



Boethius: Gateway to Medieval Thought

Summer 2025

Term Dates:	June 30 – August 23, 2025
Department:	Literature
Instructor:	Dr. Anthony G. Cirilla <a.cirilla@davenanttrust.org>
Meeting Time:	Tuesdays 7:30-10pm (Eastern Time)
Zoom & Recordings:	Populi > My Courses tab > course name > Conferences (left menu).
Delivery:	Populi is used for all course content & assignment submissions. Discord is used for additional community interaction.
Auditors:	No attendance requirement, but participation is greatly encouraged.

Course Description

C.S. Lewis wrote of Boethius's *The Consolation of Philosophy*, "To get a taste for it is almost to become naturalized in the Middle Ages," placing it on the top ten list of books which most influenced him. Theologians such as Anselm, Aquinas, and Peter Abelard were deeply influenced by Boethius's work, as was the medieval conception of the seven liberal arts and medieval literature in general. Translated by King Alfred's circle, by Chaucer into Middle English as well as by two other Middle English writers, and by Queen Elizabeth I, *The Consolation of Philosophy* also profoundly inspired writers such as Dante, Thomas More, Jean de Meun, and many others.

This course will examine Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* from its theological and liberal arts context and with an eye to the history of its massive theological, philosophical, and literary influence. We will start by reading the *Opuscula Sacra*, Boethius's five theological tracts (two on the Trinity, one on Christology, one on the nature of created vs uncreated goodness, and one a general statement of the Christian faith). Paired with samples of Boethius's work in the liberal arts and examples of influence from his magnum opus, we will then spend most of the course reading *The Consolation of Philosophy* closely, seeing how Boethius's theological and academic work coalesced into his final production.

Objectives

1. Understand Boethius's theological works, in terms of content, value and influence (especially on writers like Anselm and Aquinas).
2. Apply this knowledge to a reading of *The Consolation of Philosophy*.
3. Articulate the philosophical and theological significance of *The Consolation*.
4. Consider and develop answers to major questions surrounding the text, especially Why is Christianity not explicit in the *Consolation* though the text is clearly theistic in its philosophy?
5. Appreciate the profound literary influence of the *Consolation*.

Texts

- Boethius. Theological Tractates and *The Consolation of Philosophy*. Loeb.
- Other handouts as optional reading for context.

Requirements

Late work: Grade reduction of -5% per calendar day upon instructor discretion. No assignments will be accepted after the last due date without an approved extension. [Instructor may adapt this or add it to instructions below]

1. Course Format & Attendance (10%)

Class sessions will involve a combination of lecture and seminar-style discussion on readings. Students are expected to read required texts before class and come ready for discussion. Readings will be 50–100 pages per week. One unexcused absence is permitted. Attendance is required for all students taking courses for credit. If the scheduled time does not work for a particular student, they may drop the course according to the Drop Policy.

2. Weekly Summaries (20%)

Students will submit weekly 200-word summaries of readings with 3 thoughtful questions for class discussion based on the texts. Summaries are due on Sunday night of each week. Students will choose 9 of 10 weeks to submit this assignment.

3. Written Exam (30%)

At the end of this course there will be a written exam to test basic comprehension of key themes. On the exam, students will choose 4 of 5 essay questions to answer and write a 200 word answer without the aid of notes, books, lecture materials, or any other outside content.

4. Term Paper (40%)

- **Length:** 3,000 – 4,000 words (12 – 15pp). [Required: $\geq 3,000$ words]
- **Sources:** 2 primary sources & 8 academic secondary sources.
- **Instructions:** Write an argumentative research paper on one of the topics covered in class. Your paper must interact with sources, including counter-arguments to your position.
- **Grading:** Papers should display academic style, clear and creative thesis, substantial source interaction, evidence in support of a cumulative argument (not overly descriptive), accurate understanding of important concepts and viewpoints, honest interaction with counter-arguments.
- **Formatting:** Times New Roman, double-spaced, 12-pt font, footnotes, Title page, Bibliography.

Research & Writing Guide

[The research and writing guide](#) is designed to help students navigate the expectations of graduate-level scholarship, including structuring papers, adhering to the Chicago Style Guide, and providing a sample grading rubric. This guide does not take the place of assignment requirements and may not be used by instructors.

Calendar

Week	Dates	Topics & Readings
1	July 1	Boethius' Christian Worldview <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductions. • <i>On the Christian Faith</i>. • <i>How Substances are Good</i>.
2	July 84	Boethius' Trinitarian Thought <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Whether the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are Predicated</i>. • <i>On the Trinity</i>.
3	July 15	Created vs. Uncreated Goodness Christology <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How Substances are Good</i>. • <i>Against Eutyches and Nestorius</i>.
4	July 22	Philosophical Healing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Consolation of Philosophy</i>, Book 1. Optional Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liberal Arts Handout: Boethius' <i>Commentary on Aristotle's On Interpretation</i> • Influence Example: Middle English poem <i>Pearl</i>.
5	July 29	Fortune's Goods <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Consolation of Philosophy</i>, Book 2. Optional Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liberal Arts Handout: Selections from <i>De Topicis Differentiis</i> and <i>In Ciceronis Topica</i>. • Influence Example: Chaucer's poem <i>Plaint to Fortune</i>.
6	August 5	Temporal vs. Eternal Good <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Consolation of Philosophy</i>, Book 3. Optional Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liberal Arts Handout: <i>De musica</i>. • Influence Example: Middle English poem <i>Sir Orfeo</i>, selection from Anselm's <i>Proslogion</i>.
7	August 12	Privation, Fate, & Providence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Consolation of Philosophy</i>, Book 4. Optional Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liberal Arts Handout: <i>De arithmetica</i>. • Influence Example: selection from Aquinas's <i>On Evil</i>.
8	August 19	Chance, Free Will, Epistemology <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Consolation of Philosophy</i>, Book 5. Optional Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liberal Arts Handout: Hypothetical Syllogism. • Influence Example: Selections from Anselm's <i>On Concord</i>.

Institutional Policies

Drop Policy

The policies below apply to changes made after the registration deadline two weeks prior to term. To change registration before the term starts, please log on to Populi. To change registration after the term starts, email the registrar at registrar@davenantinstitute.org. See the Academic Calendar section for exact dates.

Drop Date (100% Refund): Before the term starts, students may drop with a 100% tuition refund. Registration fee is non-refundable.

Drop Date (50% Refund): Within the first two weeks of a term, students may drop the course with a 50% tuition refund. Registration fee is non-refundable. To drop, please email the registrar.

Withdrawal: Within weeks three and four of a term, students who drop a course will receive no refund and will earn a “W” on their transcript. Students cannot drop after this time will receive a letter grade. To drop, please email the registrar.

Extension Policy

All coursework and exams must be submitted no later than two weeks after the term end date. Before that time, homework extensions are at the discretion of the instructor. If a student requires more time, the student may submit a formal extension request by emailing the registrar at registrar@davenantinstitute.org. If approved, an extension will be granted to the student for a specific period of time agreed upon by the student and instructor. Extension requests will be assessed on a case-by-case basis and will generally be granted for medical and family emergencies only.

Minimum Grade Requirement for Degree Students

Students enrolled in one of our degrees must maintain a minimum GPA of 3.0 (B average). If the students' GPA falls below 3.0, Davenport will initiate conversation with the student to judge whether the student is ready for their program. If the student earns a grade lower than a “C” (2.0) on a course required for their degree, they must retake the course in order to graduate. Their new grade will replace their former grade. If a degree student earns a grade lower than a “C” (2.0) on an elective, they are not required to retake the course, but they may request to retake the course or a close equivalent as a substitute for their former grade.

Grading Scale

A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	F
93	90	87	83	80	77	73	70	67	63	60	

For a complete list of policies, see the Academic Catalog at davenanthall.com