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Chapter Eight of Buridan's *Sophismata*

Translated, with an Introduction and a
philosophical Commentary, by

G. E. HUGHES

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PREFACE

The eighth and final chapter of Buridan's *Sophismata* is devoted to problems about self-referential propositions. Some at least of these have perplexed philosophers for more than two thousand years, and continue to do so today. The best known is probably the so-called *Liar Paradox* – the problem of whether someone who says 'What I am now saying is false' is thereby saying something true or something false. Buridan not only gives us his own distinctive and detailed solution of this particular problem, but also introduces us to a wide range of other self-referential paradoxes, many of which are likely to be unfamiliar to most present-day readers. In addition, he uses his main theme to lead into discussions of such questions as the nature of propositions, the criteria of their truth and falsity, the conditions of the validity of inferences, and the analysis of the concept of knowledge; and in this way the scope of his chapter is much wider than its official topic might suggest.

This book is not intended primarily as a contribution to the history of philosophy or to textual scholarship, but mainly as an attempt to make Buridan's ideas accessible to present-day philosophical readers for the sake of their inherent importance. The issues he deals with are still being discussed, probably more vigorously today than at any period since his own. I believe that his ideas and arguments have a contemporary relevance that is independent of their historical context and that they have a distinctive contribution to make to an ongoing debate.

My work on Buridan has been aided and encouraged by more people than can be mentioned individually here. I have shamelessly picked the brains of many colleagues and visitors here in Wellington, and they have helped me greatly by discussing Buridan's arguments, making suggestions for improving earlier drafts of the book, or casting light on difficult passages in the Latin. Jan Pinborg of the University of Copenhagen generously put his textual and philosophical scholarship at my disposal, and also lent me a vital microfilm at a crucial stage in my work. Peter Geach of the University of Leeds made many valuable comments and criticisms which led me to undertake a substantial revision of the book, both to its own considerable benefit,

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PREFACE

I believe, and to mine. He also devised the argument which is suggested on pp. 140–1 as a replacement for a defective one of Buridan's own, and kindly gave me his permission to use it. My wife, to whom the book is dedicated, read and checked the entire typescript, and I am grateful to her for helping me to remedy many inaccuracies and infelicities. The fact that my manuscript went through several drafts made the typing a more massive task than might appear from the book's final form, and I want to thank past and present secretaries in this Department, and especially Lysie Dollimore and Helen Fleming, for their care and patience in coping with it.

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May, 1981