JOHN BURIDAN ON THE LIAR: A
STUDY AND RECONSTRUCTION

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This paper is a partial study of the position taken by the 14th century logician and philosopher John Buridan (see [4]) on the Liar and related paradoxes—the "insolubles" (*insolubilia*) as they were called then. Buridan's position is most extensively set out in the eighth chapter of his Sophismata ([2], translated in [3]. There is also a discussion in [1].). Although at least three brief treatments have appeared in English ([3], introduction; [7], [9]), and although the *Sophismata* has recently been translated into English (in [3]), no study has yet examined Buridan's view in depth. This paper attempts a partial rectification of that situation.

We shall begin by setting out some preliminary notions and notation. Then we shall cite some passages from Buridan that set out his position. On the basis of these passages, we shall extract several theses which may be regarded as "principles" of his approach. Our reconstruction of Buridan's position will have to conform as much as possible to these theses. I said that this paper is a "partial" study of Buridan's position. Our overall policy will be to reconstruct that position within a very simple framework, allowing only the most straightforward kinds of paradox. Accordingly, we shall set out a very limited syntax **SYN**—containing only singular terms, two predicates, and a negation operator—and a very restricted set of models, which allow only the simplest and most direct kind of vicious self-reference. Insolubility will then be defined for this context. Such a narrow approach permits us to abstract from certain kinds of cases that Buridan simply does not discuss, and to put off to another occasion a treatment of some of the more complicated cases he does discuss. An initial obstacle is the fact that the Buridanian theses to be extracted from his text will turn out to be inconsistent even within this simple framework. Some compromise must be made if our study is to get off the ground. We shall discuss some possible ways of making this compromise, and choose from among them. Our choice will involve giving up the rules of double negation in certain cases. It will also involve adopting the principle that the