

BOOK IV

THUS gently sang the Lady Philosophy with dignified mien and grave countenance; and when she ceased, I, who had not thoroughly forgotten the grief within me, interrupted her as she was about to speak further. 'Herald of true light,' I said, 'right clear have been the outpourings of your speech till now, seeming inspired as one contemplates them, and invincible through your reasonings. And though through grief for the injustices I suffer, I had forgotten them, yet you have not spoken of They what I knew not at all before. But this one thing is the chief cause of my grief, namely that, when there exists a good governor of the world, evils should exist at all, or, existing, should go unpunished. I would have you think how strange is this fact alone. But there is an even stranger attached thereto: ill-doing reigns and flourishes, while virtue not only lacks its reward, but is even trampled underfoot by wicked doers, and pays the penalties instead of crime. Who can wonder and complain enough that such things should happen under the rule of One who, while all-knowing and all-powerful, wills good alone?'

Then she answered: 'Yes, it would be most terrible, monstrous, and infinitely amazing if

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it were as you think. It would be as though in a well-ordered house of a good master, the vilest vessels were cared for while the precious were left defiled. But it is not so. If our former conclusions are unshaken, God Himself, of whose government we speak, will teach you that the good are always powerful, the evil are always the lowest and weakest; vice never goes unpunished; virtue never goes without its own reward; happiness comes to the good, misfortune to the wicked: and when your complaints are set at rest, many such things would most firmly strengthen you in this opinion. You have seen now from my teaching the form of true happiness; you know now its place: let us go quickly through all that must be lightly passed over, and let me shew you the road which shall lead you to your home. I will give wings to your mind, by which it shall raise itself aloft: so shall disquiet be driven away, and you may return safe to your home by my guidance, by the path I shall shew you, even by myself carrying you thither.

'Yea, airy wings are mine to scale the heights of heaven; when these the mind has donned, swiftly she

loathes and spurns this earth. She soars above the sphere of this vast atmosphere, sees the clouds behind her far; she passes high above the topmost fires which seethe above the feverish turmoil of the air,¹ until she rises

103:1 -- This and some of the following lines allude to some of the theories of the early Physicists.

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to the stars' own home, and joins her path unto the sun's; or accompanies on her path the cold and ancient Saturn, maybe as the shining warrior Mars; or she may take her course through the circle of every star that decks the night. And when she has had her fill of journeying, then may she leave the sky and tread the outer plane of the swift moving air, as mistress of the awful light. Here holds the King of kings His sway, and guides the reins of the universe, and Himself unmoved He drives His winged chariot, the bright disposer of the world. And if this path brings thee again hither, the path that now thy memory seeks to recall, I tell thee, thou shalt say, " This is my home, hence was I derived, here shall I stay my course." But if thou choose to look back upon the earthly night behind thee, thou shalt see as exiles from light the tyrants whose grimness made wretched peoples so to fear.'

'Wondrous,' I cried; 'what vast things do you promise! and I doubt not that you can fulfil them. I only beg that you will not hold me back with delays, now that you have excited me thus far.'

'First, then, you must learn that power is never lacking to the good, while the wicked are devoid of all strength. The proofs of these two statements hang upon each other. For good and bad are opposites, and therefore, if it is allowed that good is powerful, the weakness

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of evil is manifest: if the weakness and uncertainty of evil is made plain, the strength and sureness of good is proved. To gain more full credit for my opinion, I will go on to make my argument sure by first the one, then the other of the two paths, side by side.

'It is allowed that there are two things upon which depend the entire operation of human actions: they are will and power. For if the will be wanting, a man does not even attempt that which he has no desire to perform; if the power be wanting, the will is exercised in vain. Wherefore, if you see a man wish for that which he will in no wise gain, you cannot doubt that he lacks the power to attain that which he wishes.'

'That is plain beyond doubt.'

'And if you see a man gain that which he wishes, can you doubt that he has the power? '

'No.'

'But wherein a man has power, he is strong; wherein he has not power, he must be counted weak? '

'Yes.'

'Do you remember that we agreed from our earlier reasonings, that the instinct of all human will, though acted upon by different aims, does lead with eagerness towards happiness? '

'Yes,' said I, 'I remember that that too was proved.'

'Do you remember that happiness is the absolute good, and that the good is desired of all, when in that manner happiness is sought? '

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'I need not recall that,' I said, 'since it is present fixedly in my memory.'

'Then all men, good and bad alike, seek to arrive at the good by no different instincts? '

'Yes, that follows necessarily.'

'But it is certain that the good become so by the attainment of good? '

'Yes.'

'Then the good attain that which they wish? '

'Yes,' said I, 'it seems so.'

'But if evil men attain the good they seek, they cannot be evil? '

'No.'

'Since, then, both classes seek the good, which the good attain, but the evil attain not, it is plain that the good are powerful, while the evil are weak? '

'If any doubt that, he cannot judge by the nature of the world, nor by the sequence of arguments.'

Again she said, 'If there are two persons before whom the same object is put by natural instinct, and one person carries his object through, working by his natural functions, but the other cannot put his natural instinct into practice, but using some function unsuitable to nature he can imitate the successful person, but not fulfil his original purpose, in this case, which of the two do you decide to be the more capable? '

'I think I guess what you mean, but I would hear more explicitly.'

'You will not, I think, deny that the motion of walking is a natural one to mankind? '

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'No, I will not.'

'And is not that the natural function of the feet? '

'Yes.'

'If, then, one man walks, being able to advance upon his feet, while another, who lacks the natural function of feet, uses his hands and so tries to walk, which of these two may justly be held the more capable? '

'Weave me other riddles I ' I exclaimed, ' for can any one doubt that a man who enjoys his natural functions, is more capable than one who is incapable in that respect? '

'But in the case of the highest good,' she said, ' it is equally the purpose set before good and bad men; good men seek it by the natural functions of virtue, while bad men seek to attain the same through their cupidity, which is not a natural function for the attainment of good. Think you not so? '

'I do indeed,' said I; ' this is plain, as also is the deduction which follows. For it must be, from what I have already allowed, that the good are powerful, the wicked weak.'

'Your anticipation is right; and as doctors are wont to hope, it shews a lively nature now fit to withstand disease. But I see that you are very ready in understanding, and I will multiply my arguments one upon another. See how great is the weakness of these wicked men who cannot even attain that to which their natural instinct leads them, nay, almost drives them. And further, how if they are deprived of this

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great, this almost invincible, aid of a natural instinct to follow? Think what a powerlessness possesses these men. They are no light objects which they seek; they seek no objects in sport, objects which it is impossible that they should achieve. They fail in the very highest of all things, the crown of all, and in this they find none of the success for which they labour day and night in wretchedness. But herein the strength of good men is conspicuous. If a man could advance on foot till he arrived at an utmost point beyond which there was no path for further advance, you would think him most capable of walking: equally so, if a man grasps the very end and aim of his search, you must think him most capable. Wherefore also the contrary is true; that evil men are similarly deprived of all strength. For why do they leave virtue and follow after vice? Is it from ignorance of good? Surely not, for what is weaker or less compelling than the blindness of ignorance? Do they know what they ought to follow, and are they thrown from the straight road by passions? Then they must be weak too in self-control if they cannot struggle with their evil passions. But they lose thus not only power, but existence all together. For those who abandon the common end of all who exist, must equally cease to exist. And this may seem strange, that we should say that evil men, though the majority of mankind, do not exist at all; but it is so. For while I do not deny that evil men are evil, I do deny that they " are,"

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in the sense of absolute existence. You may say, for instance, that a corpse is a dead man, but you cannot call it a man. In a like manner, though I grant that wicked men are bad, I cannot allow that they are men at all, as regards absolute being. A thing exists which keeps its proper place and preserves its nature; but when anything falls away from its nature, its existence too ceases, for that lies in its nature. You will say, " Evil men are capable of evil ": and that I would not deny. But this very power of theirs comes not from strength, but from weakness. They are capable of evil; but this evil would have no efficacy if it could have stayed under the operation of good men. And this very power of ill shews the more plainly that their power is naught. For if, as we have agreed, evil is nothing, then, since they are only capable of evil, they are capable of nothing '

'That is quite plain.'

'I would have you understand what is this strength of power. We have a little while ago laid down that nothing is more powerful than the highest good? '

'Yes,' I said.

'But the highest good can do no evil? '

'No.'

'Is there any one who thinks that men are all-powerful? '

'No one,' I said, ' unless he be mad.'

'And yet those same men can do evil.' Would to heaven they could not! ' I cried. ' Then a powerful man is capable only of all

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good; but even those who are capable of evil, are not capable of all: so it is plain that those who are capable of evil, are capable of less. Further, we have shewn that all power is to be counted among objects of desire, and all objects of desire have their relation to the good, as to the coping-stone of their nature. But the power of committing crime has no possible relation to the good. Therefore it is not an object of desire. Yet, as we said, all power is to be desired. Therefore the power of doing evil is no power at all. For all these reasons the power of good men and the weakness of evil men is apparent. So Plato's opinion¹ is plain that " the wise alone are able to do what they desire, but unscrupulous men can only labour at what they like, they cannot fulfil their real desires." They do what they like so long as they think that they will gain through their pleasures the good which they desire; but they do not gain it, since nothing evil ever reaches happiness.

'Kings you may see sitting aloft upon their thrones, gleaming with purple, hedged about with grim guarding weapons, threatening with

110:1 -- From Plato's *Gorgias* (466). Boethius in this and several other passages in this book has the *Gorgias* in mind; for Plato there discusses the strength and happiness of good men, and the impotence and unhappiness of bad men. Socrates is also there represented as proving that the unjust man is happier punished than unpunished, as Boethius does below.

fierce glances, and their hearts heaving with passion. If any man take from these proud ones their outward covering of empty honour, he will see within, will see that these great ones bear secret chains. For the heart of one is thus filled by lust with the poisons of greed, or seething rage lifts up its waves and lashes his mind therewith: or gloomy grief holds them weary captives, or by slippery hopes they are tortured. So when you see one head thus labouring beneath so many tyrants, you know he cannot do as he would, for by hard task-masters is the master himself oppressed.

'Do you see then in what a slough crimes are involved, and with what glory honesty shines forth? It is plain from this that reward is never lacking to good deeds, nor punishment to crime. We may justly say that the reward of every act which is performed is the object for which it is performed. For instance, on the racecourse the crown for which the runner strives is his reward. But we have shewn that happiness is the identical good for the sake of which all actions are performed. Therefore the absolute good is the reward put before all human actions. But good men cannot be deprived of this. And further, a man who lacks good cannot justly be described as a good man; wherefore we may say that good habits never miss their rewards. Let the wicked rage never so wildly, the wise man's crown shall never fail nor wither. And the

wickedness of bad men can never take away from good men the glory which belongs to them. Whereas if a good man rejoiced in a glory which he received from outside, then could another, or even he, may be, who granted it, carry it away. But since honesty grants to every good man its own rewards, he will only lack his reward when he ceases to be good. And lastly, since every reward is sought for the reason that it is held to be good, who shall say that the man, who possesses goodness, does not receive his reward? And what reward is this? Surely the fairest and greatest of all. Remember that corollary¹ which I emphasised when speaking to you a little while ago; and reason thus therefrom. While happiness is the absolute good, it is plain that all good men become good by virtue of the very fact that they are good. But we agreed that happy men are as gods. Therefore this is the reward of the good, which no time can wear out, no power can lessen, no wickedness can darken; they become divine. In this case, then, no wise man can doubt of the inevitable punishment of the wicked as well. For good and evil are so set, differing from each other just as reward and punishment are in opposition to each other: hence the rewards, which we see fall to the good, must correspond precisely to the punishments of the evil on the other side. As, therefore, honesty is itself the reward of the honest, so wickedness is itself the punishment

of the wicked. Now whosoever suffers punishment, doubts not that he is suffering an evil: if, then, they are ready so to judge of themselves, can they think that they do not receive punishment, considering that they are not only affected but thoroughly permeated by wickedness, the worst of all evils?

'Then, from the other point of view of the good, see what a punishment ever goes with the wicked. You have learnt a little while past that all that exists is one, and that the good itself is one; it follows therefrom that all that exists must appear to be good. In this way, therefore, all that falls away from the good, ceases also to exist, wherefore evil men cease to be what they were. The form of their human bodies still proves that they have been men; wherefore they must have lost their human nature when they turned to evil-doing. But as goodness alone can lead men forward beyond their humanity, so evil of necessity will thrust down below the honourable estate of humanity those whom it casts down from their first position. The result is that you cannot hold him to be a man who has been, so to say, transformed by his vices. If a violent man and a robber burns with greed of other men's possessions, you say he is like a wolf. Another fierce man is always working his restless tongue at lawsuits, and you will compare him to a hound. Does another delight to spring upon men from ambushes with hidden guile? He is as a fox. Does one man roar and not restrain

his rage? He would be reckoned as having the heart of a lion. Does another flee and tremble in terror where there is no cause of fear? He would be held to be as deer. If another is dull and lazy, does he not live the life of an ass? One whose aims are inconstant and ever changed at his whims, is in no wise different from the birds. If another is in a slough of foul and filthy lusts, he is kept down by the lusts of an unclean swine. Thus then a man who loses his goodness, ceases to be a man, and since he cannot change his condition for that of a god, he turns into a beast.

'The east wind wafted the sails which carried on the wandering ships of Ithaca's king to the island where dwelt the fair goddess Circe, the sun's own daughter. There for her new guests she mingled cups bewitched by charms. Her hand, well skilled in use of herbs, changed these guests to different forms. One bears the face of a boar; another grows like to an African lion with fangs and claws; this one becomes as a wolf, and when he thinks to weep, he howls; that one is an Indian tiger, though he walks all harmless round about the dwelling-place. The leader alone, Ulysses, though beset by so many dangers, was saved from the goddess's bane by the pity of the winged god, Mercury. But the sailors had drunk of her cups, and now had turned from food of corn to husks and acorns, food of swine. Naught is left the same, speech and form are gone; only the mind remains

unchanged, to bewail their unnatural sufferings.

'How weak was that hand, how powerless those magic herbs which could change the limbs but not the heart! Within lies the strength of men, hidden in deep security. Stronger are those dread poisons which can drag a man out of himself, which work their way within: they hurt not the body, but on the mind their rage inflicts a grievous wound.'¹

Then I answered: 'I confess that I think it is justly said that vicious men keep only the outward bodily form of their humanity, and, in the attributes of their souls, are changed to beasts. But I would never have allowed them willingly the power to rage in the ruin of good men through their fierce and wicked intentions.'

'They have not that power,' said she, 'as I will shew you at a convenient time. But if this very power, which you believe is allowed to them, were taken from them, the punishment of vicious men would be to a great extent lightened. For, though some may scarcely believe it, evil men must be more unhappy when they carry out their ill desires than when they cannot fulfil them. For if it is pitiable to have wished bad things, it is more pitiable to have had the power to perform them, without which power the performance of this pitiable will would never have effect. Thus, when you

115:1 -- *Cf.* St. Matthew x. 28.

see men with the will and the power to commit a crime, and you see them perform it, they must be the victims of a threefold misfortune, since each of those three things brings its own misery.

'Yes,' said I, 'I agree; but I do wish from my heart that they may speedily be rid of one of these misfortunes, being deprived of this power of doing evil.'

'They will be rid of it,' she said, 'more speedily even than you wish perhaps, and sooner than they think they will be rid thereof. There is in the short course of life naught which is so long coming that an immortal mind can think it has long to wait for it. Many a time are their high hopes and great plans for evil-doing cut short by a sudden and unlooked-for end. This indeed it is that sets a limit to their misery. For if wickedness makes a man miserable, the longer he is wicked, the more miserable must he be; and I

should hold them most miserable of all, if not even death at last put an end to their evil-doing. If we have reached true conclusions concerning the unhappiness of depravity, the misery, which is said to be eternal, can have no limit.'

'That is a strange conclusion and hard to accept. But I see that it is suited too well by what we have agreed upon earlier.'

'You are right,' she said; 'but when one finds it hard to agree with a conclusion, one ought in fairness to point out some fault in the argument which has preceded, or shew that

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the sequence of statements is not so joined together as to effectively lead to the conclusion; otherwise, if the premises are granted, it is not just to cavil at the inference. This too, which I am about to say, may not seem less strange, but it follows equally from what has been taken as fact.'

'What is that?' I asked.

'That wicked men are happier when they pay the penalty for their wickedness than when they receive no penalty at the hands of justice.¹ I am not going to urge what may occur to any one, namely, that depraved habits are corrected by penalties, and drawn towards the right by fear of punishment, and that an example is hereby given to others to avoid all that deserves blame. But I think that the wicked who are not punished are in another way the more unhappy, without regard to the corrective quality of punishment, nor its value as an example.'

'And what way is there other than these?'

'We have allowed, have we not,' she said, 'that the good are happy, but the bad are miserable .

'Yes.'

'Then if any good be added to the misery of any evil man, is he not happier than the man whose miserable state is purely and simply miserable without any good at all mingled therewith?'

'I suppose so.'

117:1 -- Plato, *Gorgias*, 472 and ff.

'What if some further evil beyond those by which a man, who lacked all good things, were made miserable, were added to his miseries? Should not he be reckoned far more unhappy than the man whose misfortune was lightened by a share in some good? '

'Of course it is so.'

'Therefore,' she said, 'the wicked when punished have something good added to their lot, to wit, their punishment, which is good by reason of its quality of justice; and they also, when unpunished, have something of further evil, their very impunity, which you have allowed to be an evil, by reason of its injustice.'

'I cannot deny that,' said I.

'Then the wicked are far more unhappy when they are unjustly unpunished, than when they are justly punished. It is plain that it is just that the wicked should be punished, and unfair that they should escape punishment.'

'No one will gainsay you.'

'But no one will deny this either, that all which is just is good; and on the other part, all that is unjust is evil.'

Then I said: 'The arguments which we have accepted bring us to that conclusion. But tell me, do you leave no punishment of the soul to follow after the death of the body?'

'Yes,' she answered, 'heavy punishments, of which some, I think, are effected by bitter penalties, others by a cleansing mercy.¹ But

118:1 -- It must not be supposed from the words 'cleansing mercy' (*purgatoria clementia*) that Boethius held the same views as were held by the Church later concerning purgatory, and as are now taught by the Roman Catholic Church. It is true that St. Augustine had in 407 A.D. hinted at the existence of such a state, but it was not dogmatically inculcated till 604, in the Papacy of Gregory the Great.

it is not my intention to discuss these now. My object has been to bring you to know that the power of evil men, which seems to you so unworthy, is in truth nothing; and that you may see that those wicked men, of whose impunity you complained, do never miss the reward of their ill-doing; and that you may learn that their passion, which you prayed might soon be cut short, is not long-enduring, and that the longer it lasts, the more unhappiness it brings, and that it would be most unhappy if it endured for ever. Further, I have tried to shew you that the wicked are more to be pitied if they escape with unjust impunity, than if they are punished by just retribution. And it follows upon this fact that they will be undergoing heavier penalties when they are thought to be unpunished.'

'When I hear your arguments, I feel sure that they are true as possible. But if I turn to human opinions, I ask what man would not think them not only incredible, but even unthinkable? '

'Yes,' she said, 'for men cannot raise to the transparent light of truth their eyes which have been accustomed to darkness. They are like those birds whose sight is clear at night, but blinded by daylight. So long as they look not

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upon the true course of nature, but upon their own feelings, they think that the freedom of passion and the impunity of crime are happy things. Think upon the sacred ordinances of eternal law. If your mind is fashioned after better things, there is no need of a judge to award a prize; you have added yourself to the number of the more excellent. If your mind sinks to worse things, seek no avenger from without: you have thrust yourself downward to lower things. It is as though you were looking at the squalid earth and the heavens in turn; then take away all that is about you; and by the power of sight, you will seem to be in the midst now of mud, now of stars. But mankind looks not to such things. What then shall we do? Shall we join ourselves to those whom we have shewn to be as beasts? If a man lost utterly his sight, and even forgot that he had ever seen, so that he thought he lacked naught of human perfection, should we think that such a blind one can see as we do? Most people would not even allow another point, which rests no less firmly upon strong reasons, namely, that those who do an injury are more unhappy than those who suffer one.'¹

'I would hear those strong reasons,' I said.

'You do not deny that every wicked man deserves punishment? '

'No.'

'It is plain for many reasons that the wicked are unhappy? '

120:1 Plato, *Gorgias*, 474 and ff.

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'Yes.'

'Then you doubt not that those who are worthy of punishment are miserable? '

'No, I agree.'

'If then you were sitting as a judge, upon which would you consider punishment should fall -- the man who did the injury, or the man who suffered it? '

'I have no hesitation in saying that I would make amends to the sufferer at the expense of the doer of the injustice.'

'Then the doer of the injustice would seem to you more miserable than the sufferer? '

'That follows.'

'Then from this,' said she,' and other causes which rest upon the same foundation, it is plain that, since baseness makes men more miserable by its own nature, the misery is brought not to the sufferer of an injustice, but to the doer thereof. But the speakers in law-courts take the opposite course: they try to excite the pity of the judges for those who have suffered any heavy or bitter wrong; but more justly their pity would be due to those who have committed the wrong. These guilty men ought to be brought, by accusers kindly rather than angry, to justice, as patients to a doctor, that their disease of crime may be checked by punishment. Under such an arrangement the occupation of advocates for defence would either come to a complete stand-still, or if it seemed more to the advantage of mankind, it might turn to the work of prosecution.

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And if the wicked too themselves might by some device look on virtue left behind them, and if they could see that they would lay aside the squalor of vice by the pain of punishment, and that they would gain the compensation of achieving virtue again, they would no longer hold it punishment, but would refuse the aid of advocates for their defence, and would intrust themselves unreservedly to their accusers and their judges. In this way there would be no place left for hatred among wise men. For who but the most foolish would hate good men? And there is no cause to hate bad men. Vice is as a disease of the mind, just as feebleness shews ill-health in the body. As, then, we should never think that those, who are sick in the body, deserve hatred, so are those, whose minds are oppressed by a fiercer disease than feebleness, namely wickedness, much more worthy of pity than of persecution.

'To what good end do men their passions raise, even to drag from fate their deaths by their own hands? If ye seek death, she is surely nigh of her own will; and her winged horses she will not delay. Serpents and lions, bears, tigers and boars, all seek your lives with their fangs, yet do ye seek them with swords? Is it because your manners are so wide in variance that men raise up unjust battles and savage wars, and seek to perish by each other's darts? Such is no just reason for this cruelty.

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Wouldst thou apportion merit to merit fitly? Then love good men as is their due, and for the evil shew your pity.'

Then said I, 'I see how happiness and misery lie inseparably in the deserts of good and bad men. But I am sure that there is some good and some bad in the general fortune of men. For no wise man even would wish to be exiled, impoverished, and disgraced rather than full of wealth, power, veneration, and strength, and flourishing securely in his own city. The operation of wisdom is shewn in this way more nobly and clearly, when the happiness of rulers is in a manner transmitted to the people who come into contact with their rule; and especially when prisons, bonds, and other penalties of the law become the lot of the evil citizens for whom they were designed. I am struck with great wonder why these dues are interchanged; why punishments for crimes fall upon the good, while the bad citizens seize the rewards of virtue; and I long to learn from you what reason can be put forward for such unjust confusion. I should wonder less if I could believe that everything was the confusion of accident and chance. But now the thought of God's guidance increases my amazement; He often grants happiness to good men and bitterness to the bad, and then, on the other hand, sends hardships to the good and grants the desires of the wicked. Can we lay our hands on any cause? If not, what can make

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this state different in any way from accidental chance? '

'It is no wonder,' she answered, 'if one who knows not the order and reasons of nature, should think it is all at random and confused. But doubt not, though you know not the cause of such a great matter of the world's government, doubt not, I say, that all is rightly done, because a good Governor rules the universe.

'If any man knows not that the star Arcturus¹ has his course nearest the topmost pole how shall he not be amazed that Boötes so slowly takes his wain and is so late to dip his brightness in the ocean, and yet so swiftly turns to rise again? The law of heaven on high will but bewilder him. When the full moon grows dim to its horns, darkened by the shadow of dull night, when Phoebe thus lays bare all the varying bands of the stars, which she had hidden by the power of her shining face: then are the nations stirred by the errors of the vulgar, and beat without ceasing brazen cymbals.²No man is surprised when the blasts of the wind beat a shore with roaring waves, nor when a solid mass of frozen snow is melted by

124-1 -- Arcturu:, the star in Boötes nearest to the Bear, used to be thought the nearest star to our pole. Boötes was also known as the Arctophylax, or Bearward, and so also as the driver of the Wain.

124:2 -- The old superstition was that an eclipse meant the withdrawal of the moon, and that by a noise of beaten brass, etc., she could be saved.

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the warmth of Phoebus's rays; for herein the causes are ready at hand to be understood. But in those other matters the causes are hidden, and so do trouble all men's hearts, for time does not grant them to advance with experience in such things as seldom recur: the common herd is ever amazed at all that is extraordinary. But let the cloudy errors of ignorance depart, and straightway these shall seem no longer marvellous.'

'That is true,' I said; 'but it is your kind office to unravel the causes of hidden matters, and explain reasons now veiled in darkness; wherefore I beg of you, put forth your decree and expound all to me, since this wonder most deeply stirs my mind.'

Then said she, smiling, 'Your question calls me to the greatest of all these matters, and a full answer thereto is well-nigh impossible. For this is its kind: if one doubt be cut away, innumerable others arise, as the Hydra's heads; and there can be no limit unless a man restrains them by the most quick fire of the mind. For herein lie the questions of the directness of Providence, the course of Fate, chances which cannot be foreseen, knowledge, divine predestination, and freedom of judgment. You can judge for yourself the weight of these questions. But since it is a part of your treatment to know some of these, I will attempt to make some advantage therefrom, though we are penned in by our narrow space of time.

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if you enjoy the delights of song, you must wait a while for that pleasure, while I weave together for you the chain of reasons.'

'As you will,' said I. Then, as though beginning afresh, she spake thus:

'The engendering of all things, the whole advance of all changing natures, and every motion and progress in the world, draw their causes, their order, and their forms from the allotment of the unchanging mind of God, which lays manifold restrictions on all action from the calm fortress of its own directness. Such restrictions are called Providence when they can be seen to lie in the very simplicity of divine understanding; but they were called Fate in old times when they were viewed with reference to the objects which they moved or arranged. It will easily be understood that these two are very different if the mind examines the force of each. For Providence is the very divine reason which arranges all things, and rests with the supreme disposer of all; while Fate is that ordering which is a part of all changeable things, and by means of which Providence binds all things together in their own order. Providence embraces all things equally, however different they may be, even however infinite: when they are assigned to their own places, forms, and times, Fate sets them in an orderly motion; so that this development of the temporal order, unified in the intelligence of the mind of God, is Providence.

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The working of this unified development in time is called Fate. These are different, but the one hangs upon the other. For this order, which is ruled by Fate, emanates from the directness of Providence. Just as when a craftsman perceives in his mind the form of the object he would make, he sets his working power in motion, and brings through the order of time that which he had seen directly and ready present to his mind. So by Providence does God dispose all that is to be done, each thing by itself and unchangeably; while these same things which Providence has arranged are worked out by Fate in many ways and in time. Whether, therefore, Fate works by the aid of the divine spirits which serve Providence, or whether it works by the aid of the soul, or of all nature, or the motions of the stars in heaven, or the powers of angels, or the manifold skill of other spirits, whether the course of Fate is bound together by any or all of these, one thing is certain, namely that Providence is the one unchangeable direct power which gives form to all things which are to come to pass, while Fate is the changing bond, the temporal order of those things which are arranged to come to pass by the direct disposition of God. Wherefore everything which

is subject to Fate is also subject to Providence, to which Fate is itself subject. But there are things which, though beneath Providence, are above the course of Fate. Those things are they which are immovably set nearest the

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primary divinity, and are there beyond the course of the movement of Fate. As in the case of spheres moving round the same axis, that which is nearest the centre approaches most nearly the simple motion of the centre, and is itself, as it were, an axis around which turn those which are set outside it. That sphere which is outside all turns through a greater circuit, and fulfils a longer course in proportion as it is farther from the central axis; and if it be joined or connect itself with that centre, it is drawn into the direct motion thereof, and no longer strays or strives to turn away. In like manner, that which goes farther from the primary intelligence, is bound the more by the ties of Fate, and the nearer it approaches the axis of all, the more free it is from Fate. But that which clings without movement to the firm intellect above, surpasses altogether the bond of Fate. As, therefore, reasoning is to understanding; as that which becomes is to that which is; as time is to eternity; as the circumference is to the centre: so is the changing course of Fate to the immovable directness of Providence. That course of Fate moves the heavens and the stars, moderates the first principles in their turns, and alters their forms by balanced interchangings. The same course renews all things that are born and wither away by like advances of offspring and seed. It constrains, too, the actions and fortunes of men by an unbreakable chain of causes: and these causes must be unchangeable, as they

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proceed from the beginnings of an unchanging Providence. Thus is the world governed for the best if a directness, which rests in the intelligence of God, puts forth an order of causes which may not swerve. This order restrains by its own unchangeableness changeable things, which might otherwise run hither and thither at random. Wherefore in disposing the universe this limitation directs all for good, though to you who are not strong enough to comprehend the whole order, all seems confusion and disorder. Naught is there that comes to pass for the sake of evil, or due to wicked men, of whom it has been abundantly shewn that they seek the good, but misleading error turns them from the right course; for never does the true order, which comes forth from the centre of the highest good, turn any man aside from the right beginning.

'But you will ask, " What more unjust confusion could exist than that good men should sometimes enjoy prosperity, sometimes suffer adversity, and that the bad too should sometimes receive what they desire, sometimes what they hate? " Are then men possessed of such infallible minds that they, whom they consider honest or dishonest, must necessarily be what they are held to be? No, in these matters

human judgment is at variance with itself, and those who are held by some to be worthy of reward, are by others held worthy of punishment. But let us grant that a man could discern between good and bad characters. Can

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he therefore know the inmost feelings of the soul, as a doctor can learn a body's temperature? For it is no less a wonder to the ignorant why sweet things suit one sound body, while bitter things suit another; or why some sick people are aided by gentle draughts, others by sharp and bitter ones. But a doctor does not wonder at such things, for he knows the ways and constitutions of health and sickness. And what is the health of the soul but virtue? and what the sickness, but vice? And who is the preserver of the good and banisher of the evil, who but God, the guardian and healer of minds? God looks forth from the high watch-tower of His Providence, He sees what suits each man, and applies to him that which suits him. Hence then comes that conspicuous cause of wonder in the order of Fate, when a wise man does that which amazes the ignorant. For, to glance at the depth of God's works with so few words as human reason is capable of comprehending, I say that what you think to be most fair and most conducive to justice's preservation, that appears different to an all-seeing Providence. Has not our fellow-philosopher Lucan told us how " the conquering cause did please the gods, but the conquered, Cato?"¹ What then surprises you when done on this

130:1 -- Lucan, *Pharsalia*, i. 128. This famous line refers to the final triumph of Cæsar at Thapsus, B.C. 46, when Cato considered that the Republican cause was finally doomed and he committed suicide at Utica rather than survive it.

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earth, is the true-guided order of things; it is your opinion which is perverted and confused. But if there is any one whose life is so good that divine and human estimates of him agree, yet he must be uncertain in the strength of his mind; if any adversity befall him, it may always be that he will cease to preserve his innocence, by which he found that he could not preserve his good fortune. Thus then a wise dispensation spares a man who might be made worse by adversity, lest he should suffer when it is not good for him to be oppressed. Another may be perfected in all virtues, wholly conscientious, and very near to God: Providence holds that it is not right such an one should receive any adversity, so that it allows him to be troubled not even by bodily diseases. As a better man¹ than I has said, " The powers of virtues build up the body of a good man." It often happens that the duty of a supreme authority is assigned to good men for the purpose of pruning the insolent growth of wickedness. To some, Providence grants a mingled store of good and bad, according to the nature of their minds. Some she treats bitterly, lest they grow too

exuberant with long

131:1 -- The author is supposed to be Hermes Trismegistus, who wrote in the third century after Christ. The word 'powers' was used by many Neo-Platonic philosophers for those beings in the scale of nature, with which they filled the chasm between God and man. But Boethius does not seem to intend the word to have that definite meaning here.

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continued good fortune; others she allows to be harassed by hardships that the virtues of their minds should be strengthened by the habit and exercise of patience. Some have too great a fear of sufferings which they can bear; others have too great contempt for those which they cannot bear: these she leads on by troubles to make trial of themselves. Some have brought a name to be honoured for all time at the price of a glorious death. Some by shewing themselves undefeated by punishment, have left a proof to others that virtue may be invincible by evil. What doubt can there be of how rightly such things are disposed, and that they are for the good of those whom we see them befall? The other point too arises from like causes, that sometimes sorrows, sometimes the fulfilment of their desires, falls to the wicked. As concerns the sorrows, no one is surprised, because all agree that they deserve ill. Their punishments serve both to deter others from crime by fear, and also to amend the lives of those who undergo them; their happiness, on the other hand, serves as a proof to good men of how they should regard good fortune of this nature, which they see often attends upon the dishonest. And another thing seems to me to be well arranged: the nature of a man may be so headstrong and rough that lack of wealth may stir him to crime more readily than restrain him; for the disease of such an one Providence prescribes a remedy of stores of patrimony: he may see

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that his conscience is befouled by sin, he may take account with himself of his fortune, and will perhaps fear lest the loss of this property, of which he enjoys the use, may bring unhappiness. Wherefore he will change his ways, and leave off from ill-doing so long as he fears the loss of his fortune. Again, good fortune, unworthily improved, has flung some into ruin. To some the right of punishing is committed that they may use it for the exercise and trial of the good, and the punishment of evil men. And just as there is no league between good and bad men, so also the bad cannot either agree among themselves: nay, with their vices tearing their own consciences asunder, they cannot agree with themselves, and do often perform acts which, when done, they perceive that they should not have done. Wherefore high Providence has thus often shewn her strange wonder, namely, that bad men should make other bad men good. For some find themselves suffering injustice at the hands of evil men, and, burning with hatred of those who have injured them, they have returned to cultivate the fruits of virtue, because their aim is to be unlike those whom they hate. To divine power, and to that alone, are evil things good, when it uses

them suitably so as to draw good results therefrom. For a definite order embraces all things, so that even when some subject leaves the true place assigned to it in the order, it returns to an order, though another, it may be, lest aught

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in the realm of Providence be left to random chance. But "hard is it for me to set forth all these matters as a god,"¹ nor is it right for a man to try to comprehend with his mind all the means of divine working, or to explain them in words. Let it be enough that we have seen that God, the Creator of all nature, directs and disposes all things for good. And while He urges all, that He has made manifest, to keep His own likeness, He drives out by the course of Fate all evil from the bounds of His state. Wherefore if you look to the disposition of Providence, you will reckon naught as bad of all the evils which are held to abound upon earth.

'But I see that now you are weighed down by the burden of the question, and wearied by the length of our reasoning, and waiting for the gentleness of song. Take then your draught, be refreshed thereby and advance further the stronger.

'If thou wouldst diligently behold with unsullied mind the laws of the God of thunder upon high, look to the highest point of heaven above. There, by a fair and equal compact, do the stars keep their ancient peace. The sun is hurried on by its whirl of fire, but impedes not the moon's cool orb. The Bear turns its rushing course around the highest pole of the universe, and dips not in the western depths,

134:1 -- Homer, *Iliad*, xii. 176.

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and though it sees the other constellations sink, it never seeks to quench its flames in the ocean stream. In just divisions of time does the evening star foretell the coming of the late shadows, and, as Lucifer, brings back again the warming light of day. Thus does the interchanging bond of love bring round their neverfailing courses; and strife is for ever an exile from the starry realms. This unity rules by fair limits the elements, so that wet yields to dry, its opposite, and it faithfully joins cold to heat. Floating fire rises up on high, and matter by its weight sinks down. From these same causes in warm spring the flowering season breathes its scents; then the hot summer dries the grain; then with its burden of fruits comes autumn again, and winter's falling rain gives moisture. This mingling of seasons nourishes and brings forth all on earth that has the breath of life; and again snatches them away and hides them, whelming in death all that has arisen. Meanwhile the Creator sits on high, rules all and guides, king and Lord, fount

and source of all, Law itself and wise judge of justice. He restrains all that stirs nature to motion, holds it back, and makes firm all that would stray. If He were not to recall them to their true paths, and set them again upon the circles of their courses, they would be torn from their source and so would perish. This is the common bond of love; all seek thus to be restrained by the limit of the good. In no other manner can they endure if this bond of

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love be not turned round again, and if the causes, which He has set, return not again.

'Do you see now,' she continued, 'what follows upon all that we have said? '

'What is it?' I asked.

'That all fortune is plainly good,' she answered.

'How can that be?' said I.

'Consider this,' she said: 'all fortune, whether pleasant or difficult, is due to this cause; it is for the sake of rewarding the good or exercising their virtue, and of punishing and correcting bad men: therefore it is plain that all this fortune which is allowed to be just or expedient, must be good.'

'Yes,' I said, 'that is a true argument, and when I think of the Providence or Fate about which you have taught me, the conclusion rests upon strong foundations. But if it please you, let us count it among those conclusions which you a little while ago set down as inconceivable.'

'Why?' she asked.

'Because it is a commonplace saying among men -- indeed an especially frequent one -- that some people have bad fortune.'

'Would you then have us approach more nearly the common conversation of men, lest we should seem to withdraw too far from human ways?'

'If you will,' I said.

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'Do you not think that that, which is advantageous, is good?'

'Yes.'

'And that fortune, which exercises or corrects, is advantageous? '

'I agree,' said I.

'Then it is good, is it not? '

'It must be so.'

'This is the fortune of those who are either firmly set in virtue and struggling against their difficulties, or of those who would leave their vices and take the path of virtue? '

'That is true,' I said.

'But what of that pleasant fortune which is granted as a reward to good men? Do most people perceive that it is bad? No; but, as is true, they esteem it the best. And what of the last kind of fortune, which is hard and which restrains bad men by just punishment? Is that commonly held to be good? '

'No,' said I, 'it is held to be the most miserable of all that can be imagined.'

'Beware lest in following the common conception, we come to some truly inconceivable conclusion.'

'What do you mean? '

'From what we have allowed,' she said, 'it results that the fortune of those who are in possession of virtue, or are gaining it, or advancing therein, is entirely good, whatever it be, while for those who remain in wickedness, their fortune is the worst.'

'That is true, but who would dare confess it? '

'For this reason a wise man should never complain, whenever he is brought into strife with fortune; just as a brave man cannot properly be disgusted whenever the noise of battle is heard, since for both of them their very difficulty is their opportunity, for the brave man of increasing his glory, for the wise man of confirming and strengthening his wisdom. From this is virtue itself so named,¹ because it is so supported by its strength that it is not overcome by adversity. And you who were set in the advance of virtue have not come to this pass of being dissipated by delights, or enervated by pleasure; but you fight too bitterly against all fortune. Keep the middle path of strength and virtue, lest you be overwhelmed by misfortune or corrupted by pleasant fortune. All that falls short or goes too far ahead, has contempt for happiness, and gains not the reward for labour done. It rests in your own hands what shall be the nature of the fortune which you choose to form for yourself. For all fortune which seems difficult, either exercises virtue, or corrects or punishes vice.

'The avenging son of Atreus strove for full ten years before he expiated in the fall of Phrygian Troy the wrong done to his brother's marriage. The same Agamemnon must needs throw off his father's nature, and himself, an unwilling priest, thrust his knife into his unhappy

138:1 -- The Latin word 'virtus' means by its derivation, manly strength.

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daughter's throat, and buy the winds at the cost of blood, when he sought to fill the sails of the fleet of Greece. The King of Ithaca wept sore for his lost comrades whom the savage Polyphemus swallowed into his huge maw as he lay in his vast cave; but, when mad for his blinded eye, he paid back with rejoicings for the sad tears he had drawn. Hercules became famous through hard labours. He tamed the haughty Centaurs, and from the fierce lion of Nemea took his spoil. With his sure arrows he smote the birds of Stymphalus; and from the watchful dragon took the apples of the Hesperides, filling his hand with their precious gold; and Cerberus he dragged along with threefold chain. The story tells how he conquered the fierce Diomedes and set before his savage mares their master as their food. The Hydra's poison perished in his fire. He took the horn and so disgraced the brow of the river Achelous, who hid below his bank his head ashamed. On the sands of Libya he laid Antæus low; Cacus he slew to sate Evander's wrath. The bristling boar of Erymanthus flecked with his own foam the shoulders which were to bear the height of heaven; for in his last labour he bore with unbending neck the heavens, and so won again his place in heaven, the reward of his last work.

'Go forth then bravely whither leads the lofty path of high example. Why do ye sluggards turn your backs? When the earth is overcome, the stars are yours.
