1. Introduction

Thomas Bradwardine was born shortly before the start of the fourteenth century. While at Merton College in Oxford in the 1320s, he made two seminal contributions to our understanding of the world. One is generally recognised and well known: his reinterpretation of Aristotle on the ratio of velocity to force and resistance, that the second two vary with the square of the first. The other insight is much less well known and usually credited elsewhere. Ralph Strode, friend and neighbour in London of Geoffrey Chaucer later in the century wrote: “Then appeared that prince of modern natural philosophers, Thomas Bradwardine, who first came upon something of value concerning the insolubles.”1 The insolubles are paradoxes or antinomies of language, perhaps most famously expressed in the Liar Paradox: ‘What I am saying is false’. Bradwardine’s solution was later taken up by Albert of Saxony and John Buridan at the University of Paris, and is most well known in Buridan’s version, following discussions by Ernest Moody and Arthur Prior2 and translations by Scott and Hughes.3 Bradwardine’s treatise has not been translated into English, and appeared in print for the first time in 1970, edited from two of the twelve manuscripts known to have survived.4

Even a quarter century after its publication, however, Edith Sylla could write in her essay on Bradwardine in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: “Bradwardine’s other mathematical and logical works [besides *De continuo*] do not seem to have been particularly notable.”  

I wish to challenge this evaluation of the treatise on the insolubles. There was more excuse for this judgment when John Murdoch wrote: “Neither [*De insolubilibus* nor *De incipit et desinit*] has been edited or studied, yet the likelihood is not great that they will eventually reveal themselves to be much more than expositions of the *opinio communis* concerning their subjects.”  

Not so. Buridan’s adaptation of Bradwardine’s solution lays it open to insuperable objections; even Albert of Saxony’s alteration of it makes it unworkable. But Bradwardine’s original idea is not so open to challenge. It is arguably a genuine and original solution.

The problem with a proposition like ‘What I am saying is false’, is that we appear to be able to show not only that it is false, but that, in consequence, it is true as well. Briefly, if it were true that what I was saying was false, it would be false and so not true, hence (assuming it must be either true or false) it is false. But if what I was saying was false, then what I said was true, as well as false. If we think to avoid this contradiction by suggesting that what I said was neither true nor false, the revenge problem hits back through the alternative paradox: ‘What I am saying is not true’. The same *reductio* proof shows that it is not true. The problem for truth-value gap theorists is to explain why I did not speak truly when I anticipated them and said: ‘What I am saying is not true’.  

Bradwardine lays down from the start that every proposition is true or false. But he faces a similar problem. He can show that the paradoxical proposition, ‘What I am saying is false’, is false, by the standard *reductio* proof. How can he avoid what seems an inevitable consequence, that I must then have spoken truly when I said that it was false? Too often, purported solutions to the Liar (as we will see below) concentrate on proofs that it is true, or that it is false. But that is to avoid the real problem. We have a surfeit of proofs, both that it is true and that it is

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