

William of Ockham
De insolubilibus.

Summa logicae, III.3.46

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On Insolubles

- (1) About insolubles, you need to know that some things are called “insolubles” by sophisters not because they can in no way be solved but rather because they are solved [only] with difficulty.
- 5 (2) Thus, you need to know that sophisms are “insoluble” when, by apparent consequences that seem to be governed by necessary rules, from some contingent proposition its opposite is inferred. They are called “insolubles” because it is difficult to block such consequences.
- 10 (3) Such arguments cannot occur except when a human act regards (i) the term ‘false’ (or some similar [term]) affirmatively, or (ii) the term ‘true’ (or some similar [term]) negatively — as is the case for ‘Socrates is saying a falsehood’ (*Sortes dicit falsum*) and ‘Socrates is not saying a truth’ (*Sortes non dicit verum*).
- 15 (4) An insoluble occurs like this: Let Socrates begin to say ‘Socrates is saying a falsehood’, so that he is saying nothing else. And then I ask: Is Socrates saying a truth or is Socrates saying a falsehood?
- (5) If you say Socrates is saying a truth, he is not saying [anything] but the proposition ‘Socrates is saying a falsehood’; therefore ‘Socrates is saying a falsehood’ is true. Consequently, Socrates is saying a falsehood. So, if
- 20 he is saying a truth he is saying a falsehood.
- (6) If you say Socrates is saying a falsehood, therefore ‘Socrates is saying a falsehood’ is true; and Socrates is saying that; therefore, Socrates is saying that which is true. Consequently, Socrates is saying a truth. So, posit-
- 25 (7) This argument is called insoluble, because it is solved [only] with difficulty.
- (8) For the solution of this and all other [insolubles], you need to know that such a contingent proposition, from which [a proposition] incompatible with it should be inferred, either has (a) the term ‘false’ (or some similar [term]) or (b) the term ‘true’ (or some similar [term]).
- 30 (9) If (a) the former, [the proposition] has to be affirmative, and it has to be said that it is false. Thus, if Socrates begins to say ‘Socrates is saying a falsehood’, it has to be said that this proposition is false. But if he began to say ‘Socrates is not saying a falsehood’, such an apparent argument could not
- 35 be made.
- (10) If however (b) the proposition contains the term ‘true’ (or some similar [term]), [the proposition] has to be negative. And in that case it is to be granted that the proposition is true. For example, if Socrates begins to say ‘Socrates is not saying a truth’, it is to be granted that this is true.

40 (11) And if it is argued: If this is true: ‘Socrates is not saying a
truth’, and Socrates says this proposition, therefore Socrates says a true propo-
sition — it is to be said that the consequence ‘Socrates says this proposition;
and this proposition is true; therefore, Socrates says a true proposition’ is not
45 valid. The reason for this denial is that in the proposition ‘Socrates is not say-
ing a truth’ the predicate cannot supposit for the whole proposition of which it
is a part, although not precisely on account of its being its part.

 (12) Therefore, the proposition ‘Socrates is not saying a truth’ is
equivalent to ‘Socrates is not saying a truth *other than* “Socrates is not saying
a truth”’. Therefore, just as it does not follow: ‘This is true; and Socrates says
50 this; therefore, he says a true proposition other than this’, so it does not fol-
low: ‘Socrates says the proposition “Socrates is not saying a truth”; and this is
true; therefore, Socrates is saying a truth’. This is because, as was said, these
two are equivalent: ‘Socrates is not saying a truth’ and ‘Socrates is not saying
a truth other than “Socrates is not saying a truth.”’

55 (13) It is to be replied to the preceding argument¹ in the same way,
analogously. For when Socrates begins to say ‘Socrates is saying a falsehood’,
and it is asked “Is Socrates saying a truth or a falsehood”?, it is to be said that
Socrates says *neither* a truth nor a falsehood, just as it is to be granted that he
says neither a truth nor a falsehood other than this. And in that case it does not
60 follow: ‘This is true: “Socrates is saying a falsehood”; and Socrates is saying
this; therefore, Socrates is saying a falsehood’, just as it does not follow: ‘Soc-
rates is saying this; and this is false; therefore, Socrates is saying a falsehood
other than this’. This is because these two propositions are equivalent: ‘Socra-
tes is saying a falsehood’ and ‘Socrates is saying a falsehood other than this’,
65 because of the fact that in ‘Socrates is saying a falsehood’ the predicate cannot
supposit for this proposition.

 (14) And if is said: Here the argument is from an inferior to a supe-
rior without negation and without distribution; therefore, the consequence is a
good one — it is to be said that the consequence² is not valid except when the
70 superior in the consequent can supposit for the inferior. Thus if, in ‘A man is
an animal’, ‘animal’ could not supposit for a man, the consequence ‘Socrates
is a man; therefore, Socrates is an animal’ would not be valid. But in ‘Socrates
is saying a falsehood’, the predicate cannot supposit for the whole proposition;
therefore, ‘Socrates is saying this falsehood; therefore, Socrates is saying a
75 falsehood’ does not follow.

¹ See para. (4).

² That is, the consequence at the beginning of this sentence, in para. (14), not to the
argument being referred to, back in para. (13)

(15) By means of what has been said [above], the studious person can reply to all insolubles, if in solving them he wants to pay diligent attention to and inquire [into] the nature of insolubles. I leave this to clever people, because I inserted these [materials] about obligations³ and insolubles only to fill out this *Summulae* and lest so great a part of logic be left completely untouched.

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³ *Summa logicae*, III.3.39–42, are about the peculiar mediaeval disputation form known as *obligationes* (= “obligations”).