206 Tongue (*Lingua*)

The tongue does four things: it forms words, discerns tastes, makes peace between men, and modulates songs. Indeed, the first, Eccli. 4[:29]: “By the tongue wisdom is discerned.” For the intelligent man discerns what is to be said noting that many have fallen on the edge of the sword, but not as many as they who died by their tongue. For this is the medicinal tongue curing wounds by the word of preaching, Prov. 28[:23]: “He that rebukes a man, shall afterward find favor with him, more than he that by a flattering tongue deceives him.” Therefore, it is said that the dissolute tongue which serves idle words, the immodest which serves lasciviousness and uncleanness, the boasting which serves arrogance, the deceitful which serves malice and detraction.

Wherefore Augustine, *14 Abusiones*, chapter 2,[[1]](#endnote-1) two little pieces are to be avoided, which do not become fixed in man, but draw him to evil; the heart and the tongue, because the heart is always machinating new things. For the tongue speaks quickly what the heart machinates, James 3[:6]: “The tongue is placed among our members, which defiles the whole body.” Also, animals can be dominated by man, but no one can tame the tongue of man. Wherefore Augustine, *De verbis Domini*,[[2]](#endnote-2) accordingly, the image of God tames the wild beasts; and God does not tame his image.

But because according to the Philosopher, *De animalibus*, book 12,[[3]](#endnote-3) the tongue is free, soft, and broad. Therefore, nature has doubled the closure for it through the teeth and the lips, but it is not so for other organs because they are positioned in the open, Eccli. 22[:33]: “Who will set a guard before my mouth,” and it follows, “that I fall not by them, and that my tongue destroys me not?”

Again, the Philosopher, *De animalibus,* book 12,[[4]](#endnote-4) the order of the tongue is for tasting and speaking. Tasting because of itself, speech because of another. But as it is said in Psal. [44:2]: “My tongue is the pen of a scrivener.” When it is directed by a good spirit it writes good and well, when in truth by an evil it writes bad things. Wherefore Prov. 18[:21]: “Death and life are in the power of the tongue.”

¶ When the devil governed the tongue of the serpent speaking to Eve, humanity was made dead, and so the point was begotten in the tongue, Apo. 16[:10]: “They gnawed their tongues for pain.” But afterwards the Holy Spirit was given in the shape of tongues, Act. 2[:3]. Man has been brought to life by the tongue of the teacher, just as the bear by licking forms its fetus, Mark the last chapter [16:17]: “And these signs shall follow them that believe ... they shall speak with new tongues.” And Prov. 15[:2]: “The tongue of the wise” is healthy. According to the Philosopher, book 6, *De animalibus*, chapter 3,[[5]](#endnote-5) lambs found by their mothers are recognized whether it is white or black from some vein under their tongue, so from the tongue of man he is recognized on the outside by what is his life inside.

¶ Note how this confusion of tongues was made in the construction of the tower of Babel below in the chapter [254] Obedience (*Obediencia*).

When a horse is impetuous it is restrained by a double harness, so ought our tongue be restrained by silence against impetuous loquacity, abstinence against impetuous gluttony. Wherefore also the banqueting rich man was punished in his tongue according to both, Luke 16[:24]. In the law, Num. 19[:15]: “The vessel that hath no cover, nor binding over it, shall be unclean.” So it is concerning the tongue. Wherefore also the Lord would send Moses into Egypt where he heard many insults. He made him to be hindered in his tongue, Exod. 4[:10] lest perchance he would break forth in excessive words.

1. Augustine, *De XII gradibus abusionum* 2 (PL 40:1080): Cavendae sunt ergo homini duae particulae, quae in illius carne non veterascunt, et totum hominem secum ad peccatum pertrahunt; cor videlicet et lingua: quia cor novas [Col.0870D] semper cogitationes machinari non desinit; lingua impigre loquitur, quodcumque machinari cor senserit. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Augustine, *Sermo De Scripturis* 55.3.3 (PL 38:376): Imago Dei domat feram; et non domat Deus imaginem suam? [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Aristotle, *History of Animals* 1.11 492b30-35 (Barnes 1:785): The tongue is sometimes broad, sometimes narrow, and sometimes of medium width; the last kind is the best and the clearest in its discrimination of taste. Moreover, the tongue is sometimes loosely hung, and sometimes fastened: as in the case of those who mumble and who lisp. The tongue consists of flesh, soft and spongy, and the so-called 'epiglottis' is a part of this organ. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Aristotle, *History of Animals* 1.11 492b28-30 (Barnes 1:784-785): The part that is sensible of taste is the tongue. The sensation has

its seat at the tip of the tongue; if the object to be tasted be placed on the flat surface of the organ, the taste is less sensibly experienced. The tongue is sensitive in all other ways wherein flesh in general is so: that is, it can appreciate hardness, or warmth and cold, in any part of it, just as it can appreciate taste.

*Parts of Animals* 2.16 (660a1-7) 1:1028: In man the lips are soft and flesh-like and capable of separating from each other. Their purpose, as in other animals, is to guard the teeth, but they are more especially intended to serve a higher office, contributing in common with other parts to man's faculty of speech. For just as nature has made man's tongue unlike that of other animals, and, in accordance with what I have said is her not uncommon practice, has used it for two distinct operations, namely for the perception of savours and for speech, so also has she acted with regard to the lips, and made them serve both for speech and for the protection of the teeth. For vocal speech consists of combinations of the letters, and most of these would be impossible to pronounce, were the lips not moist, nor the tongue such as it is. For some letters are formed by closures of the lips and others by applications of the tongue. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Aristotle, *History of Animals* 6.19 674a6-9 (Barnes 1:900): Lambs are born white and black according as white or black veins are under the ram's tongue; the lambs are white if the veins are white, and black if the veins are black, and white and black if the veins are white and black; and red if the veins are red. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)