Reviews

John Buridan's Logic: The Treatise on Supposition; The Treatise on Consequences. Translated
with a Philosophical Introduction by Peter King, Dordrecht (Reidel) 1985, pp.
xii + 380, ISBN 90 277 1918 7.

John Buridan was clearly a remarkable logician, who had an immense influence on
the study of logic throughout Europe, but particularly at Paris, in the two centuries
following his death around 1358. His major work, the *Summulae*, is put together from
nine treatises on logic, of which the fourth, on the theory of supposition, makes up
the first half of the present volume. The second half consists of an independent treatise
on consequences. The two works sit together well, King being often able in his end-
notes to direct the attention of the reader of the *Consequentiae* (TC) back to remarks
in *De Suppositionibus* (TS) to expand a particular point. The editions are preceded by
an introduction of some 80 pages.

TS is an elementary work in which Buridan distinguishes supposition from
signification (meaning), verification (what makes a sentence true) and appellation
(roughly, any additional connotation of a term). After explaining the various modes
of supposition—ways in which a term can stand for objects—he proceeds to discuss
the supposition of relative terms, that is, terms referring back to an antecedent; and
ampliation and restriction, that is, ways in which the range of things for which a term
stands may be extended or reduced by the particular predicate of the sentence, or
other linguistic context in which the term occurs. For example, 'dead' ampliates a
term to stand for things not only of the present but also of the past; 'can' to things
for which the term not only does now but could stand; and so on.

TC is a much more advanced treatise. Its topic is far wider that its title would sug-
gest, being essentially that third part of a logic, dealing with all sorts of argument.
(Medieval treatises on logic often consisted of three parts, on terms, on propositions,
and on argument. What is noticeably missing in the present compilation is any
extended treatment of the proposition.) Buridan deals with assertoric inference, that
is, the logic of unanalysed propositions, with modal propositional logic, with
syllogisms, and with modal syllogisms. Buridan is an unashamed and defiant
adherent of strict implication: an argument is valid if every model of the antecedent
is a model of the consequent. Books III and IV, on the syllogism, are particularly rich,
presenting a very general picture of what can be validly inferred from any pair of
(modal or non-modal) syllogistic premises.

TC survives in both incunabula and manuscripts; TS, in its original form, really
only in manuscript (the incunabula of the *Summulae* contain Dorp's commentary on
the amended text, or sometimes the amended text alone, of Peter of Spain's treatise
which Buridan used as the basis for his commentary). There are at least 16 manu-
scripts of the *Summulae*. Reina produced an edition of the Latin text of TS from one
ms. (CVP 5365) in the *Rivista critica di Storia della Filosofia* in 1957; Hubien edited the
Latin text from the three known manuscripts and three printed texts of TC in 1976.

King's translation is based on these two modern editions, with one or two references to the manuscripts.

Recall the mixed feelings one has towards the medieval scribes: clearly, their labour in transmitting medieval logical texts to us is beyond price; on the other hand, their misreadings and omissions are infuriating. Unfortunately, the same feeling is experienced on reading King's translation. Occasional sentences are mistranslated, resulting in logical nonsense; from time to time whole clauses, or in one case, a paragraph, are omitted; and on nearly every page there are minor typographical errors, not infrequently provoking puzzlement as to what is really meant. Constant reference to the Latin text is necessary to resolve such puzzles. In a word, the accusation of carelessness cannot be avoided. Some errors have clearly arisen in the physical production of the book. But not all. This is a great shame: for detail apart, the work is well presented, well thought out, and should have been a most useful introduction, for readers without Latin, to a great logician.

The reader's confidence is shaken near the start of the introduction when, in a brief allusion to Russell's theory of descriptions, the final clause '&Bx' is ommitted; and again as the translation opens when, in the second footnote, King provides an extract from Buridan's questions on *De Interpretatione* to explain the phrase 'ad placitum': "But if you were to ask about utterances with are nouns and verbs *ad placitum, ...*" Perhaps King meant 'which' for 'with' here; a clearer translation would be: "But if you were to ask in what way utterances which are nouns and verbs signify *ad placitum, ...*" (King takes the text from Pinborg's 1976 excerpts; the whole work was edited by Ria van der Lecq in 1983.) But these slips are minor compared to some which follow.

For example, consider Theorem 8 from Book I of TC. Here, as too often elsewhere, mistranslation makes Buridan appear at the very least sloppy, even logically incompetent. But the fault is not Buridan's. King's translation reads:

> (a) All sentences with the same number of causes of their truth follow from the same <sentences>; (b) all having more <causes of their truth> follow from any having fewer or the same <number of causes of their truth> by some <sentences> of those <having> more, but (c) not conversely. (p. 204)

(As is customary, King marks by angle brackets words added in translation.) The astute reader will be puzzled. 'P and Q' and 'Neither P nor Q' have the same *number* of causes of their truth, but the causes are different, and so they clearly are not implied by exactly the same sentences. Reference to Buridan's text reveals that he was quite aware of this. What he wrote was:

> (a) All sentences with an equal number *and the same* causes of their truth *mutually imply one another*; (b) all <sentences> having more <causes of truth> follow from any having fewer *and the same as some of that greater number* <of causes>, but (c) not conversely.

(My italics.)

Another example of logical nonsense introduced in the translation occurs on p. 267. King's text reads:

> (b) any syllogism is acceptable in which the contradictory of one premiss follows from *the contradictory of* the other premiss along with the contradictory of the conclusion.

(My italics.) The italicised words quite rightly do not appear in Buridan's text. Again, in his introduction, King makes Buridan look a fool when he writes (p. 48):

> A common term has *confused supposition* in a sentence if it is not sufficient for the

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truth of that sentence that it be true for a singular term falling under the common term (TS 3.5.1).

(Italics in original.) This cannot be right. For 'animal' in 'Every man is an animal' has confused supposition, but the sentence is entailed by 'Every man is Socrates'. Buridan's text reads (King's translation, p. 129):

> the supposition of some term is called 'confused' when the sentence in which it is found, or an equiform sentence, can be true without being true for some < one > determinate thing falling under the term.

That is quite right. Buridan knew the difference between a necessary and a sufficient condition. And on p. 197 King attributes to Buridan the claim that

> (b) any sentence formed as a consequence is an acceptable consequence if the *contrary* of the antecedent of the indicated consequence follows from the contradictory of the *antecedent* of the indicated consequence.

(My italics.) In place of the italicised words Buridan has the sensible words 'contradictory' and 'consequent' respectively.

There are too many such cases. There is not space here to deal with them all. But there are also simple cases of omission. For example, on p. 107 King's text reads, adding the omitted clause in italics:

> I say that the sentence "Of-every-man the ass is running" is neither universal nor indefinite, *because the whole subject is neither distributed nor used indefinitely,* but it is indefinite for the nominative and universal for the oblique, ...

and on p. 108 (again, adding the missing words in italics):

> The syllogism "*Socrates is seeing every horse, Brunellus is a horse, so* Socrates is seeing Brunellus" is acceptable.

On p. 265 we find:

> (a) For whichever two terms of which one is truly called the same as some discrete term, of which the other is truly called not the same, *the one is not truly called the same as the other, and so* the one can be inferred negatively of [actually: from] the other.

Finally, on p. 298, the third theorem of Book IV is omitted entirely:

> The third theorem is:
> *[Theorem IV-3] Composite uses of 'know', 'believe', 'doubt' and similar modes do not yield valid syllogisms.*
> *Hence this is not acceptable:*
> (426) That every B is A is known by Socrates, and that every C is B is known by Socrates, therefore, that every C is A is known by Socrates.

(Buridan is hardly likely to have given an invalid syllogistic form the title of a theorem.) Such omissions are pure carelessness, and when multiplied the unreliability of the translation without constant reference to the original reduces the usefulness of King's volume.

King also has trouble with the phrases *de virtute sermonis* and *de vi sermonis,* leaving the former untranslated on p. 121, with a footnote comment that it is "very difficult to translate; literally, it means something like 'by the power of the word'." Actually, it means 'literally', or 'properly speaking'. So something has gone very wrong on p. 184, where *si vis expresse loqui de vi sermonis* comes out as "if < the sentence > explicitly deals with the meaning (*vis*) of its words", which moreover, is in the context absurd.

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What Buridan means is: "If you wish to put it properly", the point being how properly to express the fact that a formal consequence must remain valid under uniform substitution. King elsewhere very sensibly points out that Buridan, as a nominalist for whom only (some) token sentences exist, must express such criteria with great care.

King's introduction is very full, covering an immense range of material on the whole very well. Occasionally he indulges in quite ridiculous kite-flying, such as the claim (p. 46) that determinate supposition is the same as what Donnellan (*Philosophical Review*, 1966) called a referential and (merely, or non-distributive) confused supposition matches an attributive use, extended from definite descriptions to (presumably) all nounphrases. His idea is this: what is distinctive, for Donnellan, of a referential use of a description in a sentence is that the sentence be true of some particular referent picked out by the speaker, not of whatever satisfies the description. Similarly, says King, 'Some man is F' may be false if some man is not F, even if some *other* men are F, for on that occasion they were not being referred to. Accordingly, " 'Some man' in such sentence refers to some man ... The sentence is false because that particular man is not F" (ibid.).

This is a gross distortion of the theory of supposition. For example, if 'Some man is F' might be false even when some (other) men are F, then it would not be the contradictory of 'No man is F'. There is no warrant in Buridan's text for King's perverse interpretation. In fact, quite the contrary. Supposition is *not* the same as verification: that 'he' in 'Some man is running and he is white' supposits only for those men who are running, does not entail that 'man' does likewise. Buridan says it explicitly: "the antecedent 'man' supposits for all men indifferently, although indefinitely, but the term 'he' does not supposit for all, but only for those for which the sentence 'Some man is running' is true" (p. 150). In this Buridan stood four-square with a century-old tradition, which Peter of Spain, on whom he is ostensibly commenting, made quite clear: "Although in ['A man is running' and 'Some man is running'] 'man' supposits for all men both running and not running, they are true on account of one running man alone. For supposition and making a sentence true are quite different." (*Tractatus*, ed. L. M. de Rijk, p. 82.) Supposition is to be identified neither with verification, nor with reference.

What is perhaps most notably skated over in King's introduction is any historical setting, in Buridan's life or in the fourteenth century in general, for these two treatises. To be sure, facts about Buridan's life are regrettably few. But more can be inferred. For example, in the introduction to his edition of TC, from which King was working, Hubien asks whether there is any internal evidence as to the date of the work. He is struck by a particular example which Buridan uses at one place: *si dicamus 'cardinalis albus est electus in papam' ... et ... 'ego video unum talem hominem', tu concludes 'ergo certe tu vides unum falsum hominem'* (see Hubien's edition, pp. 9, 23). Such a departure from the stock examples of two thousand years in which Socrates repeatedly runs and disputes, needs some explanation. Hubien finds it in the election in 1334-5 of Pope Benedict XII, a Cistercian who would therefore be called "the white Cardinal" from the colour of his habit. Moreover, he was an avowed opponent of Ockham and nominalism. Consequently, one is surprised to find King translating Buridan's example as 'Cardinal White has been elected Pope' (p. 185), adding in a footnote: "Perhaps this was a stock figure in examples, or even a person known to Buridan's students", with no comment on Hubien's argument.

In sum, then, this book marks a marvellous opportunity lost. Two wonderful works, in sore need of modern translation, have not received the care and attention they deserved.

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