
The Philosopher as Arts Master

Buridan's Career at the University of Paris

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John Buridan's approach to philosophy was profoundly shaped by the institutional setting in which he worked as well as by the explicitly pedagogical aim of his activities as an arts master and teacher of undergraduate students. He was not unique in this regard, as the medieval university and its teaching practices were well established by the fourteenth century. But there are a number of things about his career that are unusual.

First, he remained for his entire career in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Paris, apparently without ever moving on to seek an advanced, doctoral degree in theology, which was the career path taken by other well-known philosophers of the time such as William of Ockham, Walter Burley, and Nicole Oresme. It was probably a deliberate choice on Buridan's part, but why this is we are not sure.¹ What it meant in practical terms is that he would have been responsible for teaching logic and the texts of Aristotle that constituted the arts curriculum (e.g., *Physics*, *De anima*, *Metaphysics*, *Nicomachean Ethics*) to undergraduates from his own Picard Nation. As a result, Buridan's literary remains are mostly in the form of commentaries on Aristotle – line-by-line commentaries that explain the literal meaning of the text and question commentaries that explore its deeper, philosophical significance – both of which originated in the lecture hall.² He also wrote one of the most influential logic textbooks of the medieval period, the *Summulae de dialectica* (*Compendium of Dialectic*), a comprehensive treatment of the topics in logic and semantics that were taught in the schools at the time.³ Buridan's commentaries and textbooks are without exception models of clarity, sound exegesis, and careful argumentation. Copies soon found their way to other, newer universities in northern Italy and eastern Europe, where they served as prototypes for other masters teaching the arts curriculum. As a result, Buridan continued to influence the way philosophy was taught well into the early modern period.

Besides determining the philosophical genres in which he worked, Buridan's decision to remain an arts master meant that he had to be sensitive to the curricular mandates of the other faculties at Paris, especially the faculty of theology. Relations between the two faculties had become fraught in the latter half of the thirteenth century, culminating in the Condemnation of 1277, in

which the Bishop of Paris declared certain Aristotelian propositions defended by certain arts masters to be inconsistent with revealed truth.⁴ The Condemnation cast a long shadow on later medieval philosophy, though it did not succeed in silencing philosophical discussion of ultimate questions about God and human nature. Buridan himself is circumspect in his approach to the relation between philosophy and theology: while conceding pride of place to theology, he at the same time establishes a domain for philosophy to operate independently, approximating what we might today think of as the secular realm. He says that theology takes precedence over metaphysics, the highest form of philosophy, but theology properly concerns what follows from church decretals and articles of faith, that is, from truths that are believed quite apart from the evidence we have for them.⁵ But if we “leave the faith aside [*fide circumscripta*],” metaphysics stands as the preeminent form of human wisdom and ordering principle (*ordinatrix*) of all the other sciences, including everything taught in the other faculties. So why does philosophy belong to the “lowest” faculty, the faculty of arts, where undergraduates are educated? Buridan jokes that the low regard for arts and “artists [*artista*],” might be due to “the wealth of those who profess in the other faculties,” or perhaps to the fact that its curriculum includes the common or primary subjects of grammar, logic, and rhetoric. But along with such “trivial” arts, he reminds us that his faculty also teaches (1) natural philosophy, giving it precedence over medicine; (2) moral philosophy, giving it precedence over law; and (3) metaphysics, giving it precedence over all other forms of inquiry save revealed theology,⁶ which Buridan regards as kind of wisdom (*sapientia*) but not knowledge (*scientia*), a term he reserves for what can be rationally demonstrated on the basis of sense, memory, and experience. Given the Condemnation of 1277 and other institutional efforts by church authorities to limit the autonomy of philosophy in medieval universities, this is a remarkable thing to say.⁷

When philosophical inquiry is understood in this way, it creates a space, distinct from revealed theology, where philosophy (or, more properly, metaphysics) can address questions “about God and divinity.” The boundary is clear – “metaphysics considers only what can be proved and concluded deductively or inductively using demonstrative reason”⁸ – but it enables Buridan to consider everything from the divine attributes (omnipotence, eternity, freedom) to the providential structure of creation and the relation between human happiness and final beatitude, all from a human, creaturely perspective.⁹ Typically, he does not explicate matters of doctrine or challenge what the theologians say about God, but rather uses theological considerations to define the limits of philosophical inquiry. Thus, he famously defends the reliability of human empirical knowledge against his Parisian contemporary, Nicholas of Autrecourt, who used the doctrine of divine omnipotence to undermine confidence in the accepted Aristotelian accounts of perceptual,

causal, and inductive knowledge. Buridan's reply charges Autrecourt with an *ignoratio elenchi*, agreeing with Autrecourt that it follows from divine omnipotence that God could always deceive us in ways we could never detect, but denying that this is relevant to the justification of empirical knowledge, which is grounded in *a posteriori* considerations such as rational judgment and the evidence of sense, memory, and experience. Besides confirming the mandate of arts masters to teach philosophy via Aristotelian texts, this pointed the way to a definitive sphere of operations for philosophers, independent of revealed theology.

The second way in which Buridan was different was that he remained a secular master for his entire career rather than joining a religious order such as the Dominicans or Franciscans. Moving on to a higher faculty would have been natural enough for someone licensed to teach in the faculty of arts, since mendicant orders taught undergraduate novices at their own custodial schools, sending them to university only for graduate study. But in the larger context of fourteenth-century philosophy, this meant that Buridan was able to develop his views independently of the respective authorities invoked by the Dominican and Franciscan traditions, which were frequently in conflict. Thus, he was under no obligation, fraternal or otherwise, to defend the teachings of Thomas Aquinas on the Dominican side or those of Duns Scotus on the Franciscan side. What he does instead is help himself to insights and arguments from both sides, as needed, to develop his own positions. For example, he follows Thomas Aquinas in defending an intellectualist account of human free choice, arguing that whenever it chooses, the will is always motivated by reasons under the aspect of goodness. But he leavens this with the voluntarist consideration that as long as reason is not 100 percent certain about the best course of action, the will remains free not to accept it but rather to defer its choice in order to reflect on the matter further:¹⁰

[T]he freedom according to which the will is able not to accept what has been presented to it as good, or not reject what is presented to it as bad, is of great benefit to us in the direction of our lives, so much so because in many things in which some *prima facie* aspects of goodness are apparent, thousands of evils often lie hidden, either as adjoined to them or as consequences of them. For this reason, accepting what appeared good would be inappropriate and detrimental to us. And so as well, what seems *prima facie* bad sometimes has hidden goodness, on account of which it would be bad for us to have rejected it.

This is not, to be sure, the same as the Scotistic idea that the will is an autonomous power able to transcend our natural and rational inclinations; Buridan clearly understands the will as a manifestation of our rational nature, not as a power belonging to an order distinct from it. Still, it represents a significant modification of the intellectualist position because it grants the will

autonomy over the intellect in a very wide range of practical cases, where free choice is exercised in the absence of decisive reasons.¹¹ Buridan is thereby able to respond to Article 169 of the Condemnation of 1277, which had criticized the view (held by Aquinas, among others) that the will cannot knowingly act against reason, by reminding us of the uncertainty of moral life and making a virtue of the will's ability to defer its acceptance or rejection of reason's dictates.¹²

We see a similar effort to harmonize opposing views in the case of Buridan's account of the cognition of singular objects. Duns Scotus had introduced the idea that not all human cognition occurs via a species or representative likeness abstracted from an object, which is the Aristotelian position defended by Thomas Aquinas; rather, there is a mode of cognition that is 'intuitive' in the sense that it provides an unmediated awareness of the existence of its object.¹³ The motivation for the doctrine was theological insofar as Scotus thought that such direct awareness would be the mode of cognition enjoyed in beatitude, when we finally see God face to face, no longer "through a glass darkly" (1 Cor. 13:12), and, furthermore, that if beatitude is our natural end, the power of intuitive cognition ought to be present among our intellectual and sensory powers in this life.¹⁴ Buridan accepts the doctrine, but he does not argue for it theologically, like Scotus, for the simple reason that as an arts master he was not permitted to address theological topics. What he does instead is provide an entirely secular account of the same idea, in terms of our ability to cognize an object as it exists before us, "in our prospect [*in prospectu*]." In this mode of cognition, he says, "things are perceived and judged to exist in the way they are perceived as existing in the prospect of the person cognizing them," such that our judgment that a singular entity exists "could not be proven more evidently than by the fact that it appears in the prospect of sense," that is, "just as you are present to me."¹⁵ This is the basis for all singular cognition according to Buridan. It is the initial presentation of an object to the cognizing agent with its attributes "confused [*confusa*]," or fused together in their natural and unabstracted form. The same object may be further discriminated by the intellect as a singular of a certain type, or as representing a universal or common nature, but this requires the further act of abstracting a species from the initial presentation. Accordingly, the difference between divine and human cognition is that we lack the ability to understand everything there is to know about an object from its mere presence before us, whereas "God himself cognizes everything most distinctly and determinately, as it were in a singular manner, because he has everything *per se* perfectly in his prospect."¹⁶

Buridan is not so accommodating of views he disagrees with, of course, and in cases of conflict, he usually defends what he takes to be the simplest account of the phenomenon at hand. Thus, he famously rejects the theory that propositions have their own significates, known as *complexe significabilia*, which serve as the proper object of scientific knowledge – a view originally developed by the Franciscan theologian Adam Wodeham, but which Buridan

encountered in a slightly different version defended by the Augustinian theologian Gregory of Rimini in his *Sentences* commentary delivered at Paris in the early 1340s.¹⁷ In his refutation of Gregory's view, Buridan is adamant that no explanatory advantage is to be gained by positing an additional semantic layer of sentence-meanings beyond categorematic terms and the things they signify; therefore, we may dispose of them with the razor.¹⁸

If we can explain everything by positing fewer, we should not, in the natural order of things, posit many, because it is pointless to do with many what can be done with fewer. Now everything can be easily explained without positing such *complexe significabilia*, which are not substances, or accidents, or subsistent per se, or inherent in any other thing. Therefore, they should not be posited.

Throughout his writings, Buridan's philosophical voice as an arts master, working within the curricular parameters of his faculty and engaging in theological questions only when they have secular consequences, remains consistent, clear, and distinctive.

In recent decades, we have learned more about Buridan's contemporary influences and about the intellectual milieu of mid-fourteenth-century Paris.¹⁹ This has enabled us to correct mistakes in earlier histories of the period, such as Pierre Duhem's notion that there was a "school of Buridan" at Paris consisting of Albert of Saxony, Themon Judeus, Nicole Oresme, and Marsilius of Inghen, all of whom Duhem claimed "faithfully received and developed his teachings." We now know that despite being at the University of Paris around the same time, these thinkers had significantly different views on a number of questions (an unsurprising fact given that they were philosophers) and, in any case, were segregated institutionally because they belonged to different nations at the university.²⁰ This does not mean that they were not familiar with each other's views, of course, just that the similarities Duhem noticed proved to be largely superficial. Among earlier authors, Buridan certainly had access to the *Summa logicae* of William of Ockham, though he never mentions Ockham by name, and his own *Summulae de dialectica*, while certainly following the nominalist *via moderna* inaugurated by Ockham, frames its teachings more traditionally in terms of the logic curriculum presented in the *Summulae logicales* of Peter of Spain.²¹ Likewise, Book 1, q. 8, of Buridan's *Physics* commentary makes Buridan's opposition to the Ockhamist denial of quantitative forms explicit, but there are almost certainly other authors in the mix whose arguments Buridan is targeting, such as those of his Parisian contemporary, Albert of Saxony.²² Getting the full dialectical picture will require closer study of more sources. Another author influencing Buridan's natural philosophy is the English logician Walter Burley, who is mentioned by name on several occasions. Buridan seems to have become acquainted with the controversy on the intension and remission of forms via

Burley's *Tractatus primus* and *De intensione et remissione*, though his own treatment of the problem in his commentaries on the *Physics* and *On Generation and Corruption* is probably aimed at another Parisian contemporary, Nicole Oresme, who defended a modified version of Burley's position.²³ There are also cases where the influence comes from an unexpected quarter. The *Nicomachean Ethics* commentary of Gerald of Odo, a Franciscan theologian and opponent of Ockham who eventually became Minister General of the Order, is clearly a source text for Buridan's own lengthy commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, his longest work by far other than the *Summulae de dialectica*.²⁴ Buridan's *Nicomachean Ethics* commentary is also noteworthy for the extensive use it makes of an ancient authority, Seneca, whose Stoic teachings he interprets not as opposed to Aristotelian moral philosophy but as perfective of it.²⁵

Among medieval authorities named by Buridan are Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas ("*Beatus Thomas*," as Aquinas was canonized in 1323), Giles of Rome, and Robert Grosseteste ("*Lincolniensis*"). He is also familiar with the writings of Roger Bacon on the propagation of species through a medium, and of John Pecham on perspectivism, though he does not mention either by name – typically, the arguments of lesser-known figures are prefaced by the formulaic *aliqui dicunt* (= some say) or, in the case of Pecham, by *perspectivi dicunt*.²⁶ Scholars have been able to identify possible opponents for two of Buridan's early treatises: *On Dependence, Agreement, and Difference* (c. 1332) is directed against the realist theory of a certain "*Picardus*" or Picard master, thought to be Egidius of Feno (Buridan's other opponent in the treatise – an "*Anglicus*" or arts master from the English-German Nation – is not known),²⁷ whereas the *Question on Points* (c. 1335) is very likely replying to Michael of Montecalario, a master from the French Nation whose *Determinatio de puncto* attacked Buridan's views on indivisibles and the composition of continuous magnitudes.²⁸ As always, Buridan's discussions point to a rich tapestry of philosophical debate occurring in the background, most of which, again, awaits discovery by scholars.

1.1 Works

As mentioned above, Buridan primarily wrote philosophical commentaries on Aristotle's works, which formed the basis of the arts curriculum in fourteenth-century Paris. Most of these were developed as lecture courses in which Buridan offered his undergraduate students a close reading of the meaning of the text in the first part of his lecture, followed by a more detailed discussion of its philosophical implications in the second part, where he would also develop his own interpretations and refute others. The former survive in the genre of *expositiones* or literal commentaries and the latter as *quaestiones*,

which are commentaries organized around a series of questions or problems raised by the text. Many of these questions were standardized and routinely addressed by other masters lecturing on the same text, such as the question of whether the human intellect is able to understand itself, which Buridan considers in Book III, q. 9 of his commentary on Aristotle's *De anima*.²⁹ His answer is that the intellect can indeed understand itself, but only discursively, in the course of thinking about other things, and not a priori and through its essence, like God.³⁰

Buridan frequently lectured more than once on a text; for example, his *De anima* commentary describes itself as his "third or final set of lectures [*tertiam sive ultima lectura*]" on *De anima*. We have hardly any surviving manuscripts of the first two versions, but the third version exists in over twenty manuscripts scattered across European libraries. This suggests that the relation between earlier and later versions was one of replacement rather than succession, with the final version offering the most settled or complete rendition of Buridan's teaching.³¹ Like all good teachers, Buridan sometimes reuses the same material in different contexts when that is pedagogically appropriate. Thus, his lengthy discussion of how we cognize universals vs. singulars in Book III, q. 8 of his *De anima* commentary is reprised in Book I, q. 7 of his *Physics* commentary, which was probably composed slightly later.³² It is possible to date Buridan's works relative to each other through internal references, so we can sometimes infer their possible ordering. There are also occasional references to datable events such as the 1347 Condemnation of John of Mirecourt mentioned in Book III, q. 11 of the final version of Buridan's *De anima* commentary, giving us a terminus a quo for this work (assuming the reference is not a later interpolation). But for the most part, our grasp of the chronology of his writings is fairly speculative.³³

Appendix

Bibliography of Buridan's Known Works

The following is a list of Buridan's known works, along with modern editions and translations, if available.

Independent Treatises

On the Difference between Genus and Species
(De diversitate generis ad speciem)

This text has been lost.

On Dependence, Agreement, and Difference

Edition

Dekker, Dirk-Jan. 2004. "John Buridan's Treatise, De dependentiis, diversitatibus, et convenientiis: An Edition." *Vivarium* 42.1: 109–49.

On the Difference between Universals and Individuals

Edition

Szyller, Slawomir (ed.). 1987. "Johannis Buridani, *Tractatus de differentia universalis ad individuum*." *Przegląd Tomistyczny* 3: 137–78.

On Relations (De relationibus)

Question on Points (Quaestio de puncto)

Edition

Zoubov, Vassili (ed.). 1961. "Jean Buridan et les concepts du point au quatorzième siècle" *Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 5: 63–95.

Logical Writings

Compendium of Dialectic (Summulae de dialectica)

Edition

Bos, E. P. (ed.). 1994. *Johannes Buridanus, Summulae: In Praedicamenta*. Artistarium 10/3. Nijmegen: Ingenium.

de Rijk, L. M. (ed.). 1995. *Johannes Buridanus, Summulae de praedicabilibus*. Artistarium 10/2. Nijmegen: Ingenium.

- (ed.). 2001. *Johannes Buridanus, Summulae de demonstrationibus*. Artistarium 10/8. Groningen: Haren.
- Green-Pedersen, N. J. (ed.). 2013. *Johannes Buridanus: Summulae de locis dialecticis*. Artistarium 10/6. Turnhout: Brepols.
- Pironet, Fabienne (ed.). 2004. *Johannes Buridanus: Summulae de practica sophismatum*. Artistarium 10/9. Turnhout: Brepols.
- Spruyt, Joke (ed.). 2010. *Johannes Buridanus, Summulae de syllogismis*. Artistarium 10/5. Turnhout: Brepols.
- van der Lecq, Ria (ed.). 1995. *Johannes Buridanus: Summulae de suppositionibus*. Artistarium 10/4. Turnhout: Brepols.
- (ed.). 2005. *Johannes Buridanus: Summulae de propositionibus*. Artistarium 10/1. Turnhout: Brepols.

Translation

- Klima, Gyula (trans.). 2001. *John Buridan: "Summulae de dialectica."* Yale Library of Medieval Philosophy. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Treatise on Consequences (Tractatus de consequentiis)

Edition

- Hubien, Hubert (ed.). 1976. *Iohannis Buridani Tractatus de consequentiis*. Philosophes Médiévaux XVI. Louvain: Publications universitaires.

Translation

- Read, Stephen (trans.). 2015. *John Buridan: Treatise on Consequences*. With an introduction by Stephen Read and an editorial introduction by Hubert Hubien. New York: Fordham University Press.

Question Commentaries

On Aristotle's *Categories*

Edition

- Schneider, Johannes (ed.). 1983. *Iohannes Buridanus Quaestiones in Praedicamenta*. Munich: Beck.

On Aristotle's *De interpretatione*

Edition

- van der Lecq, Ria (ed.). 1983. *Johannes Buridanus, Questiones longe super librum Perihermeneias*. Artistarium 4. Nijmegen: Ingenium.

On Aristotle's *Prior Analytics*

Edition

Hubien, Hubert (ed.). "Iohannis Buridani Quaestiones in duos libros Aristotelis Priorum Analyticorum." Unpublished typescript.

On Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*

Edition

Hubien, Hubert (ed.). "Iohannis Buridani Quaestiones in duos libros Aristotelis Posteriorum Analyticorum." Unpublished typescript.

Translation

Economos, Ariane. 2009. "*Intellectus and Induction: Three Aristotelian Commentators on the Cognition of First Principles, Including an Original Translation of John Buridan's Quaestiones in duos Aristotelis libros posteriorum analyticorum.*" PhD Dissertation, Fordham University. <https://research.library.fordham.edu/dissertations/AAI3377044>.

On Aristotle's *Topics*

Edition

Green-Pedersen, Niels-Jorgen (ed.). 2008. *Quaestiones Topicorum*. Turnhout: Brepols.

On Aristotle's *Sophistical Refutations*

Edition

van der Lecq, Ria, and H. A. G. Braakhuis (eds.). 1994. *Quaestiones Elencorum*. Artistarium Supplementa 9. Nijmegen: Ingenium.

On Aristotle's *Physics*

Editions

Books I–II

Streijger, Michiel, and Paul J. J. M. Bakker (eds.). 2015. *John Buridan, "Quaestiones super octo libros Physicorum Aristotelis (secundum ultimam lecturam), Libri I–II."* With an introduction by Johannes M. M. H. Thijssen and a guide to the text by Edith D. Sylla. History of Science and Medicine Library 50. Medieval and Early Modern Science 25. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Books III–IV

Strejiger, Michiel, and Paul J. J. M. Bakker (eds.). 2016. *John Buridan, "Quaestiones super octo libros Physicorum Aristotelis (secundum ultimam lecturam), Libri III–IV."* With a guide to the text by Edith D. Sylla. History of Science and Medicine Library 55. Medieval and Early Modern Science 27. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Early Printed Edition

Buridan, John. 1509. *Subtilissimae Quaestiones super octo Physicorum libros Aristotelis*. Paris. Repr. 1964 as *Kommentar zur Aristotelischen Physik*. Frankfurt a.M.: Minerva.

On Aristotle's *On the Heavens*

Editions

Moody, E. A. (ed.). 1942. *Iohannis Buridani Quaestiones super libris quattuor De caelo et mundo*. Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America.
 Patar, Benoît (ed.). 1996. *Ioannis Buridani Expositio et Quaestiones in Aristotelis De caelo*. Philosophes Médiévaux 33. Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, and Paris: Éditions de l'Institut Supérieur de Philosophie/Éditions Peeters.

On Aristotle's *On Generation and Corruption*

Edition

Strejiger, Michiel, Paul J. J. M. Bakker, and Johannes M. M. H. Thijssen (eds.). 2010. *John Buridan, "Quaestiones super libros De generatione et corruptione Aristotelis."* Critical edition with an introduction. History of Science and Medicine Library 17. Medieval and Early Modern Science 14. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Edition and Translation

Klima, Gyula, Peter G. Sobol, Peter Hartman, and Jack Zupko (eds. and trans.). 2023. *John Buridan's Questions on Aristotle's De Anima – "Iohannis Buridani Quaestiones in Aristotelis De Anima."* Historical-Analytical Studies on Nature, Mind, and Action 9. Cham: Springer.

On Aristotle's *On the Movement of Animals*

Edition

Scott, Frederick, and Herman Shapiro (eds.). 1967. "John Buridan's *De motibus animalium*." *Isis* 58: 533–52.

On Aristotle's *Metaphysics*

Early Printed Edition

Buridan, John. 1588 (actually 1518). *In Metaphysicen Aristotelis Quaestiones argutissimae*. Paris. Rpr. 1964 as *Kommentar zur Aristotelischen Metaphysik*. Frankfurt a. M.: Minerva.

On Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*

Early Printed Edition

Buridan, John. 1513. *Quaestiones super decem libros Ethicorum Aristotelis ad Nicomachum*. Paris. Rpr. 1968 as *Super decem libros Ethicorum*. Frankfurt a. M.: Minerva.

Translation of Book x

Kilcullen, John (ed. and trans.). 2001. "Jean Buridan, Questions on Book X of the Ethics." In *The Cambridge Translations of Medieval Philosophical Texts. Volume II: Ethics and Political Philosophy*, edited by Arthur Stephen McGrade, John Kilcullen, and Matthew Kempshall. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 498–586.

On Porphyry's *Isagoge*

Edition

Tatarzynski, Ryszard (ed.). 1986. "Jan Buridan, Komentarz do Isagogi Porfiriusza." *Przegląd Tomistyczny* 2: 111–95.

On Pseudo-Albert the Great's *On the Secrets of Women*

Edition

Beneduce, Chiara, and Paul J. J. M. Bakker. 2019. "John Buridan's *Quaestiones de secretis mulierum*: Edition and Introduction." *Vivarium* 57: 127–81.

Notes

- 1 The details of his life are scant, but from them, we can infer that Buridan was born around 1300 in Picardy and studied in Paris, where he received his MA and license to teach in the 1320s. He was supported by a number of benefices or stipends over the course of his long career, including one reserved for needy students. He served twice as rector of the University of Paris, in 1327/28 and again in 1340. He is last mentioned in the historical record in 1358 when he helped resolve a jurisdictional dispute between the Picard and English Nations at the university. He was probably dead by 1361 because in that year, one of his benefices was awarded to another person. For further background, see Zupko 2018, section 1.

- 2 In fact, their origins in the give-and-take of the classroom setting occasionally come into view. In his *Questions on Porphyry's Isagoge*, for example, Buridan explains to his audience that he must sometimes pursue elementary questions for the sake of his less-experienced students:

quaestiones quaerentes de numero vel praedicatorum vel praedicabilium, praedicamentorum vel principiorum naturalium, vel elementorum, etc., sunt valdes difficiles et taediosae specialiter iuvenibus, quibus oportet explicare cavillationes logicas et sophisticas, de quibus propecti non amplius curant. Ideo propter beans ego pono aliquas conclusiones faciles et trufaticas.

[Questions asking about the number of predicates or predicables, or categories, or natural principles, or elements, etc., are exceedingly difficult and tedious especially for younger students, for whom it is necessary to explain logical and sophistical quibbles that no longer concern advanced students. And so, for the sake of the beginners, I propose some easy and truistic conclusions.]

(*Quaestiones in Isagogen Porphyrii* 14: 183, ll. 2204–09)

Elsewhere, Buridan tells us that the word ‘beanus’ refers to someone who “has been at Paris for only a year [*Beanus dicitur, quia solo anno fuit Parisius*]” (*Quaestiones in Praedicamenta* 3: 27, ll. 325–26).

- 3 Indeed, the English translation of this work (Klima 2001) prints to over 1,000 pages!
- 4 See Thijssen 2018.
- 5 *Quaestiones in Metaphysicen Aristotelis* 1.2, 4ra–rb: “theologia vero habet pro principiis articulos creditos absque evidientia et considerat ultra ex quaecumque ex huiusmodi articulis possunt deduci.”
- 6 *Quaestiones in Metaphysicen Aristotelis* 1.2, 4rb:

Quare autem nostra facultas sit infima? Potest dici quod hoc est propter divitias eorum qui alias profitent quia etiam nostra facultas est valde communis. Continet enim grammaticam, logicam, rhetoricam, et ratione harum ipsa non meretur dici principalis. Sed cum illis artibus ipsa etiam continet naturalem philosophiam secundum quam est principalis medicinae et moralem philosophiam secundam quam sit principalis legum et metaphysicam secundam quam est principalis simpliciter.

- 7 Buridan is nothing if not respectful of curricular boundaries. For example, he allows that even though there are intellectual habits infused in us by God, he will not discuss them because Aristotle does not mention them and it does not pertain to the faculty of arts to debate them. See *Quaestiones in Metaphysicen Aristotelis* 1.1, 3rb: “dico quod metaphysica sive sapientia est omnium virtutum intellectualium optima et nobilissima, tamen excipio habitus intellectuales nobis a deo supernaturaliter infusos quia de hiis non intromisit se Aristotelis nec pertinet de illis disputare ad istam facultatem.”
- 8 *Quaestiones in Metaphysicen Aristotelis* 1.2, f. 4ra: “metaphysica non considerat de deo et de divinis nisi ea quae possunt probari et ratione demonstrativa concludi seu induci.”
- 9 For discussion, see Zupko 2003, 139–45. Thomas Aquinas seems to understand the difference between philosophical and theological inquiry in a similar fashion:

“Although philosophy considers all existing things according to concepts [*rationes*] taken from creatures, there must be another science, which considers existing things according to concepts taken from the inspiration of the divine light” (*In I Sent.*, Prol., q. 1, a. 1, ad 1; cf. *In De Trin.*, q.5, aa.1–4).

- 10 *Quaestiones super decem libros Ethicorum Aristotelis ad Nicomachum* III.3 42[*lxii*]va:

libertas secundum quam voluntas potest non acceptare quod sibi praesentatum fuerit sub ratione boni, vel non refutare quod praesentatum est sub ratione mali, prodest valde nobis ad vitae directionem, pro tanto quia in multis in quibus prima facie sunt aliquae rationes bonitatis apparentes, latent saepe mille malitiae vel annexae vel consequentes. Propter quod acceptare illud quod apparebat bonum esset nobis inconveniens et damnosum, et sic etiam, quod prima facie videtur esse malum habet aliquando bonitatem latentem, propter quam refutasse illud esset nobis malum.

- 11 Indeed, this is the most plausible explanation of the example that has come down to us known as “Buridan’s Ass,” where a donkey starves to death because it has no reason to choose between two equidistant and equally tempting piles of hay (this particular example is nowhere to be found in Buridan’s writings, but there are versions of it going back to Greek antiquity). The most plausible explanation is that it originated as a parody of his account of free choice by modern critics, who found absurd the notion that the will’s freedom could consist in *not* choosing, that is, deferring its act until the intellect comes up with absolutely decisive reasons.
- 12 Buridan actually cites Article 169 in the course of developing his position (*Quaestiones super decem libros Ethicorum Aristotelis ad Nicomachum* VII.7: 144vb). For discussion, see Zupko 2003, 253–60.
- 13 See Duns Scotus, *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, q. 6, a. 1; q. 7, a. 2; q. 13, a. 2 (Scotus 1975, 135–37, 162–72, 290–96). The doctrine was also defended by another well-known Franciscan, William of Ockham: see *Ordinatio* I, prologue, q. 1, a. 1 (*Opera Theologica* I: 31; 69).
- 14 See Dumont 1989.
- 15 *Quaestiones in Metaphysicam Aristotelis* IV.9, f. 19vb: “res percipiuntur et iudicantur esse secundum quod percipiuntur tanquam in prospectu cognoscentis . . . sicut tu esses praesens mihi”; *Quaestiones in duos libros Aristotelis Posteriorum Analyticorum* I.4: “non posset evidentius probari quam quia apparet in prospectu sensus.”
- 16 *Quaestiones in Aristotelis De anima* (ed. and trans. Klima, Sobol, Hartman, and Zupko 2023), III.8, par. 28: “ipse Deus quasi per modum singularem cognoscit omnia distinctissime et determinatissime, scilicet quia habet omnia perfecte in prospectu suo per se.”
- 17 For more on Gregory, see Schabel and Girard 2022.
- 18 *Quaestiones in Metaphysicam Aristotelis* V.7, 31ra: “Si possumus omnia salvare per pauciora, nos non debemus in naturalibus ponere plura, quia frustra fit per plura quod potest fieri per pauciora. Modo omnia possunt salvare facilliter non ponenda talia complexe significabilia quae nec sint substantiae, nec accidentia, nec per se subsistant, nec aliis inhaerant. Ideo talia non sunt ponenda.”
- 19 Until fairly recently the relative lack of texts and documents from the University of Paris between 1326 and 1340, corresponding to the first half of Buridan’s career, has been an obstacle to developing a robust intellectual history of the period. But even so, as William Courtenay notes, “[i]dentifying formative intellectual relationships in medieval Paris is difficult because it could occur outside the normal structures of the faculty of arts, because it was rarely acknowledged directly, and because in most

- cases it was probably the result of listening and reading rather than personal contact” (2004, 11).
- 20 See Thijssen 2004. Buridan belonged to the Picard Nation, Oresme to the Norman Nation, and Albert, Themon, and Marsilius to the Anglo-German Nation. Because he did not receive his BA until 1362, Marsilius may not even have arrived in Paris before Buridan’s death, which probably occurred between 1358 and 1361. Thijssen also shows that *contra* both Ockham and Albert of Saxony, Buridan held that substance and quantity (or what he calls ‘magnitude [*magnitudo*]’) are really distinct and that quantity cannot be explained by the local motion of the parts of a substance.
 - 21 For discussion, see Zupko 2003, chs. 1–9. It should be said that despite borrowing the structure of Peter’s old textbook, Buridan completely renovates the logic curriculum as well as improving upon Ockham’s logic in several respects, for example, by treating simple supposition as a variety of material supposition and thereby reducing the basic kinds of supposition to two, personal and material. See *Summulae de dialectica* 4.3.2 (trans. Klima 2001, 253).
 - 22 *Quaestiones super octo libros Physicorum Aristotelis* 1.8 (ed. Streijger and Bakker 2015, 79–92) and n. 20 above. See also the helpful discussion of sources for this question in Edith Sylla’s *Guide to the Text*, pp. c–cviii. For Ockham’s influence on Buridan more generally, see Dewender 2016.
 - 23 See Caroti 2004 and Biard 2002.
 - 24 As Thomas Dewender puts it, “Buridan takes topics, arguments, and even whole passages from Odo’s text” (2016, 177).
 - 25 See Walsh 1966a, 1975, 1986; Zupko 2013.
 - 26 *Quaestiones in Aristotelis De anima* (ed. and trans. Klima, Sobol, Hartman, and Zupko 2023): for Bacon, see 11.18, par. 52; 11.24, par. 20; for Pecham, see 11.16, par. 21; 11.17, par. 10; 11.18, par. 16.
 - 27 See Dekker 2004, 110.
 - 28 See Courtenay 2008, 270, n. 8, and Celeyrette 2004. For discussion of Buridan’s position, see Zupko 1993.
 - 29 *Quaestiones in Aristotelis De anima* III.9, par. 1 (ed. and trans. Klima, Sobol, Hartman, and Zupko 2023). Like many questions, q. 9 is occasioned by a lemma from Aristotle’s text, in this case his remark at *De an.* III.4 429b9 that once the intellect is able to grasp its objects as a knower, “it is able to understand itself [*ipse autem se ipsum tunc potest intelligere*].” For the later medieval standardization of topic questions, see Christensen 2018.
 - 30 Even so, Buridan argues that the intellect must be able to elicit a simple substance concept of itself from the complex concept it forms discursively, on pain of infinite regress. For the details, see *Quaestiones in Aristotelis De anima* (ed. and trans. Klima, Sobol, Hartman, and Zupko 2023): 111.9, par. 17, n. 84.
 - 31 Buridan occasionally remarks that his views on a topic have changed – for example, his treatment of alethic paradoxes in *Summulae* IX.8, Seventh Sophism (trans. Klima 2001, 965–69) – but in general he does not refer to his earlier lectures in the final or “ultimate” versions that have come down to us.
 - 32 See *Quaestiones in Aristotelis De anima* III.8 (ed. and trans. Klima, Sobol, Hartman, and Zupko 2023) and *Quaestiones super octo libros Physicorum Aristotelis* 1.7 (ed. Streijger and Bakker 2015, 59–78).
 - 33 Buridan’s independent treatises (see Appendix) are thought to originate from early in his career. Dirk-Jan Dekker, editor of the treatise *On Dependence, Agreement, and Difference*, believes that this treatise was part of a debate between several arts masters that occurred between 1331 and 1334 (Dekker 2004, 109).