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BURIDAN: 'EVERY PROPOSITION IS FALSE' IS FALSE

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In his *Sophismata*,[1] Buridan proposes as a sophism:

(1) Every proposition is false.

A sophism for Buridan is a proposition[2] which appears to be both demonstrably true and demonstrably false. We are to hypothesize a background situation in which "all true propositions should be destroyed and false ones remain."[3] This sophism is a version of the classical paradox, the one which van Frassen calls "the weakened liar paradox." On the one hand, the problem proposition, (1), seems to describe aptly the hypothetical situation in which all true propositions have been destroyed, and thus to be true. On the other hand, if *it* is an existent proposition and is true, then it itself is no longer true. If it is false, however, it seems to make itself true once more. This is certainly sufficient reason for Buridan to pronounce (1) a sophism. Buridan's solution is that 'Every proposition is false' is in fact false. I should like to argue that Buridan's solution to the weakened liar paradox is acceptable. He has both an intuitive and a demonstrative argument for his assignment of truth value, and those arguments are correct. But Buridan's system is precisely the kind which should, according to Tarski, eventually produce liar-type paradoxes which it cannot solve. I shall argue that Buridan's representation of natural language is indeed just strong enough to produce a sentence whose truth value is in one sense obvious, but is in addition such that the assignment of that truth value introduces inconsistency into the system. That sentence is the so-called "ordinary liar paradox," 'I am speaking falsely.' Buridan does not block the formation of the sentence expressing the ordinary liar paradox.[4] Nor, I shall argue, does he depart from his basic commitment to semantic bivalence. The result is that he can have either his solution to the ordinary liar paradox, or systematic consistency, but not both.

Buridan has two arguments for the falsity of (1). In the first argument, which I shall call "intuitive," he uses the notion of "virtual implication" to move from:

(2) No proposition is true.

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