

Article

Deus sine nomine: Dialectic as a Tool for the Christian Interpretation of Boethius's *Consolatio* III, m. 9, by Adalbold of Utrecht

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Abstract: *The Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius was not only widely read during the Middle Ages, but it was also frequently glossed, commented on, and discussed. The ninth poem of the third book, which offers a Platonic image of the creation of the cosmos and the governance over it, had a specific place in the reception of this Boethius's work. Today we know of numerous debates about the possible interpretations of this poem and its Christian understanding, dating back at least to the 9th century. This paper deals with the commentary on this poem written by Adalbold of Utrecht († 1026). Attention is focused in particular on the role of dialectic in selected passages of this Adalbold's text and on the inspirational sources of his dialectical knowledge. Specifically, the paper deals with the possibility of definition or description of God (*Deus sine nomine*), and arguments explaining the appropriateness or inappropriateness of conceptualizing God as the form of the highest good (*forma summi boni*).

Keywords: Adalbold of Utrecht; dialectic; Boethius; *Consolatio* III, m. 9; God; definition; description; argumentation



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1. Introduction

Since at least the ninth century, Boethius's famous and influential ninth poem from the third book of *The Consolation of Philosophy* has been frequently discussed by medieval intellectuals. The Platonic vision of the world and its governance by God led numerous glossators and commentators to interpretations in which they presented, in varying degrees, their original attempts to clarify or explicate the controversial or apparently confusing passages of the poem. One of such commentators on Boethius's *Consolatio* III, m. 9, was Adalbold (also Adelbold, Athalbald, or Albald, † 1026), since 1010 Bishop of Utrecht, whose *Commentarius ad Boethii carmen 'O qui perpetua'* (Huygens 2000, pp. 123–40) is one of the most complete explicatory works on *Consolatio* III, m. 9, written before the mid-eleventh century.

Adalbold's commentary is the primary focus of this paper. The article does not aim to thematize all the intellectually interesting and stimulating ideas of Adalbold's exposition but rather to focus exclusively on selected dialectical aspects of the author's approach to some of Boethius's verses.¹ The goal of the paper is to show how Adalbold used dialectic as an instrument serving a Christian interpretation of *Consolatio* III, m. 9. Thereby, attention is focused on these three topics: the possibility of defining God, the possibility of describing God, and a reconstruction of the dialectical path that led Adalbold to the appropriate understanding of designating God as the form of the highest good. All this will, at the same time, be followed within the framework of the sources that may have served as inspiration for Adalbold, which he further modified and used in his dialectical exposition of Boethius's poem.

To facilitate these goals, I will first briefly introduce metre 9 from the third book of Boethius's *Consolation* and some of the topics that were glossed, explicated, and debated by

thinkers of the ninth through eleventh centuries (Section 2). I will then sketchily introduce the author of the commentary analysed in this study, Adalbold of Utrecht, and his work as it is known to us today (Section 3), to prepare the ground for a more detailed analysis of some passages of his *Commentary* and the role dialectic plays in it in the next chapter (Section 4).

2. *Consolatio* III, m. 9, and the Oldest Medieval Glosses and Commentaries

The ninth metre of the third book of Boethius's *Consolation* begins with these verses (Boethius 2005, pp. 79–80; English translation see, for example, Boethius 1978, pp. 271–73):

*O qui perpetua mundum ratione gubernas,
 terrarum caelique sator, qui tempus ab aevo
 ire iubes stabilisque manens das cuncta moveri
 quem non externae pepulerunt fingere causae
 materiae fluitantis opus, verum insita summi
 forma boni livore carens; tu cuncta superno
 ducis ab exemplo, pulchrum pulcherrimus ipse
 mundum mente gerens similique in imagine formans
 perfectasque iubens perfectum absolvere partes.*

In the introduction to his poem, Boethius uses these words to invoke the governing, motionless God (cf. Marenbon 2003, pp. 152–53), who created all that is created and changeable, whereby this Creator is not influenced by anything and is without flaw since He is the form of the highest good. Such a God is also the most beautiful, and Boethius proceeds to enumerate His works: in His mind, there are exemplars of everything that is created, which can be harmoniously formed by His activity to a perfection similar to the Creator himself.

In the following verses, Boethius makes a further remark on God's creative act (Boethius 2005, p. 80), namely that He harmoniously bound elements of matter (*elementa*) by means of numbers (*numeri*) so that harmony would be maintained, whereupon He composed the world soul of three natures (*naturae*), and subsequently divided it according to ratios into two circles (*orbes*), which He then wrapped into a sphere (*glomerare*). He then begot lesser souls (*animae minores*) that can return to the Creator upon purification. He concludes with the wish that the mind (*mens*) may ascend to the noble abode of the Father (*pater*) and come to know the source of good (*fons boni*), i.e., God, who is the beginning (*principium*) and the goal (*finis*), the driver (*vector*) and the leader (*dux*), the pathway (*semita*) and the end (*terminus*).²

Glosses of various types (interlinear, marginal, and so-called *glossae collectae*) and commentaries on Boethius's *Consolation*, including specific attention to the passage III, m. 9, first appeared in the Carolingian Renaissance. Regarding their origin, gradual supplementation and broadening of scope, problems with identifying authors, later influence, etc., a fairly extensive scholarly literature exists today.³ With maximum conciseness, we can say that within the oldest period of glossing and commenting in the Carolingian and Ottonian eras, two basic traditions are distinguished today that mutually exerted some influence: the so-called Remigian tradition (according to Remigius of Auxerre, † 908)⁴ and the tradition of the anonymous of St Gall.⁵ To this some further—to various degrees independent—extant glosses need to be added, including the reception of *The Consolation* and expositions of it in the British Isles,⁶ as well as commentaries focused specifically on *The Consolation* III, m. 9, authored, for example, by Bovo of Corvey († 916; for the edition, see Huygens 2000, pp. 99–115) or by Adalbold of Utrecht.

Metre 9 of the third book of Boethius's *Consolation* raised many questions among the early medieval intellectuals and presented stimuli for developing their own ideas. Among the topics of these inventive commentaries, one can mention the interest in the

numerical binding of matter and its elements by God, including the properties of the individual elements mentioned in Boethius's poem and the so-called *syzygia elementorum*, for which a conjunction of Platonic and Aristotelian doctrine on the elements was used, with inspiration from the older authorities Macrobius, Chalcidius, and others.⁷ The glossators and commentators also strove to come to terms with the Platonic conception of the world soul according to *Timaeus*, which they frequently likened to the Sun, following upon it with reflections on the human soul and its (Platonic and Aristotelian) components,⁸ or on the human being as a microcosm corresponding to the macrocosm. There are also cosmological and astronomical reactions, including efforts to explain the central position of the Sun, etc.⁹

Other questions were also discussed, raised by the words and formulations of Boethius's verses (for example, disputes over what the lesser souls or lesser lives are, how the light carriages on which they float are to be understood, etc.). Here, I would just like to mention one motif in detail: can *Consolatio* III, m. 9 (and ultimately the entire *The Consolation of Philosophy*—for an overview, cf., for example, [Marenbon 2015](#), pp. 45–53), be understood as the work of a Christian who is attempting to sketch the Christian vision of the universe and God's essential role in it?

The Remigian glosses take an unambiguously positive stance on this issue (e.g., [Stewart 1916](#), pp. 30–34; or [Silk 1935](#), pp. 332–34). The world-governing intellect in the poem's first verse is identified with God's word (*verbum dei*), God's wisdom (*sapientia*), and God's Son (*filius dei*). The origin of time in the second verse is explained with a reference to the Biblical *fiat lux* (*Gen* 1:3)¹⁰ when time began to unfold. Boethius's likening God to the form of the highest good (verses 5–6) is again related to the Son of God, who is God's wisdom, which is a reflection of God the Father (*deus pater*), as witnessed by a quotation from the Letter to the Hebrews (*Heb* 1:3). They are also well aware that Boethius's poem presents a Platonic vision of the ordering and governance of the world, but they interpret the most problematic passages on the world soul (verses 13–17) in exclusively cosmological and astronomical terms as a theory of philosophers (*philosophi*). They also find parallels to Biblical theses, witnessing to the harmony between these conceptions and Holy Scripture—for example, the rising and setting of the Sun according to *Eccl* 1:5. These glosses also declare that there is an evident link between Plato and Christianity, for example, when they state that what Plato calls ideas (*ideas*) is the same as what the gospel (*Jn* 1:4) calls life (*vita*).

The St Gall glosses seem to be much more reserved in this respect. Referring to the poem's ninth verse, they say that a perfect union of parts is guaranteed by Christ ([Papahagi 2008](#), pp. 326–27), but when it comes to the world soul, they are clear that this has nothing to do with Christianity. They make use of Augustine, who in *De civitate Dei* explicitly contrasts Plato (especially the theories from the dialogue *Timaeus*) and Christianity. The all-moving world soul is likened to Jupiter (*Iuppiter*), who comprises all elements of matter and permeates all that there is from the centre to the outermost extremes by means of mathematical ratios. In this way, the entire cosmos is interpreted as the biggest, happiest, and eternal animal ([Augustinus 1955](#), p. 399). The glossator of Boethius's poem repeats these Augustine's words and identifies the verses as non-Christian since they express Plato's mere wish ([Papahagi 2008](#), p. 327).

The clear discord between the claims made by the poem and Christianity is most pointedly laid out by Bovo of Corvey. He opens his commentary ([Huygens 2000](#), p. 100) with the statement that he is aware that much of what appears in *Consolatio* is contrary (*contrarius*) to the Catholic faith (*fides catholicae*). While it holds that the author of *Consolatio* is at the same time the author of valued theological treatises, what he wrote in this poem has nothing to do with the doctrine of the Church (*doctrina ecclesiastica*). Here Boethius is presenting the mere opinions of philosophers (*dogmata philosophorum*), specifically Platonists (*Platonici*). This is especially evident in the exposition on the world soul, where Bovo states directly that here the poem does not bear upon truth (*veritas*) but follows exclusively the views (*opinio*) of philosophers ([Huygens 2000](#), p. 106; cf. [Marenbon 2004](#), pp. 342–44). Bovo is even more expressive in his reflections on the pre-existence of the human soul,

where he mentions (Huygens 2000, p. 106) that no Christian would be so silly to take these monstrous comments (*monstruosae commenta*) seriously (cf. Nauta 1996, p. 112).

Adalbold's approach is closest to the Remigian glosses. Based on the introductory verse of *Consolatio* III, m. 9, he sees Boethius as a true Christian (Huygens 2000, pp. 123–24) who has clearly seen the light of truth (*veritas*), in which he has not been aided by physical vision (*oculus corporis*) but by the vision of the heart or soul (*oculus cordis*). Plato and Hermes stayed blind (*caecus*) because they lacked fervent faith (*fides fervens*). Thus, the eternally governing intellect, called benevolence (*benivolentia*) by Plato in the *Timaeus* (cf., e.g., Waszink 1975, pp. 22–23) and good will (*bona voluntas*) by Hermes (Nock 1946, p. 321 or p. 331), is in Boethius designated as God's wisdom (*sapientia dei*) and God's Son (*filius dei*), which corresponds to Biblical (Ps 85:13) mercy (*benignitas*).

Adalbold (Huygens 2000, p. 138) takes a similar view of Boethius's words on the merciful law, which enables the souls to return to the Creator by means of the converting fire (verses 20–21). Adalbold identifies this with the merciful law of the gospel, aided by the Holy Spirit (*Spiritus sanctus*). In commenting on verses 25–28 Adalbold writes (Huygens 2000, p. 140) that knowledge of God's majesty (*maiestas*), i.e., of God the Father (*pater*), is made possible by the work of the Son (*filius*). We are led to the desired goal by the Holy Scripture (*scriptura*), with prophecies (*prophetiae*) and mercy of the gospel (*gratia evangelii*) as our guides and leaders.

Adalbold (Huygens 2000, pp. 134–35) ascribes verses 15–16 on the world soul to fictions (*figmenta*) of physicists (*physici*), whose interpretation does not follow the truth but merely something like (*similis*) the truth. When contemplating on the origin of souls (verses 19–20) and their possible pre-existence, he appeals to Hieronymus and Augustine (Huygens 2000, p. 137) when he emphasizes that he knows that they are created by God but does not know how it happened because he is not the Creator's advisor (*consiliarius*). He would, therefore, rather be considered ignorant (*inscius*) than endorse an error. Adalbold thus evidently regards *Consolatio* III, m. 9, as a Christian's poem about the Christian God (cf., for example, Nauta 1996, pp. 112–13; Marenbon 2015, pp. 60–61; McCluskey 2012, p. 71).

3. Adalbold of Utrecht

The following sections of the paper will focus on selected dialectical motifs of Adalbold's *Commentary on Boethius's Consolation* III, m. 9, with first a few lines to briefly introduce its author. The fragmentary information we have on Adalbold's education and subsequent teaching activity points to the Liège circle around bishop Notker († 1008) and to the abbey of Lobbes at the time of abbot Heriger († 1007).

Egbert of Liège († c. 1023), who dedicated his *Facunda ratis* to Adalbold, mentions him in the introduction as a former classmate (Egbert von Lüttich 1889, p. 1), which would point to Liège. To this corresponds the report of Anselm, a canon of the Liège cathedral († c. 1056), who mentions Adalbold among the later important Church figures active in Notker's circle (Anselmus Leodiensis 1883, p. 109; Anselmus Leodiensis 1846, p. 205; cf. also Lutz 1977, pp. 97–98). The well-known mathematician of the Liège school Franco († c. 1083), in his *De quadratura circuli*, mentions Adalbold as his predecessor, who strove (like, for example, Wazo of Liège or Gerbert, i.e., Pope Sylvester II) to solve the quadrature of the circle (Folkerts and Smeur 1976a, p. 62, 1976b, pp. 229–33).

In a letter on the quadrature addressed to the philosopher Pope Sylvester II (Gerbert of Reims, papal office 999–1003), Adalbold calls himself *scolasticus* and reminds the addressee that he was his *conscolasticus juvenis* (Bubnov 1899, p. 302), which again may indicate a link to the scholars associated with the bishop of Liège Notker but just as well to Heriger's circle in Lobbes. Sigebert of Gembloux († 1112) in his *De viris illustribus* (Sigebertus Gemblacensis 1974, p. 91), mentions Adalbold as *clericus Lobiensis*. The close partnership of Adalbold and Heriger is witnessed by their dialogue on counting the time of Advent, which was the topic of the non-extant *Dialogus de dissonantia ecclesiae de adventu domini*.¹¹ The ties between the Lobbes abbey and the Liège bishopric was very close, and Abbot Heriger appears to

have been a co-worker and friend of bishop Notker, whereby it is commonly assumed that Heriger himself was at least for a time active in Liège (Lutz 1977, pp. 99–101).

To summarize, Adalbold most probably taught at the cathedral school in Liège (in 1007 he was appointed archdeacon there—cf. Foidl 2011, p. 193) and probably also at the cathedral school in Lobbes. He belonged to the intellectual circle around Notker of Liège, and as an outstanding mathematician and scholar, he was without doubt in contact with other outstanding scholars of his time, such as Heriger of Lobbes, Gerbert of Reims, Wazo of Liège, etc. (cf. Glauche 1999, p. 103; de Jong 2018, esp. pp. 42–43).

Around 1000, the Liège school was famous not only as a very important centre of (mathematical) knowledge but also for its contacts with the emperor's court. It is, therefore, not surprising that Adalbold served emperor Henry II as chaplain and notary (cf., for example, de Jong 2018, p. 23, or Rädle 1978, p. 41) and then became bishop in Utrecht with the emperor's assistance (Pertz 1839, p. 93; cf. Hauck 1908, p. 32). In his episcopal function, he was obliged to take part in numerous military operations,¹² but was also significantly active in building renovations in his diocese, including the cathedral Church of St. Martin (cf. Hoekstra 1988). When Henry II died in 1024, Adalbold took part in the election of his successor Conrad II (Bethmann 1846, p. 485). Adalbold died in November 1026 (the annals and the chronicle of the Egmond monastery both state 1027—see von Richthofen 1886, pp. 70–71; cf. Manitius 1923, pp. 745–46).

At his time, Adalbold was famous as a mathematician (cf., for example, the letter of Ragimbold of Cologne—Tannery and Clerval 1901, p. 522). Topics of the quadrivium were also the subjects of his works, especially the abovementioned letter on the measurement of the sphere dedicated to Pope Sylvester II (*Epistola ad Silvestrum II papam/De crassitudine sphaerae*, see Bubnov 1899, pp. 302–9), and the non-extant dialogue with Heriger of Lobbes on counting the time of Advent. We also know of his other geometrical activities (see, for example, Bubnov 1899, p. 43). While the work *Epistola cum tractatu de musica instrumentali humanae ac mundana* has frequently been attributed to him, it is probably not of his writing, even though he was without doubt also engaged with music.¹³ His works also include *Vita Heinrich II imperatoris* (Adalboldus Ultraiectensis 1841), while the hagiographic *Miracula S. Waldburgae Tielensia* (Holder-Egger 1888) does not seem to be Adalbold's text (cf., for example, Glauche 1999, p. 104). This study will focus exclusively on passages of his commentary on the ninth poem of the third book of Boethius's *The Consolation of Philosophy* (*Commentarius ad Boethii carmen ,O qui perpetua'*).

4. Dialectic in Adalbold's *Commentarius III*, m. 9

The brief mentions of Adalbold's life and work listed above attest to his active connections with numerous very well-known intellectuals of his time—Notker of Liège, Heriger of Lobbes, Gerbert of Aurillac, and many others. Although the list of Adalbold's works does not include a work specifically on dialectic, there is no doubt that he was also engaged with it. Heriger and Gerbert can be used as examples of the way dialectic was conceived at the time.

Already in the 970s and 980s, Gerbert was famous as a teacher at the cathedral school in Reims, where a monk of the Reims monastery, Richer of Reims (d. after 998), author of the chronicle called *Historiae*, was introduced to him (for detail, see Glenn 2004). In the *Historiae*, Richer devoted a longer passage to Gerbert, in which he presented the educational programme in Reims as practised by Gerbert. Regarding dialectic, we, therefore, know that Gerbert's teaching was based on reading and analysing of the authoritative texts of the so-called *logica vetus*: he began with the Latin translation of Porphyry's *Introduction to Aristotle's Categories*, including Boethius's commentaries on this work, followed by Aristotle's *Categories* and *On Interpretation*, then Cicero's *Topica* and Boethius's commentary on this work, followed by Boethius's further dialectical and logical treatises (Richerus Remensis 2000, pp. 193–94).

Dialectic also seems to have been a topic close to Heriger of Lobbes, insofar as we can judge from the work *De corpore et sanguine Domini*, which is now frequently attributed to

him, although it used to be designated as Gerbert's work.¹⁴ In it, Heriger makes use of Eriugena's understanding of dialectic (Herigerus Lobiensis 1853, c. 185; cf. Eriugena 2000, p. 12; cf. Erismann 2007), characterizing it as an art that is not invented by humans but, like all other *artes*, is a work of the Originator (*Auctor*), who placed it into the nature (*natura*) of all things so that the wise (*sapientes*) could discover it and make use of it for a thorough investigation of reality. Its basic task is to divide (*dividere*) genera into species and then again resolve (*resolvere*) the species to genera, which Heriger at the same time supports with the Biblical creative act when on the sixth day of creation God let the genus (*genus*) of animals and various animal species (*species*) arise on Earth (*Gen* 1:24).

In this way, Heriger applies Eriugena's understanding of dialectic, according to which dialectic is not concerned merely with the traditional art of good disputation (*bene disputandi*—cf., for example, Eriugena 2003, p. 14; or Augustine 1975, p. 83), and engaged merely with dividing (*divisio*) genera into species and resolving (*resolutio*) species to genera, but also with definitions (*diffinitio*) and proofs or arguments (*demonstratio*), and at the same time has an essentially metaphysical dimension since it is situated in the very foundation of reality as evidence of God's creative act (see Eriugena 1978, p. 6; cf. Kijewska 2017, esp. pp. 83–85). Heriger demonstrates this on the harmonious interconnection with reality, which is manifested in dialectic in linking the components of arguments, where the first (*primus*) can be predicated of the third (*ultimus*) when the first can be predicated of the second (*medius*), and at the same time the second can be predicated of the third (Herigerus Lobiensis 1853, c. 185).¹⁵

We can, therefore, assume that Adalbold's knowledge of dialectic came from several different sources. This is witnessed by the extant catalogue of the library in Lobbes, which comprises works of the so-called *logica vetus* (Aristotle in Latin translations, Cicero, Boethius's commentaries and treatises), as well as Augustine's works and the pseudo-Augustinian *De categoriis decem*, but also the so-called encyclopaedic works of the turn of Antiquity and the Middle Ages (Isidore, Martianus Capella, Cassiodorus, and others) and texts by authors of the so-called Carolingian Renaissance, such as Alcuin, Eriugena, and Hrabanus Maurus (see Dolbeau 1978, 1979).

4.1. The Definition of God

In the first verse of *Consolatio* III, m. 9, Boethius addresses God without assigning a name to Him. This is the first point Adalbold mentions in his commentary. God is evoked without a name (*sine nomine*) because it is impossible to state His definition (*diffinitio*), which would make it possible to determine His name (Huygens 2000, p. 123).

Adalbold (Huygens 2000, pp. 128–29) assumes that for each particular or thing (*res*), we ought to be able to state its name (*nomen*). The created thing is composed of matter (*materia*) and form (*forma*), whereby the name corresponds to the form of the thing, expressing its constancy and unchangeability, while the changeable existence (*existentia*) is due to the flowing matter (*materia fluitans*). The name is thus a guarantee of unchangeability and discloses what the thing is. In this, Adalbold follows the traditional conception of definition, which—in Boethius's words (Boethius 1847, c. 163)—shows what a thing is (*quid sit*), since a certain substance (*substantia*) can be called by its name (for example, by the name *homo*), or we can say what it is like according to its definition (for example, *animal rationale, mortale*). A definition serves to disclose the proper nature (*natura*) or very being (*esse*) of the thing (cf. Magee 1989, pp. 123–24). Eriugena (Eriugena 1996, p. 58) made a similar statement, quoting Augustine (Augustinus 1986, p. 190), that the fundamental definition is the so-called essential definition (*diffinitio essentialis*), which contains precisely that which is necessary to render the nature (*natura*) of the defined thing. An appropriately formed definition (see, for example, Boethius 1833, pp. 318–19) assumes that the supreme genus (*genus*) of the defined thing is mentioned together with the specific difference (*differentia*).

The definition thus discloses the nature of the defined thing. The superordinate genus is something higher (*magis*), and it is more closely determined by the specific difference, which is also something higher (*magis*) with respect to the thing defined, but their con-

nection results in a precise stipulation of that which is being defined—i.e., the defined and the defining are equal (cf. Boethius 1906, II: p. 153). That is why Adalbold writes (Huygens 2000, p. 123) that in a definition we deduce from something higher by means of something higher to an equality (*a maioribus per maiora usque ad aequalitatem deduci*). If we define, for example, the human being, then from something higher (the superordinate genus animal) by means of something higher (the specific difference rationality, mortality), we reach something that is equal to that which is being defined, i.e., the human being.

Evidently, not everything can be defined in this way. On the one hand, it is not possible to reach such a definition for individuals (*individua*) due to a lack of the specific difference, and it is not possible to define the highest genera (*genera generalissima*) in this way due to a lack of the superordinate genus (Boethius 1847, c. 166). Adalbold points this out while explaining why in the first verse of *Consolatio* III, m. 9, Boethius does not call God by a name—God cannot be essentially defined since there is nothing higher than God that could be stated as a genus superordinate to Him (Huygens 2000, p. 123). We cannot define God, we are unable to cogently signify what He is or what His nature is like, and therefore, it is impossible to state His name since an essential definition cannot be applied in this case.¹⁶ Thus, Adalbold perceives God as something highest, above which nothing higher can be stated, which makes it impossible to define Him.

4.2. The Description of God

While definitions do not allow us to state the names of individuals, it is possible to describe them. In contriving a description, we avoid the difficulties with the superordinate genus and the specific difference as required by definitions. A description consists in stating that which is proper to the thing being described; the sum of such properties then provides a unique identification of the thing described. Boethius (1906, II: pp. 153–54) mentions that definitions are suitable when we are striving to find the common essence of many things, while descriptions are effective when we know the specific properties (*proprietas*) of a certain individual. While God has nothing like an essence common to many, and therefore, a definition is not a suitable means of rendering His name, He does have unique properties. Of course, each individual property can also be common to many (for example, height, colour, family relation, etc.), but the sum of these properties in an individual nonetheless results in a description that uniquely and distinctly grasps that individual.

Adalbold's (Huygens 2000, p. 123) characteristic of description is more specific, as he states that it enables a turn away from the same by means of the same (*ab aequalibus per aequalia ad conversionem debeat fieri*). This formulation also reveals inspiration from Boethius, or rather from Aristotle's *Categories* and Boethius's commentary on that work. The passage on the category *πρός τι* (*ad aliquid*) discusses (Minio-Paluello 1961, pp. 18–23; Boethius 1847, c. 216–38), among others, when it is possible to appropriately (*convenienter*) say of something that it is in a certain relationship to something else. A necessary condition is that not only the first is predicated of the second, but also the second can be predicated of the first. An example is the relationship of slave (*servus*) and master (*dominus*), or of double (*duplum*) and half (*dimidium*): We can speak of the slave's master and the master's slave, or of the half's double and the double's half. Only when all accidentalities (*accidentia*) are removed from terms related in such a way can the relationship between the one and the other be called appropriate. The accidentalities include not only the accidental characteristics of a certain substance, such as, for example, that the master can acquire knowledge (*scientiae perceptibilis*) or has two legs (*bipes*), but also essential definitions or natures, for example, that he is a human being (*homo*). The slave is not a slave because a human exists, but because his master exists, i.e., a slave need not necessarily be the slave of a human.

Boethius then summarizes (Boethius 1847, c. 222) that if something is appropriately predicated in relationship to another, then we are predicating the same of the same in the same way (*aequale enim aequali aequale dicimus*). He then develops (Boethius 1847, c. 227–28) that this sameness is based on the same nature (*natura*) of the relationship, which makes the turn (*conversio*) possible. Such sameness is not present, for example, in wing (*ala*) and bird

(*avis*)—we would have to speak of the wing and the winged (*alatus*) since not only birds have wings; nor is it present in oar (*remus*) and ship (*navis*)—again, we would have to mean the oar and whatever has oars because there are ships without oars. On the other hand, we can appropriately speak of the common nature of the relationship between father (*pater*) and son (*filius*), since no son can exist without having his origin in a father, and the father becomes father only when the son (child) exists—thus, there is no child without parents, and parents are parents only when their child exists.

Apparently, this is what Adalbold had in mind when he mentioned the possibilities of describing God. For the description to be appropriate, the relation between the describing and the described must be of the same nature so that one can be turned into the other. But if one name of the relationship is to be the very name of God and the other something that is the same, then there must be something equal to God. Since there is no such thing, Adalbold claims, it is not possible to provide a description of God that would render Him adequately (Huygens 2000, p. 123).

In this, we can see how Adalbold is inspired by Eriugena's view of dialectic, which, as has been stated above, is not focused exclusively on our way of speaking but at the same time is concerned with the proper metaphysical structure of reality. Since there is nothing real that could be higher than God, God cannot be defined. It also holds that nothing real is equal to God, so it is not possible to propose a description of Him that would be appropriate in its relationship to Him and based on sameness. Therefore, Adalbold writes (Huygens 2000, p. 123) that God must remain unnamed in the first verse of Boethius's poem, and it is merely possible to express admiration for the one who governs the world (cf. Brinkmann 1980, pp. 327–28).

4.3. God as the Form of the Highest Good (*forma summi boni*)

Although no name can be ascribed to God based on a definition or a description, in the later text of Boethius's poem some names of God appear. This article will now focus exclusively on designating God as *forma summi boni*, in which Adalbold demonstrates the practical use of his dialectical knowledge.

As mentioned above, dialectic is the art of good disputation. It is concerned with dividing genera into species and resolving species to genera, with definitions, and with arguments. Boethius characterized this art in a similar fashion in his commentary on Cicero's *Topics* (Boethius 1833, p. 274), where he includes arguments, besides the division (*partitio*) of genera into species and definitions, into the third part of the art of dialectic, which he called composition (*collectio*). For Boethius, this composition is the deductive formation of arguments, which he divides according to the type of conclusion into three kinds: proof (*demonstratio*), where the result is a necessary conclusion; dialectic (*dialectica*), in a narrower sense of the word, where the conclusion is probable; and sophistry (*sophistica*), where the argument's conclusion is fallacious or erroneous. Thus, dialectic is basically concerned with finding (*inveniendi*) and judging (*iudicandi*) arguments.

And since it is highly probable that Adalbold knew these texts, it is not surprising that in his exposition of the fifth and sixth verses of Boethius's ninth poem of the third book of *The Consolation* he makes use of forming and judging arguments. In verses 5–6 of *Consolatio* III, m. 9, Boethius writes that God impersonates the form of the highest good (*forma summi boni*). A difficulty is associated with this, which Adalbold (Huygens 2000, p. 126) points out by constructing a fourfold of arguments, always comprising the higher premise (*propositio*), the lower premise (*assumptio*), and the conclusion (*conclusio*) deduced from them. These are in the form of categorical syllogisms (*sillogismus*); therefore, they enjoy the validity of proofs.

The quartet of syllogisms takes the following form (Huygens 2000, p. 126):

- Arg. 1
Propositio: Every form is formed.
Assumptio: Everything formed is created.
Conclusio: Every form is created.

- Arg. 2
P: Everything created is lesser than that by which it was created.
A: Everything that is lesser cannot be the highest of all.
C: Nothing created can be the highest of all.
- Arg. 3
P: That, which is the highest, is not formed. (\rightarrow follows from Arg. 2 and Arg. 1)
A: The highest good exists. (\rightarrow many goods exist; therefore, their source and origin must exist)
C: The highest good is not formed.
- Arg. 4
P: That, which is not formed, does not have a form. (\rightarrow follows from *P* Arg. 1)
A: The highest good is not formed. (\rightarrow C Arg. 3)
C: The highest good does not have a form.

With his reasoning, Adalbold aims to determine whether something like the form of the highest good can exist at all. First (Arg. 1), he reaches the conclusion that every form (*forma*) must be something created (*creatura*), since all forms must be formed (*formatum*) and everything that is formed must have been created. Then (Arg. 2) he reasons that nothing created (*creatura*) can be the highest (*summum*), since all that is created is lesser (*minor*) than that which created it, and that which is lesser cannot be the highest. He then assumes that the form of the highest good might exist after all, but then (Arg. 3) it would hold that the highest good (*summum bonum*) cannot be formed (*formatum*), since from Arg. 2 and Arg. 1 it follows that that which is the highest (*summum*) cannot be formed, and at the same time it is necessary that some highest good exists. In the last step (Arg. 4), he concludes that the highest good (*summum bonum*) cannot have a form (*forma*), since all that has a form must be formed (*formatum*), and the highest good is not formed. To summarize: there is nothing that could be the form of the highest good.

Adalbold is led to this conclusion by philosophy (*philosophia*), whose words are difficult to reject because, as Adalbold writes (Huygens 2000, p. 126), it was with God when all things were formed. In this way, Adalbold shows the dialectical procedure in practice. He formed an argument that must be judged, which, in the case of these syllogisms, means that—if we follow dialectic—we ought to assent to them (cf. Brinkmann 1980, p. 328). Adalbold may well have been familiar with Eriugena's interpretation of God as the one who lacks a form (*informis*) because He has not been formed (Eriugena 1996, p. 80), since he most probably knew his texts and was influenced by them (cf. Gregory 1958, pp. 11–13).

However, despite the authority of philosophy and Eriugena, Boethius writes in his poem that God is the form of the highest good. That is why Adalbold further reflects on how this is possible. Again, he is inspired by the earlier tradition when he notes (Huygens 2000, pp. 126–27) that we sometimes give names to individuals according to what they are not (*quod non sunt*)—for example, according to something that surpasses them in some way, which can be a form (*forma*) or an art (*ars*). The example Adalbold cites is the name potter (*figulus*), whereby he may have been inspired by Augustine's *Ennarationes in Psalmos* or in a passage of the *Etymologies* of Isidore of Sevilla, which was also literally copied by Hrabanus Maurus (Rabanus 1864, c. 597).

In his exposition of the twentieth verse of *Psalm* 93 (*Ps* 94:20), Augustine (Augustinus 1990, II: p. 1324) focused on the verb *figere*, expressing the activity of forming (*formare*) or moulding (*plasmare*), which gave the name to potters (*figuli*) and pottery (*vas fictile*), or pots. Deriving the name 'potter' from that verb is not associated with something untrue (*fictum*) pointing to a lie (*mendacium*), but rather shows that something existing has a form (*forma*). In this way, Augustine draws a comparison between a potter and God, who created much out of earth, including the fragile human, as witnessed by quotations from 2 *Cor* 4:7 and *Rom* 9:21. The potter (God) can form the earth according to his decision, and all that has been created in this way is something precisely due to the potter's (God's) creative activity. Isidore (Isidorus Hispalensis 1911, XX, 4, 2) states the same, namely that potters (*figuli*) are

so called because by their activity pots (*fictilia*), i.e., earthen vessels, come to be, as evinced by the verb *ingere*, which means to create (*facere*), form (*formare*), or mould (*plasmare*).

Adalbold (Huygens 2000, p. 127) introduces his example by stating that potters are so called even though they are in fact humans. The potter receives his name due to the earthen works (*fictilia*) he makes, not because they express his mode of being (*esse*). He receives his name (*nomen*) from the earthen vessels he forms, even though he precedes them since they do not form him; he forms the earth when he gives rise to the inventions (*figmenta*) of his mind (*mens*).

The situation with God as the highest good is similar. God is the highest good, which creates (*creare*) all goods (*cuncta bona*). These were formed by God, and therefore, they received their form from Him. While it is held that God cannot be defined or described, we can at least partially access his nature based on what he created (cf. Brinkmann 1980, pp. 328–29). These created and formed goods make possible a certain disclosure (*apparitio*) of the highest good. This highest good can at the same time be called ‘form’, not because it is formed as such, but because it forms everything else, so that it shows itself as the cause of forming.¹⁷ This does not mean that God receives something new from His creations since everything is in His power now and before all ages. But because God created everything (like the potter, who is called according to his works), He is correctly called ‘form’. This form of the highest good can be viewed as something naturally proper to God, which is *de facto* innate (*innata*) to Him as an expression of the kindness (*benivolentia*) with which He creates the world (Huygens 2000, pp. 127–28).

In this way, Adalbold explains that although God cannot be designated as ‘form’ in the proper sense of the word (as the dialectical arguments have clearly shown), it is still possible to speak of Him as of the form of the highest good. There is no formed good without the Creator’s kindness, which is why the Creator of all forms is appropriately called ‘highest form’. Thus, Adalbold suggests that the imperfection of knowing and naming God based on what He has created is the only option we have if we want to assign names to God at all. This is what Adalbold then does in his further exposition of Boethius’s poem, where he discusses cosmological, metaphysical, and natural-philosophical topics in a Christian context and gradually unfolds how everything is created by God through His wisdom and what other appropriate names can be assigned to Him.

5. Conclusions

The question of to what extent dialectic can be viewed as an art assisting in the grasping of Christian truths was posed already in Christian antiquity and engaged Christian intellectuals through the centuries. For example, Otloh of St Emmeram († c. 1070) in his *Dialogus de tribus quaestionibus* objects that adherents of dialectic (*dialectici*) assess the words of Scripture exclusively by dialectical methods when they follow Boethius and, in their effort to precisely define the terms and reasoning procedures in the Bible, trust him more than the holy authorities (Othlonus de S. Emmerammi 1854, c. 60). To Otloh’s objection, we may add that such a way of following dialectic can become even more problematic when we try to interpret some passages from Boethius himself. As suggested by the abovementioned Bovo of Corvey, some parts of Boethius’s work (in this case *Consolatio* III, m. 9) must be accessed with caution, and one must strictly reject the view that the presented ideas are Christian.

Just a few decades before Otloh’s objection, Adalbold of Utrecht attempted to apply dialectic to Boethius’s work, specifically to metre 9 of the third book of *The Consolation of Philosophy*. However, he did not wish to declare the repugnance between Boethius’s poem and the Christian view of the universe. He used dialectic as a tool for confirming the appropriateness of the Christian interpretation of *Consolatio* III, m. 9. He started from the contemporary understanding of dialectic as concerned with dividing genera into species and resolving species to genera, and with arguments, in which he was assisted by the Peripatetic and the Stoic traditions of dialectic, as well as by Eriugena’s understanding of dialectic.

Entirely in accordance with dialectic, he explains that Boethius appropriately rejects the possibility of defining and describing God, as it is not possible to provide a relevant essential definition of God or a description enabling equality between the one described and the description. Adalbold therefore appreciates that Boethius was aware of this and viewed God more with his heart than with his bodily sight, which enabled him to overcome the blindness of the ancient thinkers. Here dialectic demonstrates that the structure of reality makes it impossible to apply a cogent and precise name to God because He is too far removed from our capacities for thus precisely grasping His nature.

Similarly, Adalbold then shows that dialectic can provide sound evidence, as seen in syllogisms confirming that we are unable to adequately ascribe predicates to God. Although there can be no doubt that the highest good must exist, which is the cause of all other existing goods, we cannot state with certainty that God is the form of this highest good. All things that arise have a form, which means that all forms are created. God cannot take on a form because He is not created. This is without doubt the conclusion of the dialectical reasoning, and it must be respected.

But dialectic also teaches us that we sometimes use names that do not correspond to the nature of the things named. Adalbold makes use of this to show that, albeit very imperfectly, we nonetheless can refer to the Creator in some way based on information about the creation. On the example of the name ‘potter’, who is essentially a human, yet to designate a certain human we use the name ‘potter’, Adalbold shows that something can be named according to its creation, not according to its nature. A certain human being forms the earth, whereby he creates pots, and therefore we can designate him as a ‘potter’, who endows the earth with form. Likewise, God forms all that is good, i.e., all that is created, and, therefore, we can name Him ‘form of the highest good’.

In this way, Adalbold demonstrates how dialectic can support the Christian interpretation of Boethius’s *Consolatio* III, m. 9, as justified, even when it may seem to many that the given claims contradict Christian doctrine.

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Abbreviations

AL	Aristoteles Latinus
CC	Corpus Christianorum
CM	Continuatio Mediaevalis
SL	Series Latina
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
DMA	Divitiae Musicae Artis
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica
SS	Scriptores (in Folio)
SS rer. Germ. N.S.	Scriptores rerum Germanicarum, Nova series
PL	Patrologia Latina

Notes

- ¹ The role of dialectic in Adalbold’s commentary has so far been addressed by just a few authors, among whom (Brinkmann 1980, pp. 327–30), is particularly noteworthy.
- ² On the interpretation of the poem, which is sometimes regarded as the very core and centre of the entire *Consolation* (cf., e.g., Fournier 2008, p. 11), see, e.g., (Blackwood 2015; Scheible 1972, pp. 101–12), etc.
- ³ Cf., e.g., (Love 2012, 2015; Godden and Jayatilaka 2011; Papahagi 2009; Nauta 2009; Wittig 2007; Bolton 1977a, 1977b; Haring 1969; Courcelle 1967, and others).

- 4 An edition of selected variants and parts of the so-called Remigian glosses is offered, e.g., by (Stewart 1916, pp. 26–42 (on III, m. 9: pp. 30–35); or Silk 1935, pp. 311–43 (on III, m. 9: pp. 332–39)).
- 5 For an edition of St Gall glosses, see (Papahagi 2008, pp. 310–37 (on III, m. 9: pp. 326–27)).
- 6 It is also possible to mention an edition of glosses from the Vatican manuscript Vat. Lat. 3363, see (Troncarelli 1981, pp. 153–96 (on III, m. 9: pp. 182–84)).
- 7 See, e.g., (Silk 1935, pp. 334–37; Huygens 2000, pp. 103–4, or 129–33; Stewart 1916, pp. 31–32, etc.; cf., e.g., McCluskey 2012, pp. 58–65).
- 8 I.e., the Platonic distinction of components of the soul into the irascible, the concupiscible, and the rational—see, e.g., (Hieronymus 1969, p. 109; or Stewart 1916, p. 33); and the Aristotelian division of souls into the vegetable, the sensible, and the rational—see, e.g., (Minio-Paluello 1966, pp. 16–17; Boethius 1906, I: pp. 70–71; or Huygens 2000, p. 133).
- 9 See, e.g., (Silk 1935, pp. 338–41; Huygens 2000, pp. 109–11, 119, 134–36; Stewart 1916, pp. 32–34, etc.; cf., e.g., McCluskey 2012, pp. 67–71; or Gregory 1958, pp. 3–10).
- 10 All references to Biblical texts are made with standard abbreviations and the edition *Nova Vulgata: Bibliorum Sacrorum Editio* (available at: https://www.vatican.va/archive/bible/nova_vulgata/documents/nova-vulgata_index_lt.html [16 February 2023]) is used.
- 11 See (Sigebertus Gemblacensis 1974, p. 91; Arndt 1869, p. 309; Jaffé 1866, pp. 368–69; cf. Lindgren 1976, p. 55).
- 12 Cf., e.g., (Thietmarus Merseburgensis 1935, p. 525 or p. 528; Alpertus Mettensis 1841; Montagna von Zeschau 2019, pp. 169–75).
- 13 See (Adalboldus Ultraiectensis 1981; Desmond 2016; Ilnitchi 2002; Schmid 1956; Huglo 2011; Smits van Waesberghe 1975, etc.).
- 14 Cf., e.g., (Lenz and Ortelli 2014, p. 63; Babcock 1984; Brunhölzl 1992, pp. 596–97; Shrader 1973).
- 15 Heriger does this to show that three apparently different and disconnected things may in fact be quite naturally interconnected. He adds further examples of such harmonious interconnection of distinct components from Platonic cosmology and Boethian arithmetic—see (Herigerus Lobiensis 1853, c. 185).
- 16 Although Boethius and Porphyry suggest that God could be designated by the differences ‘rational and immortal’ or even as a rational and immortal substance (see, e.g., Minio-Paluello 1966, p. 17; or Boethius 1906, I: pp. 21–22), Adalbold does not mention this alternative in his *Commentary*, and it seems that he follows the above-mentioned structure of the essential definition.
- 17 In this, Adalbold may have been inspired by Eriugena’s work, which also speaks of God lacking form, who is nonetheless at the same time the cause of all forms—see (Eriugena 1996, p. 80).

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