

1. Not riches or power or pleasur^e but only God is the Supreme Good, relativizing all other goods and illumining them with Presence. That's the final, late-forties' message of BOETHIUS--Roman philosopher-theologian, musician, literatus [writing the last work of Roman literature, and this his last book, DE CONSOLATIONE PHILOSOPHIAE ("THE CONSOLATION OF PHILOSOPHY"), ca.AD524].

2. On the three sheets of this thinksheet I've excerpted--from the 1897 leather-bound forty-volume LIBRARY OF THE WORLD'S BEST LITERATURE, given me upon my graduation from highschool by the head of the English department--part of chap.3. Read very slowly, making use of the plentiful white space, which is *your* space to occupy with yourself, your responses as one who, at the author's age-stage, are discovering, as he did, the paradox of life as both self-limiting and ever more profoundly open.

3. Some of the best of the literature of limits is prison literature--some of Paul's letters, Martin Luther King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," many others that Paul Mayer uses in his NYTS prison-literature course, and--now, here--Boethius, who was executed for treason shortly after completing the CONSOLATION. [Did he, as did Bonhoeffer his LETTERS AND PAPERS FROM PRISON, write it on toiletpaper and hide it in the rafters of his cell?]....Now, this corpus of the world's prison literature is especially nourishing to middle-agers, which means everybody under the potentially creative tension of life closing in [from accumulated decisions and aging body] and opening out [from enriched experience and honed life-skills and sorted-out trustables/untrustables].

4. NOTES to life-context the reading selection on Boethius:

(1) BORN of the highest and wealthiest Roman nobility: creme de la creme! Early Christianity took a long time to win the upper classes, especially the philosophers --who were actually intellectual-religious leaders with an atheist-humanist message of high ethical value and disdainful of the "gods"-type religions of the lower and middle classes. Very much like many humanist leaders of our time--in the arts and sciences, and in the human-potential movement. The noblest of the Roman emperiors, Marcus Aurelius, persecuted the Christians [and wrote his MEDITATIONS, well worth your attention]; Justin is called "Martyr" because he switched entirely over into Christianity and paid for it the ultimate price; and Boethius leaned toward and into Christianity, but is solidly planted in the best of the old pagan culture into which Jesus was born [Galilee being, culturally, more pagan than Jewish].

(2) So, reading the CONSOLATION (a) contexts you in the early-Christian environment and (b) communicates a sense of the stiff competition early Christianity was up against....and now you, too!

(3) In wrestling with this selection, you should feel good about getting to the "roots" of the civilization that formed you. The book profoundly influenced Dante, who did so much to shape the modern Western imagination; and it was translated by King Alfred [ca.AD800], Chaucer [ca.AD1380], and the first Queen Elizabeth [ca.AD 1580]--to chose one translator for each of the three stages in the development of the English language.

(4) A translator of the Greek classics into Latin, he died [canonized as "St. Severinus"] for siding with culture-and-Constantinople against the West's barbarian power.

EVERY mortal is troubled with many and various anxieties, and yet all desire, through various paths, to arrive at one goal; that is, they strive by different means to attain one happiness: in a word, God. He is the beginning and the end of every good, and he is the highest happiness. Then said the Mind:— This, methinks, must be the highest good, so that men should neither need, nor moreover be solicitous, about any other good besides it; since he possesses that which is the roof of all other good, inasmuch as it includes all other good, and has all other kinds within it. It would not be the highest good if any good

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were external to it, because it would then have to desire some good which itself had not. Then answered Reason, and said:—It is very evident that this is the highest happiness, for it is both the roof and the floor of all good. What is that then but the best happiness, which gathers the other felicities all within it, and includes and holds them within it; and to it there is a deficiency of none, neither has it need of any, but they come all from it and again all to it, as all waters come from the sea, and again all come to the sea? There is none in the little fountain, which does not seek the sea, and again from the sea it returns into the earth, and so it flows gradually through the earth, till it again comes to the same fountain that it before flowed from, and so again to the sea.

Now, this is an example of the true good, which all mortal men desire to obtain, though they by various ways think to arrive at it. For every man has a natural good in himself, because every mind desires to obtain the true good; but it is hindered by the transitory good, because it is more prone thereto. For some men think that it is the best happiness that a man be so rich that he have need of nothing more, and they choose their life accordingly. Some men think that this is the highest good, that he be among his fellows the most honorable of his fellows; and they with all diligence seek this. Some think that the supreme good is in the highest power. These strive either themselves to rule, or else to associate themselves to the friendship of rulers. Some persuade themselves that it is best that a man be illustrious and celebrated and have good fame; they therefore seek this both in peace and in war. Many reckon it for the greatest good and for the greatest happiness that a man be always blithe in this present life, and follow all his lusts. Some indeed who desire these riches are desirous thereof because they would have the greater power, that they may the more securely enjoy these worldly lusts, and also the riches. Many there are who desire power because they would gather money; or again, they are desirous to spread their name.

On account of such and other like frail and perishing advantages, the thought of every human mind is troubled with anxiety and with care. It then imagines that it has obtained some exalted good when it has won the flattery of the people; and to me it seems that it has bought a very false greatness. Some with much anxiety seek wives, that thereby they may above

all things have children, and also live happily. True friends, then, I say, are the most precious things of all these worldly felicities. They are not indeed to be reckoned as worldly goods, but as divine; for deceitful fortune does not produce them, but God, who naturally formed them as relations. For of every other thing in this world, man is desirous, either that he may through it obtain power, or else some worldly lust; except of the true friend, whom he loves sometimes for affection and for fidelity, though he expect to himself no other rewards. Nature joins and cements friends together with inseparable love. But with these worldly goods, and with this present wealth, men make oftener enemies than friends. From these, and from many such proofs, it may be evident to all men that all the bodily goods are inferior to the faculties of the soul. We indeed think that a man is the stronger, because he is great in his body. The fairness, moreover, and the strength of the body, rejoices and invigorates the man, and health makes him cheerful. In all these bodily felicities men seek one single happiness, as it seems to them. For whatsoever every man chiefly loves above all other things, that, he persuades himself, is best for him, and that is his highest good. When therefore he has acquired that, he imagines that he may be very happy. I do not deny that these goods and this happiness are the highest good of this present life. For every man considers that thing best which he chiefly loves above other things, and therefore he deems himself very happy if he can obtain what he then most desires. Is not now clearly enough shown to thee the form of the false goods; namely, riches, and dignity, and power, and glory, and pleasure? Concerning pleasure, Epicurus the philosopher said, when he inquired concerning all those other goods which we before mentioned: then said he, that pleasure was the highest good, because all the other goods which we before mentioned gratify the mind and delight it, but pleasure chiefly gratifies the body.

But we will still speak concerning the nature of men, and concerning their pursuits. Though, then, their mind and their nature be now obscured, and they are by that descent fallen to evil and inclined thither, yet they are desirous, so far as they can and may, of the highest good. As the drunken man knows that he should go to his house and to his rest, and yet is not able to find the way thither, so is it also with the mind, when it is weighed down by the anxieties of this world. It is sometimes

intoxicated and misled by them, so far that it cannot rightly find out good. Nor yet does it appear to those men that they aught mistake who are desirous to obtain this, namely, that they need labor after nothing more. But they think that they are able to collect together all these goods, so that none may be excluded from the number. . . .

Two things may dignity and power do, if they come to the unwise. It may make him honorable and respectable to other unwise persons. But when he quits the power, or the power him, then is he to the unwise neither honorable nor respectable. Has power, then, the custom of exterminating and rooting out vices from the minds of great men and planting therein virtues? I know, however, that earthly power never sows the virtues, but collects and gathers vices; and when it has gathered them, then it nevertheless shows and does not conceal them. For the vices of great men many men see; because many know them and many are with them. Therefore we always lament concerning power, and also despise it, when we see that it comes to the worst, and to those who are to us most unworthy. . . .

Every virtue has its proper excellence; and the excellence and the dignity which it has, it imparts immediately to every one who loves it. Thus, wisdom is the highest virtue, and it has in it four other virtues; of which one is prudence, another temperance, the third is fortitude, the fourth justice. Wisdom makes its lovers wise, and prudent, and moderate, and patient, and just; and it fills him who loves it with every good quality. This they who possess the power of this world cannot do. They cannot impart any virtue to those who love them, through their wealth, if they have it not in their nature. Hence it is very evident that the rich in worldly wealth have no proper dignity; but the wealth is come to them from without, and they cannot from without have aught of their own. Consider now, whether any man is the less honorable because many men despise him. But if any man be the less honorable, then is every foolish man the less honorable, the more authority he has, to every wise man. Hence it is sufficiently clear that power and wealth cannot make its possessor the more honorable. But it makes him the less honorable, when it comes to him, if he were not before virtuous. So is also wealth and power the worse, if he who possesses it be not virtuous. Each of them is the more worthless, when they meet with each other.

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But I can easily instruct you by an example, so that you may clearly enough perceive that this present life is very like a shadow, and in that shadow no man can attain the true good. If any very great man is driven from his country, or goes on his lord's errand, and so comes to a foreign people, where no man knows him, nor he any man, nor even knows the language, do you think his greatness can make him honorable in that land? Of course it cannot. But if dignity were natural to wealth and were its own, or again if wealth were the rich man's own, then it could not forsake him. Let the man who possessed them be in whatsoever land he might, then his wealth and his dignity would be with him. But because the wealth and the power are not his own, they forsake him; and because they have no natural good in themselves, they go away like a shadow or smoke. Yet the mistaken opinion and fancy of unwise men judge that power is the highest good. It is entirely otherwise. When a great man is either among foreigners, or among wise men in his own country, his wealth counts nothing to either one when they learn that he was exalted for no virtue, but through the applause of the ignorant. But if his power arose from any personal merit, he would keep that even if he lost the power. He would not lose the good that came from nature; that would always follow him and always make him honorable, whatever land he was in. . . .

Worthless and very false is the glory of this world! Concerning this a certain poet formerly sung. When he contemned this present life, he said:—O glory of this world! wherefore do erring men call thee, with false voice, glory, when thou art none!—For man more frequently has great renown, and great glory, and great honor, through the opinion of the unwise, than he has through his deserts. But tell me now, what is more unmeet than this; or why men may not rather be ashamed of themselves than rejoice, when they hear that any one belies them. Though men even rightly praise any one of the good, he ought not the sooner to rejoice immoderately at the people's words. But at this he ought to rejoice, that they speak truth of him. Though he rejoice at this, that they spread his name, it is not the sooner so extensively spread as he persuades himself; for they cannot spread it over all the earth, though they may in some land; for though it be to one known, yet it is to another unknown. Though he in this land be celebrated, yet is he in another not

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celebrated. Therefore is the people's favor to be held by every man for nothing; since it comes not to every man according to his deserts, nor indeed remains always to any one. Consider first concerning noble birth. If any one boast of it, how vain and how useless is the boast; for every one knows that all men come from one father and from one mother. Or again, concerning the people's favor, and concerning their applause, I know not why we rejoice at it. Though they whom the vulgar applaud be illustrious, yet are they more illustrious and more rightly to be applauded who are dignified by virtues. For no man is really the greater or the more praiseworthy for the excellence of another, or for his virtues, if he himself has it not. Are you ever the fairer for another man's beauty? A man is little the better though he have a good father, if he himself is incapable of anything. Therefore I advise that you rejoice in other men's good and their nobility, but so far only that you ascribe it not to yourself as your own; because every man's good, and his nobility, is more in the mind than in the flesh. This only, indeed, I know of good in nobility: that it shames many a man if he is worse than his ancestors were, and he therefore endeavors with all his power to imitate the manners of some one of the best, and his virtues.