Introduction

The principle of non-contradiction is one of the most discussed subjects in the history of philosophy. Though the principle looks simple and does not seem to invite comments, in the history of philosophy it is analysed by many in different ways.

Philosophers and theologians of the fourteenth century showed great interest in it. It was qualified as a primum principium or ‘first principle’. They posed many questions: How should it be formulated? What is its ontological status? etc. They discussed these problems primarily in their commentaries on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, which was part of the curriculum for advanced students.

*Marsilius of Inghen and John Buridan*

In the present paper I shall discuss questions of this kind as they are found in commentaries by the theologian and philosopher Marsilius of Inghen, who lived from ca. 1340 to 1396. He is interesting, first because both he and his master, the philosopher John Buridan (ca. 1298–ca. 1360), challenge Aristotelian schemes of the relation between substance and accident with the help of this principle; second, because Marsilius challenges even the principle itself in virtue of his subjectivistic conception of the time in which contradictory propositions can be uttered. Marsilius criticises the conception of time held by Buridan.

Marsilius is a pupil of Buridan’s, as is well known and as he himself repeatedly says (he often calls Buridan *magister meus* ‘my master’). However, on some noticeable points he does not follow his master. This is

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1 Thanks are due to Dr. J. W. McAllister (Leiden) for the corrections of my English.

seen, for instance, in his commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* on the problem of time. Another example is that Marsilius, unlike Buridan, distinguishes *five* aspects of time: three in a strict sense, namely, present, past and future, and two in a broad sense, namely, possibility and imaginability. The latter time distinction, that is, imaginability, will play a part in this contribution.

The best place to find Marsilius’ conception of the principle of non-contradiction expressed is his question commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, notably in the last five questions on book four. There are other places in Marsilius’ works where he presents his notion of time, for instance, in his commentary on the *Physics*. In the latter work, however, in answering the question whether time is movement, he is interested in the property of succession of time and the way in which time is measurable, not in the subjective nature of the unity of time.

Buridan also wrote a commentary on the *Metaphysics*. Different versions of this commentary have come down to us. He seems to have commented on the text four times. The final version (*ultima lectura*) was also printed in 1509, and has therefore been widely accessible for a long time.

De Rijk has recently published Buridan’s *Lectura Erfordiensis* on the first six books of the *Metaphysics*. This commentary was written before the *Lectura ultima* and shows, de Rijk says, considerable doctrinal differences.

For this study, I consulted Marsilius’ question commentary. He seems to have composed it at the end of his life, between 1386 and 1390. It has been preserved, as far as I know, in nine manuscripts, two of which are

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8 MS Cracow Biblioteka Jagiellonica 708; MS Cracow Biblioteka Jagiellonica 709; MS Cracow Biblioteka Jagiellonica 710; MS Leipzig Universitätsbibliothek 1387; MS Leipzig Universitätsbibliothek 1434; MS Uppsala University Library C 596; MS Vienna Österreichische Nationalbibliothek 5297; MS Vienna Österreichische Nationalbibliothek 5376; MS Wolffenbüttel Herzog-Augustbibliothek 2747. I have chosen MS Cracow 709 (K) as basis manuscript and collated it with MS Vienna 5297 (V), because MS Cracow 709 is also