

**How do We Use Our Words
in the World where Lies
are Rampant? From Augustine's
Argument on Lying**

¿Cómo usamos nuestras palabras
en un mundo donde las mentiras son rampantes?
El argumento de Agustín sobre la mentira

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Abstract

This chapter examines how Augustine inspires us to live at peace with our world where lies are rampant. We see many cases of lies having power and truths being ignored in politics, media and other situations. In some of his works, Augustine expresses the idea that every kind of lie is a sin. His strict ban on lying has often be seen as abstract and unrealistic, because we consider lying to be sometimes useful and helpful, while regretting the situations in which lies are rampant. In the first part of this chapter, the author points out how Augustine's ban on lying has a certain kind of permissibility and that he leads us to focus on whether a liar loves truth/God or not. Augustine sets a certain criterion for the sin of lying in one's mindset in terms of loving truth/God or not. The second part of this chapter will show that Augustine thinks a person who tells a lie willingly does not love truth, and as a result she or he will lose true happiness. Augustine thinks that the liar's mindset, which willingly tells a lie, will cause great evils as well. This mindset also loses the healing of Christ. In the last part of the chapter, the author argues that Augustine finds utility in words that prevent our being liars and enable the enjoyment of the unity of truth and God. According to Augustine, we can speak truth when we speak what we heard from the truth. The truth is the Word, Christ. Augustine's argument on lying deeply connects with his Christology and that enables him to suggest how to use our words in the world where lies are rampant.

Keywords: inner-dialogue, lying, truth, *veritatem facere*, will.



Resumen

Este capítulo examina cómo Agustín nos inspira a vivir en paz en nuestro mundo donde las mentiras son desenfrenadas. Vemos muchos casos donde se valoran las mentiras y se ignoran las verdades en la política, los medios de comunicación y otras situaciones. En algunas de sus obras, Agustín expresa la idea de que todo tipo de mentira es un pecado. A menudo, se ve su prohibición estricta sobre mentir como abstracta y poco realista, porque consideramos que mentir a veces es útil, al mismo tiempo que lamentamos las situaciones en las que las mentiras son desenfrenadas. En la primera parte de este capítulo, el autor señala cómo la prohibición de mentir de Agustín tiene un cierto tipo de permisibilidad y que nos lleva a centrarnos en si un mentiroso ama la verdad/Dios o no. Agustín establece un criterio para mentir en la mentalidad de uno en términos de amar la verdad/Dios o no. En la segunda parte de este capítulo, veremos que Agustín piensa que una persona que dice una mentira voluntariamente no ama la verdad y, como resultado, perderá la felicidad verdadera. Agustín cree que la mentalidad del mentiroso, que de buena gana dice mentiras, también causará grandes males. Esta mentalidad también pierde la curación de Cristo. En la última parte del capítulo, el autor argumenta que Agustín encuentra utilidad en nuestras palabras ya que impiden que seamos mentirosos y nos permiten disfrutar juntos en la unidad de la verdad/Dios. Según Agustín, podemos decir la verdad cuando hablamos lo que escuchamos de la verdad. La verdad es la Palabra, Cristo. El argumento de Agustín sobre mentir se conecta profundamente con su cristología y eso le permite sugerir cómo usamos nuestras palabras en nuestro mundo donde las mentiras son desenfrenadas.

Palabras clave: mentira, verdad, voluntad, diálogo interno, *veritatem facere*.



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Cómo citar en MLA / How to cite in MLA

Sato, Makiko. "How Do We Use our Words in the World where Lies are Rampant. From Augustine's Argument on Lying." *Agustín de Hipona como Doctor Pacis: estudios sobre la paz en el mundo contemporáneo*, edited by Anthony Dupont, Enrique Eguiarte Bendimez y Carlos Vilabona, Editorial Uniagustiniana, 2019, pp. 321-340, doi: 10.28970/9789585498235.11

Is Augustine's Absolute Prohibition of Lying Unrealistic?

Lies have power. Politicians who often tell false stories still gain supporters; Internet media earns money by sharing false but shocking news. People can showcase their lives on social networking services with fictitious stories and selective photos. The terms “post-truth” and “alternative facts” have emerged. People seem to enjoy disrespecting truth and sharing falsehoods. On the other hand, it is true that we fear living in our world where lies run rampant. In such a world, people who can lie successfully have power and others may feel threatened. Legal justice and science lose meaning. How to confront this ongoing situation is an urgent issue for us.

As Bok pointed out, lying or deceiving was not focused on as a topic of academic research in the twentieth century, although there were many opportunities to think about problems concerning such topics.¹ Brinton (437) also pointed out that “the subject of persuasion were neglected by twentieth century religious and philosophical writers concerned with the ethics of belief.” Whether telling a lie is acceptable when a speaker intends to persuade others for good reasons is a major issue with lying. Although twentieth century philosophers “have done so little to analyze the problem of deception” (Bok 10), as Brinton says, Socrates and Plato already had an interest in the ethics of persuasion, and Augustine, being in line with the aforementioned philosophers, worked on examining the issues raised by lying.² Augustine's two books on lying, *De mendacio* (394/5) and *Contra mendacium* (420), which are said to be the first books written on the theme of lying, are classics on the topic. It is clear Augustine's doctrine on lying influenced arguments made by later writers: Gregory the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Kant and so on.³

In his *De mendacio* and *Contra mendacium*, and also in some arguments in his other works, Augustine consistently argues that every kind of lie is a sin, and that we should not tell any lie.⁴ Although his doctrine has authority, this strict ban on

¹ “The striking fact is that, though no moral choices are more common or more troubling than those which have to do with deception in its many guises, they have received extraordinarily little contemporary analysis” (Bok XIX).

² Brinton explains the influence of Plato on Augustine and the difference of their arguments on the ethics of persuasion. Regarding the argument on lying from Plato to Augustine, see Sarr.

³ Regarding the evident citations from Augustine by Gregory the Great and Aquinas, and the difference between Church fathers, see Ramsey (1985). Regarding the arguments on lying by Aquinas, Kant, Newman and Nietzsche, compared to the Augustinian position, Griffiths (“Lying”) is introductive.

⁴ “Every lie must be called a sin” (*ench.*, 7. 11). After the Bok's book (1979) was published, many articles that examines Augustine's arguments on lying started to be published. Three papers

lying seems to be unrealistic and not workable in our actual lives, because we sometimes consider lying to be useful and helpful. We can easily imagine situations in which lying would save lives. For example, when non-Jews lied to the government in Nazi Germany to save Jews; as such, it feels difficult to follow Augustine's total ban on lying. In fact, Bok says that Augustine's speculation "goes beyond the realm of ethics and belongs squarely in that of faith" (Bok 46), and she expresses her agreement with "the rejection of the absolutist prohibition of all lies" (48). While trying to defend Augustine's position, Griffiths seems to be on the same side with Bok. He explains that what Augustine means when he expresses a strict ban on lying is not to exhort one to just stop lying, but to illuminate sin's nature, to recommend confession and to turn the gaze away from the lie and toward the truth and God (Griffiths "Lying" 225). However, he also admits that "a community in which the Augustinian ban on the lie was taken seriously—a community of truth—would look very different from any we now know" (229); and that "the consistent Augustinian cannot lie to save innocent life, whether one or a million; he cannot lie to comfort the sad, preserve public order, prevent physical suffering, or even to prevent apostasy or blasphemy" (230).

Does Augustine really think that one should never lie under any circumstance? Decosimo suggests there is greater nuance in the prohibition on lying by Augustine. Based on Griffith's ("The Gift") account, which focuses on the notion of God as "Giver" of speech to human beings, Decosimo explains that although Augustine sees lying as intrinsically sinful for human agents, he permits lying only when "one is functioning as God's instrument," in other words, only when "God or the justly acting state is the true agent" (Decosimo 689 and 693). Augustine does not explicitly express the statement the way Decosimo interprets, but his interpretation is persuasive. I'd like to present two texts that Decosimo does not mention in his paper, but from which we could interpret that Augustine admits a certain kind of permissibility in lying.

One text is in *De mendacio*. Augustine explains as following:

by Feehan ("Augustine on lying"; "The morality"; and "Augustine's own examples") are important in clarifying Augustine's arguments. Although Augustine examines the definition of lying in his *De mendacio*, the definition is not necessarily definite. While saying that "a lie is a false statement made with the desire to deceive," Augustine suggests there is still a room for consideration, saying that "but, whether this alone is a lie is another question" (*mend.*, 5.; tr. Muldowney 60). To consider what is lying, Adler and Carson are beneficial. Regarding jokes that Augustine intentionally excluded from the examination, see Levenick. I also exclude the theme of jokes and fictions from the examination of this chapter, although they are an important theme when we discuss utility of our words. I'll examine them in another paper.

Therefore, in regard to the passage: “The mouth that belieth, killeth the soul” (Sap. 1:11), the question arises as to what mouth is signified. When Holy Scripture uses the term “mouth,” it often signifies that inner chamber of the heart where whatever is uttered by the voice when we speak truthfully pleases us and is determined upon. Hence it is that he lies in his heart who takes pleasure in lying; but he cannot lie in his heart who through his speech so expresses something other than what is in his mind that he knows he is doing evil solely for the sake of avoiding a greater evil and knows that both evils are repugnant to him (*mend.*, 16, 31; tr. Muldowney 92-3).⁵

The scriptural phrase “the mouth that belieth, killeth the soul” is a phrase that those who think no lie is permissible use as a testimony for their opinion. Lies are spoken with a physical mouth in so far as lying is regarded to be an act of speech. Augustine, however, interprets here that a mouth is also in one’s heart. The mouth in one’s heart is not one that speaks words silently before the words it uttered with sounds.⁶ Augustine distinguishes between those who utter falsehoods with pleasure from those who utter falsehood with displeasure, and regards the latter as not telling a lie with the mouth in his or her heart, although she or he tells a lie with his physical mouth. The mouth in one’s heart is an expression that signifies whether one has a mindset that loves the truth/God and is pleased to be veracious or not. The mouth can be expressed as one’s state of will. In fact, interpreting the scriptural phrase “Be not willing to make any kind of lie [Noli velle mentiri omne mendacium]” (Eccl. 7, 14) in the following argument, Augustine focuses on the term *velle* in the phrase, and explains that “the will itself is considered as the mouth of the heart” (*mend.*, 17, 34; tr. Muldowney 96). For a person who really loves the truth/God and wants to be veracious, to utter falsehood even for the sake of avoiding a greater evil goes against his or her will in so far as what she or he utters is false. However, even if she or he utters the truth, to cause a greater evil by uttering the truth goes against his or her will in so far as she or he causes what she or he does not want to cause. Augustine pays attention to the situation that one is involved inevitably in a sin,

⁵ “Sic ergo quod scriptum est: os autem quod mentitur, occidit animam; de quo ore dixerit, quaeritur. plerumque enim scriptura cum os dicit, conceptaculum ipsum cordis significat, ubi placet et decernitur quidquid etiam per vocem, cum verum loquimur, enuntiat: ut corde mentiatur, cui placet mendacium; possit autem non corde mentiri, qui per vocem aliud quam est in animo ita profert, ut maioris mali evitandi causa malum se admittere noverit, cui tamen utrumque displiceat” (PL 40).

⁶ Augustine argues also on internal words uttered silently in one’s mind and their relationship with external words, non-linguistic words and divine words, for example in *De magistro*, *De doctrina Christiana* and *De Trinitate* 15. See Toom (231-8).

and finds a certain kind of permissibility in one's mindset that is not pleased with telling a lie, as this mindset signifies his/her love toward the truth/God.

In another text, we find a similar understanding by Augustine.

It cannot be denied that people who lie only for the salvation of others have made great progress in goodness; but it is the good will of those who have made such progress, not their lying, that is rightly praised and even rewarded with temporal gifts. It is enough to excuse their lying without praising it as well, especially in the case of the heirs of the new covenant, to whom these words are addressed: "Let your word be yes, yes or no, no: anything more than this comes from the evil one" (Mt. 5, 37).⁷

Augustine leads us to focus on one's good will (*benevolentia*). He does not prohibit the act of lying itself in a case that one has a good will.⁸ He admits that the act of lying is excused. However, he does not admit that the act is praised. This explanation accords with what we read in the previous text.⁹ Augustine focuses on the mindset of a person who tells a lie willingly or unwillingly, and argues that he or she should not be praised and should not be pleased with the act of lying even if he or she tells a lie for a good reason. He finds a consistent love toward truth/God in the mind of a person who tells a lie unwillingly. Therefore, we should not simply say that Augustine's ban on lying is absolute. We should interpret that with more nuance he thinks that we should not tell any lie willingly, because every lie is a sin.

Augustine's focus on the mindset of a person who tells a lie willingly or unwillingly as a criterion for discerning whether the person is a liar or not is unique. In the beginning of *De mendacio*, he starts his argument on what is a lie by examining the case of inconsistency between the speaker's belief or opinion and the fact or the utterance, but he does not set out the criterion of lying in these inconsistencies. Proceeding from the argument about what is a lie and moving to the argument on whether a lie is sometimes useful, Augustine mentions the idea of a lie by the mouth in one's heart that we saw above. In

⁷ See Augustine *ench.*, 7, 22: "Plurimum quidem ad bonum profecisse homines qui non nisi pro salute hominis mentiuntur, non est negandum; sed in eorum tali profectu merito laudatur, vel etiam temporaliter remuneratur, benevolentia non fallacia; quae ut ignoscatur sat est, non ut etiam praedicetur, maxime in heredibus testamenti novi, quibus dicitur: sit in ore vestro: est est; non non: quod enim amplius est a malo est" (PL 40). English translation by Harbert.

⁸ Whether one has a good will or not is not decided by his or her self-judgement. It depends on whether the will goes righteously toward God who is the ultimate goodness.

⁹ This accords with Decosimo's interpretation as well in the point that Augustine mentions "the case of the heirs of the new covenant" whose words are in accord with divine words.

this argument, he sets the criterion of lying in one's mindset that ought to love truth/God. We can see that Augustine develops his argument in this book and shows his unique criterion for discerning whether the person is a liar or not. A similar idea is shown in his *De doctrina Christiana*. In the argument on how to discover the truth in the contents of the Scriptures, he says that,

Anyone who derives from the divine scriptures an idea which is useful for supporting this double love of God and neighbor but fails to say what the writer demonstrably meant in the passage has not made a fatal error, and is certainly not a liar (*doctr. chr.*, 1, 36, 40; tr. Green).¹⁰

He suggests focusing on the love that an interpreter has when one discerns whether his or her interpretation is correct or in error. Augustine's emphasis on one's mindset toward truth/God is continuous.

Results of Telling a Lie

However, whether one tells a lie willingly or unwillingly, the result seems to be the same, in that the lie that is uttered is the same. Is there any difference in the result when, for example, a politician tells a lie to citizens willingly for a public benefit, as opposed to when a politician does the same unwillingly? As we see above, Augustine thinks that the difference between telling a lie willingly and telling it unwillingly depends on whether the person loves truth/God or not. Let us refer to Augustine's argument on what happens to those who do not love truth. In book 10 of *Confessiones*, he explains that enjoyment is what all people want, since "all agree that they want to enjoy [*consonarent se velle gaudere*]" (10, 21, 31), and that truth also is what all people want, since even those who would gladly deceive others do not wish to be deceived.¹¹ So he concludes that all people "prefer to rejoice over the truth [*de veritate se malle gaudere*]" (10, 22, 33).¹² Then, if everyone wants to rejoice over the truth, why can it be that some

¹⁰ Partly changed in the citation, it is noteworthy that Augustine mentions the mindset of a liar in this argument as well. Also in *De mendacio* 19, 40, Augustine focuses on the importance of loving God and neighbor after the argument about the mouth in one's heart.

¹¹ See *conf.*, 10, 23, 33. "Everyone wants this happy life, this life which alone deserves to be called happy; all want it, all want joy in the truth. I have met plenty of people who would gladly deceive others, but no one who wants to be deceived. Where else, then, did they come to know this happy life, except where they also came to know about truth? Since they do not wish to be deceived, they must love truth" (tr. Boulding 259).

¹² The object that one enjoys signifies what his or her will (*velle*) intends. The intention of the will is, as it were, an intention toward an ultimate aim of his or her life. Solignac adds a comment to the term *gaudium/gaudere*: "Les mots latin 'gaudium. gaudere' sont plus riches, semble-t-il, que les correspondants français 'joie, se réjouir'. Ils indiquent un épanouissement

do not love the truth and would gladly deceive others? Augustine explains that those people “love truth in such a way that those who love something else wish to regard what they love as truth” (10, 23, 34).” In this argument in *Confessiones*, it is not obvious whom Augustine has in mind when he criticizes those who deceive others,¹³ but it is obvious that he thinks that they love what they should not love, while intending to love truth. Their will (*velle*) drifts in the wrong direction, that is, if they even have will at all.

He explains what would happen to those people as a result.

They love truth when it enlightens them, but hate it when it accuses them. In this attitude of reluctance to be deceived and intent to deceive others they love truth when it reveals itself but hate it when it reveals them. Truth will therefore take its revenge: when people refuse to be shown up by it, truth will show them up willy-nilly and yet elude them. ...It is paid back in a coin which is the opposite to what it desires, for while the soul cannot hide from truth, truth hides from the soul (*conf.*, 10, 23, 34; tr. Boulding 260).¹⁴

Generally, a liar or a deceiver has parallel realities of truth and falsehood in his or her mind (*mend.*, 3, 3). Liars think that they themselves know and uphold the truth. If they do not know or believe something to be true, they cannot be liars. Therefore, we should not interpret that the truth that Augustine argues here is a specific reality in one’s mind. The truth that would elude liars is one that is identifiable by joy (*gaudium*) and a happy life (*beata vita*).¹⁵ Augustine thinks that a person who enjoys what he or she should not enjoy cannot enjoy a truly happy life.¹⁶ In this way, a person who gladly deceives others loses joy, a

parfait de l’âme dont le bonheur est essentiellement lié à la possession et à la jouissance de la vérité, c’est-à-dire de Dieu. (Skutella, Solignac, Tréhorel and Bouissou 201.)

¹³ It would be natural for us to suppose that he keeps Manicheans in his mind, according to Kotzé’s examination.

¹⁴ “Amant eam lucentem, oderunt eam redarguentem. quia enim falli nolunt et fallere volunt, amant eam, cum se ipsa indicat, et oderunt eam, cum eos ipsos indicat. inde retribuet eis, ut, qui se ab ea manifestari nolunt, et eos nolentes manifestet et eis ipsa non sit manifesta. (...) contra illi redditur, ut ipse non lateat veritatem, ipsum autem veritas lateat” (Latin text from Skutella, Solignac, Tréhorel and Bouissou).

¹⁵ To Augustine, *veritas* is the object of quest. Kuntz explains the range of Augustine’s quest for truth, selecting eight phases.

¹⁶ See *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum*, 1, 3, 4. “We all certainly desire to live happily; and there is no human being but assents to this statement almost before it is made. But the title happy cannot, in my opinion, belong either to him who has not what he loves, whatever it may be, or to him who has what he loves if it is hurtful or to him who does not love what he has, although it is good in perfection. For one who seeks what he cannot obtain suffers torture, and one who has got what is not desirable is cheated, and one

truly happy life—that is to say, that they lose truth. The same applies to a person who tells a lie willingly for a good reason. Regardless of whether it is for a good reason or not, he or she would lose true happiness, because he or she is happy with lying, when he or she should not be happy at all. Augustine thinks that a liar’s mindset causes the loss of true happiness as a result.

We can find other consequences of lying that Augustine suggests in his texts. In the beginning of *conf.* 10, Augustine explains the purpose of confessing. That is, that even if he does not confess himself to God, everything would still be naked to His eyes (10, 2, 2). To other people, however, he can offer no proof that he confesses truthfully (10, 3, 3). Nonetheless, he does confess also to other people, as “the charity that makes them good assures them that I am not lying when I confess about myself; that very charity in them believes me” (10, 3, 4). Augustine thinks that to confess is to do the opposite of lying. In the argument in book 10, Augustine relates the act of his confession with the expression of “*veritatem facere*.” He begins his confession with a declaration: “Truth it is that I want to do [*volo eam (veritatem) facere*]” (10, 1, 1). Then, what is “*veritatem facere*”? “*Veritatem facere*” is a scriptural phrase (*Io. ev. tr.*, 3, 21; 1, 6). Augustine explains it in *Io. ev. tr.*:

And when your own deeds will begin to displease you, from that time your good works begin, as you find fault with your evil works. The confession of evil works is the beginning of good works. You do the truth, and come to the light. How is it you do the truth? Thou dost not caress, nor soothe, nor flatter yourself; nor say, “I am righteous,” while you are unrighteous: thus, you begin to do the truth (12, 13; tr, Schaff).¹⁷

Also, in this argument, Augustine links confession with doing the truth. Augustine does not think that doing the truth is an act that can be completed within a single action. Not caressing, not soothing, not flattering oneself makes him or her “begin to do the truth (*incipere facere veritatem*).” Augustine regards “doing the truth” as a continuous act which is done with the mindset of recognizing one’s evil and not justifying oneself.

who does not seek for what is worth seeking for is diseased. Now in all these cases the mind cannot but be unhappy, and happiness and unhappiness cannot reside at the same time in one man; so in none of these cases can the man be happy. I find, then, a fourth case, where the happy life exists, –when that which is man’s chief good is both loved and possessed. For what do we call enjoyment but having at hand the objects of love?” (tr. Scothert).

¹⁷ “*Cum autem coeperit tibi displicere quod fecisti, inde incipiunt bona opera tua, quia accusas mala opera tua. Initium operum bonorum, confessio est operum malorum. Facis veritatem, et venis ad lucem. Quid est: Facis veritatem? Non te palpas, non tibi blandiris, non te adulas; non dicis: Iustus sum, cum sis iniquus, et incipis facere veritatem*” (PL 35).

Here also it is noteworthy that Augustine focuses on one's mentality to displease oneself with their deeds. As we saw above, in the arguments on lying, Augustine argues that one should not be praised and should not be pleased with the act of lying even if he or she tells a lie for a good reason. Following this argument, Augustine also says that "your sin would not have displeased you, if God did not shine into you" (12, 13). He emphasizes the necessity of God's support in order to recognize one's own sin. That is, if you tell a lie and are pleased with it, you are without God's support. In the following argument, Augustine mentions the name of Christ and explains as follows:

Awake, then, while it is day: the day shines, Christ is the day. (...) He that walks in His love and mercy, even being free from those great and deadly sins, such crimes as murder, theft, adultery; still, because of those which seem to be minute sins, of tongue, or of thought, or of intemperance in things permitted, he does the truth in confession, and comes to the light in good works: since many minute sins, if they be neglected, kill. Minute are the drops that swell the rivers; minute are the grains of sand; but if much sand is put together, the heap presses and crushes. Bilge-water neglected in the hold does the same thing as a rushing wave. Gradually it leaks in through the hold; and by long leaking in and no pumping out, it sinks the ship (*Io. ev. tr.*, 12, 14).¹⁸

Augustine explains here the result of not confessing. He warns that even a minute sin would be able to bring about a much greater sin, using the metaphor of a grain of sand having the power to crush a ship when the grains are added together. If we focus only on the direct result of a single act of lying—for example, the fact that a life was saved by telling a lie—there might seem to be no difference between an act that is done willingly and an act that is done unwillingly. That is to say, the act might look like a good thing that should be praised. However, Augustine does not think this result is the end result of the lie. He encourages us to see additional things that will result from the will that is pleased with one's act, justifies it, does not reflect on oneself and does not confess his or her evil. Augustine warns that such a mindset can bring about a greater evil. As we

¹⁸ "Evigilate ergo cum dies est: lucet dies, Christus est dies. ...In dilectione autem eius et in misericordia eius qui ambulat, etiam liberatus ab illis lethalibus et grandibus peccatis, qualia sunt facinora, homicidia, furta, adulteria; propter illa quae minuta videntur esse peccata linguae, aut cogitationum, aut immoderationis in rebus concessis, facit veritatem confessionis, et venit ad lucem in operibus bonis: quoniam minuta plura peccata si neglegantur, occidunt. minutae sunt guttae quae flumina implent: minuta sunt grana arenae; sed si multa arena imponatur, premit atque opprimit. hoc facit sentina neglecta, quod facit fluctus irruens: paulatim per sentinam intrat; sed diu intrando et non exhauriendo, mergit navim."

confirmed above, he thinks that doing the truth is a continuous act. He finds repetitive avoidance of the truth in the mindset of a person who tells a lie willingly.

Let us refer to the argument in *conf.* 10 again to see another result of lying. O'Donnell points out the connection between Augustine's mention of "*veritatem facere*" in the first chapter of the book (10, 1, 1) and the examination of the current state of his desires in the last half of the book (10, 30, 41-39, 64), quoting the above argument in *Io. ev. tr.* 12.¹⁹ In fact, in the examination of his desire in *Confessiones* book 10, Augustine confesses minute sins of his own, just as he emphasizes the necessity of confessing minute sins in the above quotation from *Io. ev. tr.*, 12, 14. In a similar examination of the state of his desires in *Soliloquia*, he asserts his self-confidence in overcoming sinful desires (*sol.*, 1, 10, 17). Conversely, in the examination in *Confessiones*, he emphasizes the weakness of his will and the difficulty of knowing himself and of overcoming sinful desires. "It is frequently hard to tell whether proper care for the body indicates that further support is needed, or deceitful, pleasure-seeking greed is demanding what will gratify it" (10, 31, 44); "whatever discernment there is in me is shrouded by dismal darkness and hidden from my sight, so that as my mind questions itself about its powers, it can scarcely trust any reply it receives" (10, 32, 48); "I have become an enigma to myself, and herein lies my sickness" (10, 33, 50). Augustine regards the weakness of will and the ignorance of what we should do as the evidence of the corrupted nature (*natura vitiata*) of human beings (*pecc. mer.*, 1, 37, 68-39, 70; *ench.*, 22, 81). We cannot heal this corrupted nature by ourselves; rather, Augustine thinks that Christ is the only one who can heal it. As such, he concludes book 10 with an argument for Christ.²⁰ For Augustine, the examination of his desires is a demonstration of doing the truth (*veritatem facere*), and such examination is the way to find hope in Christ; i.e., in true healing. Now it is not difficult to imagine that Augustine thinks that a person who tells a lie willingly and does not do the truth cannot walk the way to find the hope; an example of the loss of true healing due to weakness and ignorance is the result of lying.

How do We use our Words?

As we see in the first part of this chapter, if we accept Augustine's ban on lying as an absolute prohibition of every kind of lie and try to follow it, we actually might not be able to say anything. It would be the same also for Augustine. We are often involved inevitably in a sin, as Augustine highlights in his argument

¹⁹ See O'Donnell commentary for the word "*qui facit eam*" in 10, 1, 1.

²⁰ *Conf.*, 10, 43, 68-70 is appropriated to the argument on Christ: "You will heal all my infirmities through him who sits at your right hand and intercedes for us" (69).

on lying. Moreover, even when we believe that we act for a good reason and the result of the act seems to be good, it is difficult for us to judge whether the act is actually good or not, because we human beings do not know precisely what the truth is, nor what the ultimate goodness is.²¹ However, Augustine himself continues to speak. It does not come from his arrogance nor does he believe he might be wrong. As we saw in the second part of this chapter, Augustine performs “doing the truth” through confessions. Confessing is the act of speech/writing by which Augustine is able to examine himself and recognize his actual state of being. Augustine says: “O truth, you hold sovereign sway over all who turn to you for counsel, and to all of them you respond at the same time, however diverse their pleas” (*conf.*, 10, 26, 37). The expression “hold sovereign sway over” is “*praesides*” in Latin. *Praesidere* originally means to sit (*sidere*) in front of (*prae*) something. Augustine thinks that the inner-dialogue is a dialogue with the truth that sits in front of him, within himself.²² “They all appeal to you about what they want, but do not always hear what they want to hear” (10, 26, 37). The people who “love truth in such a way that those who love something else wish to regard what they love as truth” (10, 23, 34) are those who do not have a dialogue with truth within themselves, because they do not love the truth that lets them recognize the actual state of being. The inner-dialogue with truth prevents the person from being a liar, one who loves what he or she should not love.

Having a dialogue with truth is not beneficial only for oneself; Augustine finds benefits in it also for others. By expressing such a dialogue through verbal or written words, he confesses “also in the ears of believing men and women, the companions of my joy and sharers in my mortality, my fellow citizens still on pilgrimage with me, those who have gone before and those who will follow, and all who bear me company in my life” (10, 4, 6), so that “both hymns and laments ascend into your presence from the hearts of my brethren, which are your censers” (10, 4, 5). Here, Augustine refers to “those people (which includes us) as “the companions of his joy.” Sharing the same joy means loving the same thing, because we find enjoyment in what we love. The metaphor of censers signifies the unity of the direction of the people’s love/will. Augustine thinks that the words spoken/written when one confesses encourage people to love the truth together. That is, to recognize our inevitable weakness and igno-

²¹ “Perhaps God will concern himself with why we lie, will forgive some liars and punish others, but we should never presume to make such judgements ourselves. To do that is to follow the Devil’s path, and that path lead nowhere but to our damnation” (Denery 116).

²² As well known, in *Soliloquia*, the dialogue is performed with his *Ratio*. Regarding the development of the dialogue, see Stock.

rance and have hope for healing by Christ. Augustine finds utility in our words to change others' minds, prompting them to do the truth and not be liars.

That being the case, how do we use our words among people who do not love the truth and do not share our joy? In *conf.* 12, where he interprets the book of Genesis and examines others' interpretation, Augustine mentions those people.²³ Here, he points out that there are people who say "Moses did not mean what you say, but what I say" (*conf.*, 12, 25, 34), yet he does not deny that what each of them says is true. Augustine criticizes such people, saying that "they are proud, and without having grasped Moses' idea they are infatuated with their own (*amant suam*), not because it is true but because it is theirs" (12, 25, 34). Since Moses' idea is considered to be the truth, people who love their own idea as if it is Moses' do not love the truth, but love what they want to love. Augustine depicts them here as people who stubbornly insist upon their own idea without thinking much of others'. We should think back on recent events where people have insisted that facts that were inconvenient for themselves personally were "alternative facts."²⁴ They do not deny others' statements, agreeing that they are facts, yet do not think much of it, insisting simply that their statements are "alternative facts." We often have this kind of experience, where someone insists that what is convenient and favorable for them is a "fact." Such experiences show how difficult it is to change their mind by only presenting facts to them. We also find that Augustine struggles dealing with such people. What he does to counter said objectors is to "meet the challenge calmly, and reply on the lines he has already indicated," and to "patiently put up with such people" (*ibid*). Continuing to criticize them, Augustine never seems to give up changing their minds peacefully by continually speaking to them—or in other words, by using words.

In the same argument, Augustine further elaborates upon such people.

This is why we must tremble before your judgement, O lord, for your Truth is not mine, nor his, nor hers, but belongs to all of us whom you call to share it in communion with him, at the same time giving us the terrible warning not to arrogate truth to ourselves as private property, lest we find ourselves deprived of it. For anyone who appropriates what you provide for all to enjoy, and claims as his own what belongs to all, is cast out from the truth to a lie

²³ Kenney (2010) examines the dialogues with the *contradictores* in book 12. The argument in 12, 25, 34 is not mentioned there.

²⁴ CNN Politics, Conway: Trump White House offered "alternative facts" on crowd size. See <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/01/22/politics/kellyanne-conway-alternative-facts/index.html>

[*mendacium*]; for anyone who lies is speaking from what is his own (*conf.*, 12, 25, 34; tr. Boulding 333).²⁵

Augustine has his own idea that he thinks to be true, but he says that the truth is not his. It does not indicate an attitude of relativism, as Augustine continues to criticize people who say that “Moses did not mean what you say, but what I say,” yet does not deny that what each of them says is true. In Augustine’s understanding, the people in question love what they want to love. The love toward what they want to love is not in accordance with love towards the truth, even if they believe that they love truth. Augustine expresses the state of the people who love what they want to love as people who “arrogate truth to themselves as private property [*veritatem velle havere privatam*].” The mindset of someone who wants to have the truth as private property does not agree to share the truth with others. If everyone had such a mindset, a relativist mindset, everyone’s love would go in different directions and there would be no chance for us to enjoy the unity of truth/God together. For that reason, Augustine criticizes them.

It is noteworthy that Augustine mentions the term *mendacium* in the above citation as well. Those who insist on presenting their own ideas as a truth that is their private property would not feel like they are lying. However, Augustine explains that they are cast out from the truth to a lie (*a veritate ad mendacium*), as is in the above quotation. The reason that they are cast out from the truth to a lie is that they arrogate truth to themselves as private property, even though truth belongs to all of us. They love the truth in the wrong way. In other words, they do not love the truth in the right way, even though they might think they do. Thus, they are cast out to a lie. You see that the concept of *mendacium* here is in accordance with the one that we read in *De mendacio* in the first part of this chapter. Whether one tells a lie with the mouth in one’s heart depends on whether he or she truly loves the truth or not. The direction of one’s love/will decides which way he or she will go, be it towards truth or lie. Furthermore, Augustine includes the scriptural phrase “anyone who lies is speaking from what is his own” (Io. 8: 44). The subject of, speaking from what is his own, in the scriptural text is the devil. Based on these things, we can suppose that the reason that Augustine never stopped speaking to them is as follows: Even if objectors look like devils, we need to believe they are just fallen angels and to keep on speaking with them, because we cannot enjoy the unity of truth/God together if we are alone. If you are a

²⁵ “Ideoque, domine, tremenda sunt iudicia tua, quoniam veritas tua nec mea est nec illius aut illius, sed omnium nostrum, quos ad eius communionem publice vocas, terribiliter admonens nos, ut eam nolimus habere privatam, ne privemur ea. nam quisquis id, quod tu omnibus ad fruentum proponis, sibi proprie vindicat et suum vult esse quod omnium est, a communi propellitur ad sua, hoc est a veritate ad mendacium. qui enim loquitur mendacium, de suo loquitur.”

relativist, or you try to destroy your objectors, you will never be able to enjoy the truth together with others. Augustine thinks that we love truth in the right way when we love it together with others including people who are seen as objectors.

Regarding “from what is his own,” Augustine says in *conf.* 10 that “Your best servant is the one who is less intent to hearing from you what accords with his own will, and more on embracing with his will what he has heard from you” (10, 26, 37). In the beginning of book 10, he already declares that “I can say nothing right to other people unless you have heard it from me first, nor can you even hear anything of the kind from me which you have not first told me” (10, 2, 2). Augustine thinks that hearing from God/truth precedes speaking truth. Therefore, the dialogue with truth within oneself is necessary for speaking truth to others. Speaking truth is *veritatem facere*, that is, a confession. When we use words for our inner dialogue with the truth, those words help us enjoy a truly happy life together with others. It may feel as if our inner dialogue is independent of the external world in which we live, but Augustine thinks that the inner dialogue develops a loving relationship with the external world.

Conclusion

In the first part of this chapter, I suggested that Augustine’s ban on lying was not unrealistic. In fact, the ban has a certain kind of permissibility. Augustine’s argument is that since every lie is a sin, no one should tell any kind of lie willingly, because someone who tells a lie willingly is pleased with lying and does not love the truth. What is the difference between the results of a lie that was told willingly and a lie that was told unwillingly? In the second part of the chapter, we saw what Augustine has found to be the results of lying, including: 1. The mindset of not loving the truth does not lead a person to true happiness; liars lose true happiness as a result; 2. The mindset of lying willingly can cause great evil that could harm others, even if the lie is minute, because such a mindset finds evading God customary; and 3. Such mindsets also deprive one of hope for healing, that is, hope for healing from the inevitable weakness and ignorance that all human beings have. Christ is the only being who can perform the healing. Augustine thinks that liars’ minds do not seek out the Savior, because they believe they can act honorably by themselves. As a result, they lose any chance at eternal healing. In the last part of the chapter, we saw that Augustine found utility in our words. To avoid being a liar and to change the mind of a liar, Augustine thinks that having an inner-dialogue with truth within oneself is useful. When the dialogue is performed within oneself, the words assist in uncovering our actual state of mind, preventing us from being a liar who does not love truth; a liar

who loves what he or she wants to love. When we speak to others with the words that we hear through the inner-dialogue, the words help us to enjoy the truth together with others, because the words make people recognize the weakness and ignorance within themselves and invites them to listen to the others' ideas.

Therefore, Augustine's strict ban on lying does not come from unrealistic doctrine. Rather, it comes from his insight into reality. He actually realizes that there are situations where we cannot avoid telling a lie. He realizes our true arrogance when we tell a lie willingly for a good reason. It can be said that Augustine's idea approaches the philosophers who argue that we humans can never grasp the ultimate truth as long as we live in this world. However, Augustine doesn't think that we should be allowed to judge what is true and what is false practically for the present, like a Sophist does, by thinking that we would be able to arrive at the truth only by means of our intelligence. Focusing on our arrogance when we tell a lie willingly is unique to Augustine. This focus comes from his recognition of our ignorance and weakness; the "ignorance" being that we cannot fully know the states of our own will, and the weakness being that we cannot fully control the state of our will. Christ, as the healer of said ignorance and weakness, therefore takes on a practical and essential role in Augustine's argument on lying. The act of confessing to God and neighbor is set as an act done by listening to truth/Christ and speaking with words. Confession is the path that Augustine finds for living in our world where lies are rampant.

In our world, some tell a lie to gain reputation. Some tell a lie to fill their pockets. You may say that their lies are harmless in so far as they do not harm others, but Augustine would not agree with that opinion. As those people who tell a lie for their own benefit love what they want to love. Even in the event that someone tells a lie willingly to save others' lives, he would criticize such a person. Augustine thinks that their mindset would prevent them from true happiness, and that their mindset would cause great evil in the future. He cautions that even a sin that we may regard as minute would be able to threaten our peace. However, in our world where lies are rampant, Augustine is not merely lamenting the situation. He finds hope in the fact that we have words with which to love truth together with others. We use our words both for telling lies and for searching for the truth. Augustine tells us how to use our words to create a peaceful world. Feehan (181) says that "we must count Augustine as one of the principle thinkers over time who has helped us to understand just what is morally wrong with lying and liars." I'd like to add that Augustine does not only teach us the evil of lying, he also helps us understand how fortunate we are to be able to overcome evil. Such fortune, a gift from God, can be found in our words which connect us with the truth and with other people by love.



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