the discussion of this principle, he has the same conviction, as I mentioned in Section II.2.1.3.a. Boethius believes that otherness inheres in the number two and the whole even series, and that otherness is the essence of plurality. Therefore, it is impossible to understand plurality apart from otherness (*De trinitate*, I.14-15).

Concerning sameness, Boethius adopts most of Aristotle’s point of view. Aristotle states in his *Topics*,

“Sameness would be generally regarded as falling, roughly speaking, into three divisions. We generally apply the term numerically or specifically or generically — numerically in cases where there is more than one name but only one thing; specifically, where there is more than one thing, but they present no differences in respect of their species. Similarly, too, those things are called

¹⁹³ Cf. Nicomachus, *Introduction to Arithmetic*, II.17.1; 18.1 and 4; 19.1 and 20.2; D’Oog (1938).

¹⁹⁴ D’Oog (1938), p. 99.

generically the same which fall under the same genus.”¹⁹⁵

Since “otherness”, or in other word “difference”, is the necessary correlative of “sameness”, “difference” is similarly expressed in these three ways: by genus, species, and number (*De trinitate*, I.23-24).

However, there is a little difference between Boethius and Aristotle on “sameness”. In the second commentary on Porphyry’s *Isagoge*, Boethius takes an example of human property to explain sameness in number. He affirms that Socrates, Plato, and other people are plural in number, and that the sameness of them as human beings, the unique property, is arising out of accidents (*In Isag.*, 114D). Unlike Aristotle, Boethius reckons that sameness in number is sameness in accidents. So the difference in number is also difference in accidents. In other words, “numerical difference is caused by variety of accidents” (*De trinitate*, I.24-25); hence, three men do not differ by genus or species, but only by accidents. If all other accidents are absent, there will always remain the place, which is also an accident (*De trinitate*, I.24-30). The point that the place is an accident is made by Boethius early in his commentary on Aristotle’s *Categories*. In that commentary, Boethius takes an example of a man departing a theatre. A man can depart a theatre without destroying the substantial notion of his humanity, which implies that the theatre as a place is an accident. “Wherefore it is because men are plural by their accidents that they are plural in number.” (*De trinitate*, I.31-32) This is possibly the reason of the Arian error, for they consider God the same as men, so God is also plural. As a matter of fact, the plurality in God is different from that in men, which will be clear from the theory of form.

III.3.1.2. Arguing from Theory of Form

In God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three persons, so why they does this not result in a plurality of number? The reason which will be explained by Boethius in the following is that the three persons are in God without accidents. The subject of the Divine Substance belongs to Theology, thus Boethius gives a brief description of the division of speculative science first.

¹⁹⁵ Aristotle, *Topics*, 103a7-14; Barnes (1984a).

In the second commentary on Porphyry's *Isagoge*, Boethius points out that one branch of philosophy is speculative philosophy, which concerns the nature of things or elaborates the knowledge of things (*2InIsag.*, 73D). Further division of speculative science is discussed in Chapter II of *De trinitate*.¹⁹⁶ "Speculative Science may be divided into three kinds: Physics, Mathematics, and Theology." (*De trinitate*, II.5-16) As one branch of speculative science, theology does not deal with motion and is abstract and separable using intellectual concepts, that is to say, it deals with the Divine Substance which is without either matter or motion. Boethius alarms us that we should not "be diverted to play with imaginations" in Theology. Everything owes its being not to matter, but to the form which is imprinted on it. What we should do is to "simply apprehend that Form which is pure form and no image, which is being itself and the source of Being" (*De trinitate*, II.17-21).

Boethius distinguishes two kinds of forms. The first kind consists of Plato's Forms, in which being is separate from matter. The second kind of forms is found in an Aristotelian framework, where universals solely have being in so far as they are instantiated in the particulars that compose them.¹⁹⁷ As Boethius says: "Form which is without matter cannot be a substrate, and cannot have its essence in matter, else it would not be form but a reflexion" (*De trinitate*, II.48-51). Boethius believes that the entities that reside in bodies are misnamed by us, for "they are mere images; they only resemble those forms which are not incorporate in matter." (*De trinitate*, II.55-56) But the Divine Substance is pure Form without matter (*De trinitate*, II.29-31). The Divine Substance is what it is and its own essence, which "does not consist of This and That, but is only This". Therefore, the Divine Substance is truly One, in which there is no number, and in which except its own essence nothing is present (*De trinitate*, II.37-42). This thought is similar to what Augustine expresses in his *De trinitate*.

"He is, however, without doubt, a substance, or, if it be better so to

¹⁹⁶ Kijewska gives a discussion on the division of philosophy in Boethius' *De trinitate* and his commentary on Porphyry's *Isagoge*. Cf. Kijewska (2003), pp. 628-631.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Chadwick (1981b), p. 215.

call it, an essence, which the Greeks call οὐσία. ... But other things that are called essences or substances admit of accidents, whereby a change, whether great or small, is produced in them. But there can be no accident of this kind in respect to God; and therefore He who is God is the only unchangeable substance or essence, to whom certainly being itself, whence comes the name of essence, most especially and most truly belongs.”¹⁹⁸

Unlike men who are plural by accidents, God, in whom there is no accident, is not plural in number, and is absolutely simple. Therefore, in God, there is no difference, and then there is no plurality arising out of difference, and no multiplicity arising out of accidents, and accordingly no number (*De trinitate*, II.56-58). The error of the Arians is refuted now. By accidents men are plural in number, but unlike men, in God there is no accident and no difference, therefore, God is not plural. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one God, but not three Gods.

Nevertheless, we indeed call God “Father”, “Son”, and “Holy Spirit”. Why does the repetition of three persons not produce a plurality of number? This can be explained from a distinction between two kinds of number.

III.3.1.3. Arguing from Two Kinds of Number

The question why the repetition of three persons does not produce a plurality of number can be further explained by dividing the type of number into abstract number and concrete number.¹⁹⁹ The number with which we count is the abstract number; and the number inherent in the things counted is the concrete number. “In the case of abstract number a repetition of single items does produce plurality; but in the case of concrete number the repetition and plural use of single items does not by any means produce numerical difference in the objects counted.” (*De trinitate*, III.10-14) Therefore, when a repetition of unities is a question of abstract number, it produces plurality, but when it is a question of concrete number, it does not produce plurality.

¹⁹⁸ Augustine, *On the Holy Trinity*, V.3; Schaff (1887).

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Kijewska (2003), pp. 634-637.

This formula is derived from Aristotle, who states that if three synonyms are used for the same object, then the object is one, not three. Boethius states the same point of view in his second commentary on *On Interpretation*.

“And when in the same language many terms are applied to one thing, it is demonstrated that the thing in question is not named naturally but by applying names; for if each thing were called by a natural name, we would signify one thing by just one name.” (*2InInter.*, 56.4-9)

For example, in saying “one sword, one brand, one blade”, synonymous terms are used, for each of these names denotes one and the same thing, a sword. So the repetition of single terms here does not result in plural number. This idea can be applied to God. “Similarly, if God be predicated thrice of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the threefold predication does not result in plural number.” (*De trinitate*, III.29-31) God is One.

Thus far, from three respects, i.e. the knowledge of difference, the theory of forms, and the distinction between two kinds of number, Boethius explains the unity of God. However, at the end of the discussion of the two kinds of number, one question seems to remain. While “sword”, “brand”, and “blade” are synonymous, “Father”, “Son”, and “Holy Spirit” are not synonymous terms. Though these three terms denote the same thing, they are not identical. “There is not, therefore, complete indifference between Them; and so number does come in — number which we explained was the result of diversity of substrates.” (*De trinitate*, III.50-53) Boethius discusses this view by examining how the ten categories can be applied to God. Hence we arrive at the second question about the Trinity, which concerns the diversity in God.

III.3.2. The Diversity in God

The ten categories can be universally predicated of things, viz. substance, quality, quantity, relation, place, time, condition, situation, activity, passivity. They are divided into two kinds, Boethius says, viz. substantial categories and accidents. The categories in the first kind “denote

the reality of a thing”, declaring “that a thing is something”; and categories in the second kind “denote a thing’s accidental circumstances”, saying “nothing about its being anything, but simply attach to it, so to speak, something external.” (*De trinitate*, IV.100-104)

How are the categories applied to God? Boethius tries to apply every category to God to examine whether it is possible. The same use of categories in relation to God is found in Augustine’s *De trinitate*.

“We may understand God, if we are able, and as much as we are able, as good without quality, great without quantity, a creator though He lack nothing, ruling but from no position, sustaining all things without “having” them, in His wholeness everywhere, yet without place, eternal without time, making things that are changeable, without change of Himself, and without passion.”²⁰⁰

When applied to God, the meanings of these categories are changed entirely. In reference to God, it is only possible to employ the category of substance. God is substance not in the common sense, and God is supersubstantial. That, which is an accidental quality in man, is an essence in God, or rather a supersubstantial quality. It is not possible to apply the remaining categories (time, place, condition, activity, situation, and passivity) to God. The category of relation is considered last.

In *Utrum pater*, Boethius gives a concise account of the question “whether Father, Son, and Holy Spirit may be predicated of the Divinity substantially or otherwise.” *Utrum pater* comes near to Augustine’s *De trinitate*.

“But because the Father is not called the Father except in that He has a Son, and the Son is not called Son except in that He has a Father, these things are not said according to substance; because each of them is not so called in relation to Himself, but the terms are used reciprocally and in relation each to the other; nor yet according to accident, because both the being called the Father, and the being called the Son, is eternal and unchangeable to them.

²⁰⁰ Augustine, *On the Holy Trinity*, V.2; Schaff (1887).

Wherefore, although to be the Father and to be the Son is different, yet their substance is not different; because they are so called, not according to substance, but according to relation, which relation, however, is not accident, because it is not changeable.”²⁰¹

Following Augustine, Boethius ends *Utrum pater* with the conclusion that “The Trinity is effected by diversity of Persons, wherefore Trinity does not belong to Substance. Hence neither Father, nor Son, nor Holy Spirit, nor Trinity can be substantially predicated of God, but only relatively.” (*Utrum pater*, 62-68) Similarly to Augustine, *Utrum pater* does not take the argument that far. However, Boethius continues this argument in Chapter V of *De trinitate*.

The theory used in Chapter V of *De trinitate* is Aristotelian theory of relation. In the *Categories*, Aristotle begins his statement of relation with its definition: “We call relatives all such things as are said to be just what they are, *of* or *than* other things, or in some other way *in relation* to something else.”²⁰² In God, Father is said to be the Father of the Son, for Father begets Son; and Holy Spirit is said to be in some other way in relation to Father and Son, for Holy Spirit is begotten by Father and Son. Hence, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are called relatives.

“The category of relation”, Boethius says, “has nothing to do with the essence of the subject; it simply denotes a condition of relativity, and that not necessarily to something else, but sometimes to the subject itself.” (*De trinitate*, V.19-22) So when the category of relation is applied to God, the essential nature of God cannot be altered, changed, or disturbed in any way. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. There is only one essence of the Three. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are predicated of the Divinity relatively.

The diversity in God is expounded through the category of relation. “The relation of Father to Son, and of both to Holy Spirit is a relation of identicals.” (*De trinitate*, VI.20-22)

²⁰¹ Augustine, *On the Holy Trinity*, V.6; Schaff (1887).

²⁰² Aristotle, *Categories*, 6a.36-38; Ackrill (1963).

Therefore, in God, there are three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And They are not separated by any difference.

“But where there are no differences there is no plurality; where is no plurality there is Unity. Again, nothing but God can be begotten of God, and lastly, in concrete enumerations the repetition of units does not produce plurality. Thus the Unity of the Three is suitably established.” (*De trinitate*, V.52-57)

III.3.3. Conclusion

From the analysis above, we may surmise that the seeds for reconciling unity and plurality in God are sown in Boethius’ mind, as he acknowledges, by Augustine’s writings (*De trinitate*, 31-33), especially Augustine’s *On the Holy Trinity*. Boethius discusses the Trinitarian doctrine along the same lines as Augustine. In his work on the Trinity, Augustine employs Aristotelian categories when addressing the issue of Trinitarian relations. At the same time, he always appeals to the Scripture for evidence. For example, Augustine says,

“But position, and condition, and places, and times, are not said to be in God properly, but metaphorically and through similitudes. For He is both said to dwell between the cherubims, which is spoken in respect to position; and to be covered with the deep as with a garment, which is said in respect to condition; and ‘Thy years shall have no end,’ which is said in respect of time; and, ‘If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there,’ which is said in respect to place. And as respects action (or making), perhaps it may be said most truly of God alone, for God alone makes and Himself is not made. Nor is He liable to passions as far as belongs to that substance whereby He is God. So the Father is omnipotent, the Son omnipotent, and the Holy Spirit is omnipotent; yet not three omnipotents, but one omnipotent: ‘For of Him are all things, and through Him are all things, and in Him are all things; to whom be glory.’ ”²⁰³

²⁰³ Augustine, *On the Holy Trinity*, V.9; Schaff (1887).

In this quotation, Augustine employs a combination of exegesis, argument, and prayerful meditation. Unlike Augustine, in the tractates on the Trinity, *De trinitate* and *Utrum pater*, Boethius does not refer to verses in the Scripture, but he attempts to demonstrate the coherence of Trinitarian doctrine on purely philosophical grounds, relying on arithmetic and basic logic, such as his commentaries on Porphyry's *Isagoge* and Aristotle's *On Interpretation*.

By examining how categories can be applied to God, Boethius explains the diversity of God. He secures the diversity of the Trinity by means of the category of relation, thus removing simple unity. The unity which is preserved by the category of substance consists in simplicity of substance, and is proven by the absence of all diversity in the Divine nature.

As demonstrated in the discussions on the Trinity and Christology above, Boethius investigated two important issues in Christian doctrine. These issues are the main topics in his theological tractates. There is only one so-called theological treatise left, but it is more like a philosophical essay. The *Quomodo substantiae* is close to Boethius' last famous work, the *Consolatio*, and not only similar in content but also similar in method, as I will introduce in Section III.4 and then give a detailed explanation in Chapter IV. In *Quomodo substantiae* we also find applications of basic logic and mathematics.

III.4. On the Treatise *Quomodo Substantiae in eo Quod Sint Bonae Sint cum non Sint Substantialia Bona*

The four treatises discussed above are all about the Christian doctrines, but unlike them, *Quomodo substantiae*²⁰⁴ appears to have little direct relation to Christian doctrines, and it has nothing to do with the theological controversy at that time either. Thus it looks odd to rank *Quomodo substantiae* among Boethius' theological tractates. As a matter of fact, the content of *Quomodo substantiae* is in accordance with Christian theology.

²⁰⁴ Cf. Chadwick (1981b), pp. 203-211.

Quomodo substantiae is concerned with the demonstration of the Prime Good, and Its relation to the created existences. “The Prime Good”, Boethius admits, “can be deduced from the religious beliefs of savage races”. (*Quomodo substantiae*, 92-95) As Marenbon discusses, the area of problems *Quomodo substantiae* is concerned with, is the same as that of *De trinitate* and *Utrum pater*, but the particular difficulty *Quomodo substantiae* deals with does not involve a specifically Christian doctrine, thus its language is neutral.²⁰⁵ Hence, there is no doubt that *Quomodo substantiae* is one of the theological tractates.

The motivation to write *Quomodo substantiae*, which is given at the beginning of this treatise, is to reply to a request of John the Deacon. As Boethius says, John asked him to “state and explain somewhat more clearly that obscure question in my *Hebdomads* concerning the manner in which substances are good in virtue of existence without being substantial goods” (*Quomodo substantiae*, 1-2). In the Middle Ages the title of this tractate (as accepted by Thomas Aquinas) was derived from these opening lines: it was called *De Hebdomadibus* (*On the Hebdomads*).²⁰⁶ Most scholars nowadays regard this title as mistaken. In some manuscripts, this tractate has no title; however, in most manuscripts it is given a long title, viz. *Quomodo substantiae in eo quod sint bonae sint cum non sint substantialia bona*.²⁰⁷

The *Quomodo substantiae* has a conspicuous character. John the Deacon urged Boethius to write an essay because “the method of this kind of treatise is not clear to all” (*Quomodo substantiae*, 6-7). Boethius decides to follow “the example of the mathematical and cognate sciences” (*Quomodo substantiae*, 15). And later in his last composition, *Consolatio*, Boethius gives an exposition of this mathematical method again. The mathematical method is as follows:

“As the geometricians are wont, out of their propositions which they have demonstrated, to infer something which they call *porismata* (deductions) so will I give thee as it were a *corollarium*.” (*Consolatio*, III.pX.80-83)

²⁰⁵ Cf. Marenbon (2003), p. 87.

²⁰⁶ Cf. Casey (1987); Crouse (1982); Solère (2003).

²⁰⁷ Cf. Chadwick (1981b), pp. 203-204.

In this method, there is a key term, *porismata* (porism) which is from the Greek word $\pi\acute{o}\rho\iota\sigma\mu\alpha$. Proclus distinguishes two senses in which this word is used.

“The first is that of *corollary* where something appears as an incidental result of a proposition, obtained without trouble or special seeking, a sort of bonus which the investigation has presented us with. The other sense is that of Euclid’s *Porisms*. In this sense *porism* is the name given to things which are sought, but need some finding and are neither pure bringing into existence nor simple theoretic argument.”²⁰⁸

Here in *Quomodo substantiae* and also in *Consolatio*, Boethius uses the word porism in the first sense, which is equal to *corollary*. And the method Boethius uses here is similar to what Euclid calls “analysis” and “synthesis”.

“Analysis is the assumption of that which is sought as if it were admitted <and the arrival> by means of its consequences at something admitted to be true.”

“Synthesis is an assumption of that which is sought as if it were admitted <and the arrival> by means of its consequences at something admitted to be true.”²⁰⁹

Boethius first uses the method of synthesis to the attainment of what is sought, and then uses problematical analysis²¹⁰ — one kind of the method analysis — to come to the conclusion. Section III.4 will be divided into three parts: the first one concerns the premises for the demonstration (Section III.4.1), the second one introduces the mode of mathematical example (Section III.4.2), and the last one is the solution to the problem

²⁰⁸ Heath (1956), p. 13.

²⁰⁹ Euclid, *Elements*, XIII.1; Heath (1956).

²¹⁰ Cf. Heath (1956), pp. 138-139: “In the problematical kind we assume that which is propounded as if it were known, after which we pass through its successive consequences, taking them as true, up to something admitted: if then (a) what is admitted is possible and obtainable, that is, what mathematicians call given, what was originally proposed will also be possible, and the proof will again correspond in reverse order to the analysis, but if (b) we come upon something admittedly impossible, the problem will also be impossible.”

(Section III.4.3).

III.4.1. The Premises for the Demonstration

Boethius first lays down “bounds and rules” according to which he develops nine rules for the demonstration.²¹¹

Rule I: A common conception is a statement generally accepted as soon as it is made. (*Quomodo substantiae*, 18-19)

Rule II: Being and a concrete thing are different. Simple Being awaits manifestation, but a thing is and exists as soon as it has received the form which gives it Being. (*Quomodo substantiae*, 28-30)

Rule III: A concrete thing can participate in something else; but absolute Being can in no wise participate in anything. (*Quomodo substantiae*, 31-32)

Rule IV: That which exists can possess something in addition to itself. But absolute Being has no admixture of anything besides Itself. (*Quomodo substantiae*, 35-37)

Rule V: Merely to be something, and to be something absolutely are different; the former signifies an accident; the latter substance. (*Quomodo substantiae*, 38-40)

Rule VI: Everything that is participates in absolute Being in order to exist. (*Quomodo substantiae*, 41-42)

Rule VII: Every simple thing possesses as a unity its existence and its particular being. (*Quomodo substantiae*, 45-46)

Rule VIII: In every composite thing existence and its particular being are different. (*Quomodo substantiae*, 47-48)

Rule IX: Diversity repels; likeness attracts. (*Quomodo substantiae*, 49-50)

²¹¹ Cf. Marenbon (2003), pp. 87-90.

The first rule concerns the common conception. One kind of it is universally intelligible, which could be considered as maximal proposition in Boethius' logical works. In his two works on topics, *In Ciceronis Topica* and *De Topicis Differentiis*, Boethius sets forth the maximal proposition.

“We call highest and maximal propositions those propositions that are universal and known and manifest to such an extent that they need no proof but rather themselves provide proof for things that are in doubt, for those proposition for those propositions that are uncertain.” (*C.Topica*, 280/1051)

“Those for which where is no proof are called maximal and principal, because it is necessary that these prove those which do not deny that they can be demonstrated.” (*TopicisD.*, 1176C.21-24)

After the two statements about the maximal proposition above, and also after the statement of the universally intelligible common conception in the first premise, Boethius uses the same example from mathematical theory, that is, “if equals be taken from equals the remainders are equal.” Rule II and Rule VIII are all regarding the difference between being and a concrete thing. Being is absolute, and it can “in no wise participate in anything” and “have no admixture of anything besides Itself” (*Quomodo substantiae*, 31-32; 36-37). The points here are in accord with the analysis of pure form in *De trinitate*, which I have already discussed in Section II.3.1.2 on the Trinity. The last rule is about diversity and likeness.

After laying down these nine preliminary rules, Boethius takes up his argument in the way he proposed in the context of mathematical lines.

III.4.2. Demonstrations of a Problem²¹²

Armed with nine rules, Boethius first employs the method of synthesis to get what is sought.

Suppose “Every existing thing tends to good.” (This is in line with Rule I. The second kind of common conception is intelligible only

²¹² Cf. Marenbon (2003), pp. 90-94.

to the learned, and it is just agreed by all learned.)

According to Rule IX, everything tends to its like.

Therefore, things are themselves good.²¹³

According to Rule I, things are good in one of the following two ways: either by participation or by substance.

Here we arrive at what is sought, and this proposition is what Boethius plans to show, which results in a problem. Then Boethius employs the method of analysis to demonstrate two parts of this problem in turn. The first part of the problem: things are good by participation.

Suppose the problem solved.

Then according to the definition of “participation”, the thing itself does not have what it participates in as part of its essence. (This is in line with Rule I.)

Therefore, things do not possess goodness in themselves.

But according to Rule IX, what does not own goodness in itself cannot be good in itself.

Therefore, these things are not good, which is opposite to the supposition.

Therefore, the supposition is impossible, that is, things cannot be good by participation.

Accordingly, things are good in the other way: things are good by substance.

Suppose the problem solved.

Then according to Rule V, to be something and to be something absolutely are different.

If something’s substance is good, its particular being is good.

According to Rule VIII, since the absolute and particular being of

²¹³ Cf. MacDonald (1988).

all things is the same, they are substantial goods like the First Good.

Therefore, all things are like the First Good, and are God, which is an impious assertion.

Therefore, the supposition is impossible, that is, things cannot be good by substance.

From this analysis, the problem follows that things are in no way good, for they are good neither by participation nor by substance. Boethius solves this problem in the following way.

III.4.3. The Solution to the Problem

At the beginning of the solution, Boethius offers a process of mathematics related to mental abstraction.

“There are many things which can be separated by a mental process, though they cannot be separated in fact.” (*Quomodo substantiae*, 87-88)

In order to make this process clear, Boethius gives an example from mathematics:

“No one can actually separate a triangle or other mathematical figures from the underlying matter; but mentally one can consider a triangle and its properties apart from matter.” (*Quomodo substantiae*, 88-91)

By imitating this mathematical process, Boethius removes the presence of the Prime Good from the mind for a moment. So the proposition that needs be proved is: All things are good, which is the repetition of the first proposition, and then inquires how they could possibly be good if they did not derive from the Prime Good.

The imitation of this mathematical process suggests that “the Goodness of all things and their existence are two different things.” (*Quomodo substantiae*, 98-100) Hence, the being of all things would be not identical

with their goodness. Simple goodness is the distinguishing feature of the one sole Good, thus if the things were nothing else but good substances, “they (or rather it) would seem to be not things but the principle of things” (*Quomodo substantiae*, 113-115). But this conclusion is out of the question. For things derive their existence from the Will of the Good, so they are neither independent nor simple.

“For the Prime Good is essentially good in virtue of Being; the secondary good is in its turn good because it derives from the good whose absolute Being is good.” (*Quomodo substantiae*, 121-124)

In the case of the Prime Good, Being and Goodness are identical, and It is good due to Its existence, irrespective of all conditions. Unlike the Prime Good, absolute Being of all things is not good under all circumstances, though they be good in virtue of their existence. Unless the true good had produced them, these things could not actually exist. In this way the problem is solved.

Augustine also discussed the topic of goodness and existence. For example, “A nature with no good in it cannot exist.”²¹⁴ Augustine neither states the internal relationship between the created existence and its goodness, nor does he explain how the existence of a substance makes it good. However, unlike Augustine, Boethius adopts the mathematical method and the demonstrative method to address these issues. Boethius employs the mathematical method, and regards his demonstration as an example of mathematical demonstration. Boethius also employs a similar mathematical method for the arguments in his famous work *Consolatio*. Lady Philosophy begins her argument by an imitation of this geometrical method, which I will set out in Chapter IV.

The issue of goodness discussed in *Quomodo substantiae* will also continue in *Consolatio*. In Book III, the ninth prose, of *Consolatio*, when Lady Philosophy argues for the proposition that unity and the good are identical, she draws the conclusion that “All things then desire goodness, which you may define thus: goodness is that which is desired of all things.” (*Consolatio*, III.pXI.110-112) In absolute terms, the good is the final cause

²¹⁴ Augustine, *City of God*, XIX.13; Schaff (1890).

of all things, and the good is identical with happiness. People also seek the good in order to be happy. However, most of the time, they are not happy, for the good they seek is not the true good. So where is the true good? How do people get to it? These will be discussed in the following chapter on the *Consolatio*.

III.5. Conclusion

Boethius' five theological treatises are brief but greatly contribute to the intellectual tradition of the West, not only in content but also importantly in method.²¹⁵

The content, as Boethius himself admits, follows Augustine' thoughts, but the terminology and the method in these treatises are Boethius' own, independent from Augustine.

Sutherland speaks very highly of Boethius' contribution:

“In *On the Trinity*, he employed the term *theology* for the first time as a technical Christian term denoting the philosophical inquiry into the nature of God. Methodologically, his contribution lies in the use of formal Aristotelian demonstrative logic for the first time in the service of Christian theology.”²¹⁶

This estimate is not very accurate, for before Boethius, there are other people who used Aristotelian logic to explain Christian issues. However, Boethius may have been the first to systematically apply formal Aristotelian demonstrative logic to solve Christian issues. In doing so, Boethius conjoins philosophy and faith, which is the aim stated in his second treatise, viz. to “reconcile faith and reason” (*Utrum pater*, 71).

From the chapters on logic and mathematics, it is obvious that Boethius

²¹⁵ Cf. Erismann, (2009), “The Medieval Fortunes of the *Opuscula Sacra*,” in Marenbon (ed.), pp. 155-177; Gibson (1981), “The *Opuscula Sacra* in the Middle Ages,” in Gibson (ed.), pp. 214-235; Nash-Marshall (2012), “Boethius's Influence on Theology and Metaphysics to c.1500,” in Kaylor and Phillips (eds.), pp. 163-192; Marenbon (2003), “The Method and Character of the *Opuscula*,” pp. 94-95.

²¹⁶ Eliade (2005), p. 277.

is a philosopher, which is confirmed again by his theological tractates. Boethius is also labeled as a theologian by some scholars, such as Sutherland, who called Boethius “Roman philosopher, theologian, and statesman”.²¹⁷ The label of “theologian” is not accurate in Boethius’ case. Indeed, Boethius wrote five theological tractates. However, this is not enough to prove that he is a “theologian”. The term *theologia* was used by Boethius to denote a subdivision of philosophy. In Boethius’ view, theology as an academic discipline deals with motionless and incorporeal reality, which is different from the theology of the theologians. Boethius did not write the theological treatise as a theologian in the ordinary sense of the word and his audiences are the few people who are actually capable of tackling properly theological disputation.²¹⁸

From the motivations for writing the theological treatises, it has been shown that Boethius’ active interest in Christian disputes is of the greatest political importance. The political reason aside, Boethius’ interest on these Christian issues is also scientific and speculative. As Boethius admits, in his works on the Trinity, no new Christian issues are discussed, and the seeds in his mind are sown by Augustine’s writings (*De trinitate*, 31-32). However, he decides to try his best to make these issues clear. For theology, like all Liberal Arts, has a limit: the inquiry about God is beset by the weakness of man’s wit and reason. In spite of this, Boethius is confident that philosophy could be a little useful. He purposely uses brevity and wraps up the ideas he draws from the deep questionings of philosophy in new and unaccustomed words (*De trinitate*, 16-18). That is to say, the theological tractates of Boethius are written from the perspective of philosophy.²¹⁹ This is the reason why it is not accurate to call Boethius a theologian. The accurate label for Boethius is Philosopher, which is confirmed again by his last

²¹⁷ Eliade (2005), p. 276.

²¹⁸ Chadwick points out that Boethius is “addressing himself only indirectly to a pastoral or ‘political’ situation in the Church, as a logician who thought there was some tidying up to be done in the ecclesiastical garden.” Cf. Chadwick (1981a), “Introduction,” in Gibson (ed.), p. 1. The audiences of Boethius’ theological tractates imply that “one must have both piety and knowledge, and be able to assess clearly the proper relationship between faith and reason.” Cf. Reiss (1982), “The Question of Audience,” pp. 66-70.

²¹⁹ This implies an answer to the question why Boethius chooses philosophy to console him when facing death. Cf. Section IV.4.

composition, *Consolatio*, to which we now turn.