

A Passage from Boethius, in Four Layers of English
As Translated by King Alfred the Great, Chaucer, and Queen Elizabeth

Cooper (Modern English, 1902)
<http://etext.virginia.edu/latin/boethius/boephil.html>

'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 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.'

Queen Elizabeth I (Early Modern English, original spelling)

[With original spelling; modern spellings interspersed.]

'Yf [If] any man then that can go, and an other to whom the naturall proprietie of the feete is wanting, stryving with his handes, stryves so to walke, which of these ij [roman numeral two] suppose you more worth?'

'Perform the rest if that you will, for no man doutes [doubts] but he is more of force that hath the vse [use] of nature, than he that wantes it.'

'But the greatest good,' said she, 'that is set before yll [ill] and good, the good desyre by naturall duty of vertue, the other by a scatterd desyre, and stryue [strive] to get that which is no proper gift, to such as will obtayne the greatest good. Dost thou think the contrary?'

'No,' quoth I, 'for that is playne that followes. For heerby may we gather that I graunted afore, good men to be mighty, and yll men weake.'

'Rightly hast thou discourst, And so, as phisicians ought to hope, that it is a signe of a helthy and Resisting Nature.'

Comparative translation as given in the introduction to the Sedgefield translation.
http://oll.libertyfund.org/index.php?Itemid=286&id=719&option=com_content&task=view

Geoffrey Chaucer (Middle English)

[Transliterated for modern readers, th for thorn Þ, gh for yogh ȝ; modern words interspersed.]

Than quod she 'Yif that a wyght be myghty to moene [motion?] and goth vpon [upon] hys feet, and another to whom thilke [the same] naturel office of feet lakketh enforceth hym to gone crepyng vpon hys handes, whiche of these two-oughte to ben holden more myghty by ryght?'

'Knyt furthe the remenaunt,' quod I. 'For no wyght ne douteth that he that may gone by naturel offi ce of feet ne be more myghty than he that ne may nat.'

'But the souereyne [sovereign] good,' quod she, 'that is euenlyche [even-like] purposed to the good folk and to badde, the good folke seken it by naturel office of uertnes [virtue-ness], and the shrewes enforcen hem [them] to geten it by dyuerse couetise [diverse covetousness] of erthely thinges, whiche that nis no naturel office to geten thilke same souereyne goode. Trowest thou that it be any other wyse?'

'Nay,' quod I, 'for the consequence is open and shewyng of thinges that I haue graunted: that nedes goode folk

moten ben [must be] myghty, and shrewes feble and vnmyghty.'

'Thou rennest aryght byfore me,' quod she, 'and this the iugement [judgement], that is to seyn; I iuge of the ryght as these leches [leeches, physicians] ben wont forto hopen of seke folk, whan thei aperceyuen [perceive] that nature is redressed and withstondeth to the maladie.'

Comparative translation as given in the introduction to the Sedgefield translation.
http://oll.libertyfund.org/index.php?Itemid=286&id=719&option=com_content&task=view

Alfred the Great (Old English)

[With alphabet modernized; interspersed with related modern words, and a literal translation in Modern English.]

Tha qwaeth [quoth] he: Hwaether wenstu [weenest] nu?
[Then said he: Whether dost thou think?]

Gif twegen [twain] men fundiath to anre stoew [stow], & habbath [they have] emnimikelne willan [will] to to cummenne,
[if two men are going to one place, and have equally great desire to arrive there,]

& other haefth [haveth] his fota [feet] anweald [wieldy] th. he maeg gan [go] thaer he wille,
[and one has the use of his feet, so that he may go where he will,]

swa swa [so-so] eallum monnum [man] gekynde [kind] waer th. hi meaghten [might],
[as it were natural to all men that they could,]

other neafth his fota geweald th. he meage gan, wilnath [willeth] theagh [though] to feranne,
[and the other has not the use of his feet that he can go, and yet is desirous to go,]

& onginth creopan on thone ilcan [ilk] weg [way]; hwaether thara twega thinkth the [thee] mehtigra [mighty]?
[and begins to creep the same way, whether of the two dost thou think the more powerful?]

Tha qwaeth Ic: Nis th. gelic; se bith mehtigra se the gaeth thonne than se the criepth,
[Then said I: There is no comparison. He is more powerful who goes than he who creeps,]

forthaem he maeg cuman eth thider the he wille thonne se other; saga elles th. thu wille, thaet wat [wot] aelc mon
[man].
[because he eon more easily come whither he will than the other. Say what else thou wilt, every man knows that.]

Tha qwaeth he: Swa ilke bith thaem goodum & thaem yflum [evil];
[Then said he: In like manner it is with the good and with the wicked.]

aegther heora wilnath for gekynde th. he cume to thaem heghstan goode.
[Each of them desires naturally that he may come to the highest good.]

Ac se gooda maeg cuman thider he wilnath, forthaem he his on right wilnath [willeth],
[But the good is able to come whither he desires, because he desires it rightly,]

& se yfla ne maeg cuman to thaem the he wilnath, forthaem hi hit on wog secath [seeketh].
[and the wicked cannot come to that which he desires, because he seeks it wrongly.]

Ic nat theagh the elles hwaet thinke.
[I know not but thou mayest think differently.]

Da qwaeth Ic: Ne thinkth me naught othres of thinum spellu.
[Then said I: I do not think at all differently from what thou sayest.]

Tha qwaeth he: Genog righte thu hit ongitst [get it], & th. is eak takn [token] thinre healo [health];
[Then said he: Very rightly thou understandest it: and that is also a token of thy health;]

swa swa laeca [leeches] gewuna [way] is th. hi qwethath thonne hi siocne mon [sick man] gesioth [they see],

[as it is the custom of physicians to say, when they see a sick man]

gif hi hwilc ungefaeglic [un-fail-like?] tacn on him gesioth [they see].
[if they perceive in him any healthy token.]

Me thinkth nu th. thin gekynd [kind] & thin gewuna [way] flite swithe swithlike with thaem dysige.
[Methinks now that thy nature and thy habit contends very powerfully against error.]

Sedgefield, King Alfred's Old English Version of Boethius De Consolatione Philosophiae, Chapter XXXVI, section 5, p. 107

<http://books.google.com/books?id=WAdTFQhvgGwC&lpg=PA179&ots=DHCIPzixT-&pg=PA178#v=onepage&f=true>
<http://www.archive.org/details/kingalfreds00boetuoft> (full text)

Transliterated to modern alphabet to simplify reading: c to q/k, medial h to ght, final le to lle, th for eth ð and thorn Þ, th for scribal 'that', ampersand for 'et' sign 7.

Literal translation is from Fox, King Alfred's Anglo-Saxon Version of Boethius, p. 179.

King Alfred's Version of the Consolations of Boethius. Done into Modern English, with an Introduction by Walter John Sedgefield Litt.D. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900).

<http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/1178/78835>

P. Then said she, 'How thinkest thou? If two men are hastening to the same place, and have an equally great desire to get there, one of them having the use of his feet so as to be able to walk where he pleases, even as it would be natural for all men to be able, and the other being without the use of his feet and unable to walk, and yet longing to move on, and making shift to creep along the same path,—which of these two men thinkest thou the more able?'

M. There is no likeness; he that walks is mightier than he that creeps, inasmuch as he can go where he wishes more easily than the other; say what else thou wilt, every man knows this.

P. It is just the same with the good and the wicked; each of them by his nature desires to reach the Highest Good. But the good man is able to go where he pleases, for he seeks it by the right way, whereas the wicked man may not go where he desires, for he seeks it amiss. But perhaps thou mayest not think so.

M. Nay, that, and naught else, is what I think concerning thine argument.

P. Very rightly thou dost conceive the matter, and this is also a token of thy health; even as it is the wont of leeches when they look upon a sick man, and behold in him any benign symptom, to tell him of it. Methinks therefore that thy nature and thy habits do make a stout stand against folly.

Sedgefield, King Alfred's Old English Version of Boethius De Consolatione Philosophiae, XXXVI, section 5, p. 107

<http://www.archive.org/details/kingalfreds00boetuoft>

§ v 9. Ða cwæð he: Hwæðer wenstu nu? *gif* twegen men fundiað to anre stowe, 7 habbað emnmicelne willan to to cu[*me*]nne, 7 oðer hæfð his fota⁸ anweald þ he mæg gan ðær he wile⁹, swa swa eallum monnum gecynde wære þ hi meahten, oðer næfð his fota geweald þ he mæge gan, 7 wilnað ðeah to feranne¹⁰, (7) onginð creopan on þone ilcan weg; hwæðer ðara twega¹¹ þincð¹² ðe mehtigra? Ða cwæð ic: Nis þ gelic; se bið mehtigra se ðe gæð þonne se ðe criepð, forðæm he mæg cuman eð ðider ðe he wile þonne se oðer; saga elles þ ðu wille, ðæt wat ælc mon. Ða cwæð he: Swa ilce¹³ bið ðæm goodum 7 ðæm yflum; ægþer heora wilnað for gecynde þ he cume to ðæm hehstan goode. Ac se gooda mæg cuman ðider he wilnað, forðæm he his on riht wilnað, 7 se yfla ne mæg cuman to ðæm þe he wilnað, *forðæm hi¹⁴ hit on wog secað¹⁵. Ic nat ðeah þe elles hwæt ðince¹⁶. Ða cwæð ic: Ne ðincð me nauht oðres of ðinum spellū. Þa cwæð he: Genog rihte ðu hit ongitst, 7 þ is eac tacn þinre hælo; swa swa læca gewuna is þ hi cweðað ðonne hi siocne mon ge[*si*]oð, gif hi hwilc ungefæglic¹⁷ tacn on him¹⁸ gesioð. Me ðincð nu þ þin gecynd [7] ðin gewuna flite swiðe swiðlice wið ðæm dysige.