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CLASSICAL PHILOLOGY,
VOLUME XV, 1904**

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HERBERT WEIR SMYTH,
ALBERT ANDREW HOWARD,
CLIFFORD HERSCHEL MOORE, } EDITORIAL
COMMITTEE.



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ON THE COMPOSITION OF BOETHIUS' CONSOLATIO
PHILOSOPHIAE

BY EDWARD KENNARD RAND

HERMANN USENER, whose justly admired interpretation of the *Anecdota Holderi*¹ has done more than any single publication toward restoring Boethius to his rightful place among the Christian theologians, suggests in this work a theory with regard to the composition of the *Consolatio*, to which nobody hitherto has devoted the consideration it deserves. After showing that the old question as to the relation of Boethius to Christianity is meaningless, that a Christian theologian may well have written such a work as the *Consolatio*, not to express his own views but to give Philosophy's answers to the chief problems of thought, he further declares, to make this point self-evident, that the very sources from which Boethius drew are apparent in his work. Developing a suggestion of Ingram Bywater's,² namely that Boethius may have borrowed from Aristotle's *Protreptikos*, Usener finds that what are to him the finest chapters in the *Consolatio*³ are nothing but a recast of Aristotle's dialogue.⁴ The sections following, however,—the rest of the book, it would seem—betray just as clearly a Neoplatonic source. In fact, Boethius' performance here is on a par with that of Iamblichus in his *Protreptikos*, which, as Bywater demonstrated, is a mere cento from Aristotle and Plato—each furnishing a continuous third of the work—plus the trivial reflections of the writer himself.⁵ Usener, to be sure, admits that Boethius treats his original in a more independent spirit,⁶ yet the

¹ *Anecdota Holderi, ein Beitrag zur Geschichte Roms in ostgothischer Zeit*, Bonn (Leipzig, Teubner), 1877.

² *Jour. Philol.* II (1869), p. 59.

³ 2, pr. 4, 38 (Peiper), *Quis est enim . . .* 4, pr. 6, 20, *Vi libet, inquam*.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 51.

⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 66. Accepted by Usener, *Rhein. Mus.* XXVIII (1873), p. 400, n. 1, and by Diels, *Arch. f. Gesch. der Philos.* I (1888), p. 489.

⁶ *Rhein. Mus.* XXVIII, p. 401.

difference seems one of degree rather than kind; both are compilers.¹ What is more, Boethius did not use Aristotle at first hand, but followed a later abridgment; in fact, he may not even deserve the credit of combining the Aristotelian with the Neoplatonic portions — that may have been done for him already by some writer of the type of Iamblichus.²

Usener's analysis of the *Consolatio*, then, would be as follows. He would allow Boethius himself, apparently, a kind of introduction to his compilation,³ and the verse is likewise his. Indeed Usener argues it is precisely the difference between his verse and his prose that leads us to suspect the nobler lineage of the latter; two different voices are speaking; now we hear a child of the sixth century, now a thinker of the greater past.⁴ These sorry poems are scattered at judicious intervals, to emphasize and recapitulate the main points in the argument, and, apart from the introduction, are the only element in the *Consolatio* that Boethius might call his own. For the last two thirds of his work consist of the recasts from Aristotelian and Neoplatonic treatises, which, as we have seen, he may not even have combined. No wonder, then, that Usener, in another connection, refers to the *De Differentiis Topicorum*, not to the *Consolatio*, as Boethius' "comparatively most independent work."⁵

This suggestive theory of Usener's, strangely enough, has elicited no further discussion. Dräseke, in an interesting article,⁶ the purpose of which is to interpret Usener's results to general readers, repeats the latter's ideas with commendation, adding emphatically that it is as absurd to impute a philosophical system to Boethius as to Cicero.⁷ Stewart, too, in declaring that the *Consolatio* is "intensely artificial," and "smells of the lamp," seems to have Usener's assertion in mind.⁸ Georg Schepss, whose untimely death prevented him from reaping the fruit of many labors in Boethian fields, accepted Usener's general position, and declared the *Consolatio* a combination of excerpts and trans-

¹ *Rhein. Mus.* XXVIII, p. 400.

³ 1, pr. 1 to 2, pr. 4, 38.

² *Anecd. Hald.*, p. 52.

⁴ *Anecd. Hald.*, p. 51.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁶ *Jahrb. f. protest. Theol.* XII (1886), p. 324.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 327.

⁸ *Boethius, an Essay*, Edinburgh, 1891, p. 106.

lations from various Greek consolatory treatises.¹ In a contribution to the *Commentationes Wölfflinianae*,² he suggests various works which Boethius may well have followed, particularly the treatise *παραμυθητικός πρὸς Ἀπολλώνιον* ascribed to Plutarch. Among Schepss' literary remains, now in the possession of the Patristic Commission of the Vienna Academy, there is at least the outline of an article on the sources of the *Consolatio*, which, however, makes no substantial addition to what Schepss had already published.³ Schepss' influence, to be sure, is seen in a recent examination of the sources of Boethius' poetry by the late Heinrich Hüttinger,⁴ who acknowledged a general indebtedness to Schepss,⁵ and sought by several parallel quotations to substantiate the latter's theory as to the importance of the *παραμυθητικός πρὸς Ἀπολλώνιον* as a source of the *Consolatio*.⁶ Of American publications, the recent manual of H. N. Fowler⁷ reaffirms the main points in Usener's theory as though they were established beyond cavil. But this is all. Besides such restatements as the last, one or two possible sources not mentioned by Usener have been surmised, but no minute discussion of his general proposition has yet appeared. Perhaps we may hope that August Engelbrecht, who succeeded Schepss as editor of the *Consolatio* for the Vienna *Corpus*, may, in spite of a recent resolution to restrict himself to the criticism and history of the text,⁸ find time after all to discuss the important problems pertaining to the sources of this work.

The object of the present paper is not to attempt an ultimate determination of the various writings from which Boethius drew inspiration, but merely, as a precursor to such a study, to discuss Usener's theory regarding the composition of the *Consolatio*. Naturally we may

¹ *Wochenich. f. klass. Phil.*, 1894, c. 409.

² Leipzig, 1891, p. 280.

³ See A. Engelbrecht, *Die Consolatio Philosophiae des Boethius*, in *Sitzungsber. der k. Akad. der Wissensch. in Wien*, CXLIV (1902), p. 5.

⁴ *Studia in Boetii carmina collata*. Gym. Progr., Regensburg, I (*pars prior*), 1900; II (*pars posterior*), 1902 (published posthumously).

⁵ p. 4.

⁶ p. 30. The coincidences here noted are certainly not very striking.

⁷ *Hist. of Rom. Lit.*, New York, 1903, p. 279.

⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 6.