227 Lie (*Mendacium*)

According to Augustine, in the book *De mendacio*,[[1]](#endnote-1) and according to the Master, in the third book of *Sententiae*, distinction 38,[[2]](#endnote-2) a lie is a falsehood by the sign of the voice with the intention of deceiving. And certainly, by the designation of the voice it is understood the sign of scriptural translation.

Wherefore also the first part of this description includes false speaking.

The second part includes to lie, that is to go against the mind. And thus, properly the falsity of the statement and falsity of the one speaking are required for a lie.

¶ For one can lie in telling the truth, what he thinks is false and to say the false although he does not lie. And thus not always the falseness of voice is a sign that one sins as when things take place in schools fictively after commons for the sake of teaching as if one might say, “I put it that now we know before the incarnation and it is said Christ was born, etc.” Therefore, whoever lies always deceives willingly, although sometimes he is deceived in the truth of the deed. Therefore, a liar always sins because he does not make the tongue guilty unless the mind is guilty.

¶ Causa 22, quest. 2, c. *Homines*.[[3]](#endnote-3) Therefore it is to be known that the kind of lying is triple: pernicious, joking, and offensive. This is to say that it hurts and rejoices. Of which the first is always mortal according sometimes the first is malignant. The second is of levity. The third if of piety because it injures no one, but it does good to some, because it is for avoiding danger on the part of money or cleanness, Causa 22, quest. 2, c. *Primum*,[[4]](#endnote-4) in which chapter although it is said that every lie is a sin because every liar is a deceiver. However, among other lies only the pernicious is a mortal sin, because either it happens against God in the teaching of the Church, or against one’s neighbor in the cause of criminality, or against oneself alone in lying about libidinous matters, Psal. [5:7]: “You will destroy all that speak a lie.” And Wis. 1[:11]: “The mouth that lies, kills the soul.” However, this is to be noted that it is one thing to lie and another to hide the truth. Wherefore also whoever does not want a man to perish in mortal sin, can cautiously conceal the truth and not say a falsehood, Causa 22, quest. 2, c. *Ne quis*,[[5]](#endnote-5) or he can produce something figuratively, as is evident concerning Abraham, Gen 12[:10-20] when he said Sara was his sister and concerning Jacob when he said, “I am Esau, [Gen. 27:24], that is, that Christ said concerning John, He was Elias, [Matt. 11:13-15].

Again, a lie is not only in the word but also in simulated works, because a lie is not to do the works of Christ, Causa 22, quest. 5, c. *Cavete.[[6]](#endnote-6)*

Again, note here that the simulation is triple. For a certain thing is a precaution, as that Jehu pretended, he was a worshiper of Baal so that thus he might catch the worshippers of Baal, [4 Reg. 10:18-28]. And David pretended he was mad in a time of peril, [1 Reg. 21:12-15].

Another is simulation of teaching and figure which Christ exercised when he pretended to go farther from their hearts,[[7]](#endnote-7) namely, of those with whom he went. For figurative words often are verified for sense in which they take place more than for sense which they make, and such figurative words often are supported.

Third, is simulation of duplicity which holds the appearance of a lie nor does it occur without sin. However, it can be said of the deed that is not properly a lie because the works are not instituted to the invocation of the heart. But it is more for meriting or losing merit unless they do it for the intention of deceiving.

¶ Again, to lie mostly belongs to the devil like the truth to Christ. Wherefore about that Christ says, namely, “When he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own: for he is a liar, and the father thereof,” [John 8:44].

¶ For he found the lie in the first place, and he pledged to others when he said, “I will ascend into heaven,” and to similar ones, “I will be most high.”

And second when he said to the woman, Gen. 3[:4]: “No, you shall not die the death.” Wherefore Bernard,[[8]](#endnote-8) O never. And it is said that the devil communicates a lie to a man, as the serpent communicates his semen to the viper.[[9]](#endnote-9) Whence it brings forth according to Isidore, book 12, c. 4,[[10]](#endnote-10) the offspring break out of the uterus. With the death of the mother, so the liar breaks out with his own death, as it says in Prov. 6[:16-17]:

¶ “Six things there are, which the Lord hates,” and it follows “a lying tongue.” Therefore, Cain when he lied to the Lord, saying, “I know not,” Lord. Immediately, he was cursed, Gen. 4[:9]. And Ananias lying, Acts 5[:1-5], immediately, he died, Wis. 1[:11]: “The mouth that lies, kills the soul.” Wherefore Chrysostom, *Super Mattheum*, homily 19.[[11]](#endnote-11) Whoever is a liar, no one thinks he says the truth, not even his Lord. Whoever for his own purpose is a liar, will never stop being a liar, not even after death. Certainly, death separates the soul from the flesh, but the intention of the soul is not lost. Therefore Gregory, book 18 of the *Moralia*,[[12]](#endnote-12) there is never anything worse than to devise a lie, than to speak the lie. For sometimes to speak is in haste, however, to devise deliberately is depravity. Wherefore Isadore, *De summon bono*,[[13]](#endnote-13) the second book, liars make it so that truths are never believed of the speakers. Often, he premises truths who is about to speak so that when he has first acquired faith to the remaining things, he makes the hearers credulous, Psal. [61:10]: “The sons of men are liars in the balances.” For very often we are liars that in equality of the balance there would be a weight.

First, in judging our sins lightly and those of others heavily, when however perhaps ours are heavier, such a situation seems “the mote that is in your brother's eye; and see not the beam that is in your own,” Matt. 7[:3].

¶ Again, in imposing heavier matters on subjects than oneself. Wherefore Chrysostom, *Homilia* 50,[[14]](#endnote-14) do you wish to appear holy? So be austere toward your life, toward others be benign. Men hear you commanding small things and making heavy things. On the other hand, it is said in Matt. 23[:4]: “For they bind heavy and insupportable burdens, and lay them on men's shoulders,” etc.

Again, for many we repay temporal things received with few that are spiritual. Wherefore the Lord protests, Osee 12[:7]: “Chanaan, there is a deceitful balance in your hand.”

1. Augustine, *De mendacio* 3.3 (PL 40:488): Quid sit mendacium. Ad mendacium an in loquente voluntas fallendi requiratur vel sufficiat. Quapropter videndum est quid sit mendacium. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Peter Lombard, *Sententiarum* 3.38 (PL 192:833): quartum, sola mentiendi fallendique libidine, quod maximum mendacium est. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Decretum, Causa 22, quest. 2, c. 3: Homines falsum iurant, uel cum fallunt, uel cum falluntur. Putat homo uerum esse quod falsum est, et temere iurat; aut scit uel putat falsum esse, et tamen pro uero iurat, et nichilominus cum scelere iurat. Distant autem ista periuria, que duo conmemoraui. Fac illum iurare, qui uerum putat esse pro quo iurat; uerum putat esse, et tamen falsum est; non ex animo iste periurat, fallitur: hoc pro uero habet, quod falsum est, non pro re falsa sciens iurationem interponit.

Cf. Hugh Ripelin of Strasburg*, Compendium Theologicae Veritatis* 5.67 (8:199a*): Non loqueris contra proximum tuum falsum testimonium* Hic prohibetur omne genus mendacii sicut dicit Augustinus: quod determinatur per tres differentias: est enim mendacium perniciosum, quod nocet; officiosum, quod prodest; jocosum, quod delectat. Includitur in hoc præcepto taciturnitas veritatis tempore necessitatis: tamen causa et opportunitas facit ipsam taciturnitatem veritatis esse licitam. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Decretum, Causa 22, quest. 2, c. 8: Primum est capitale mendacium et longe fugiendum, quod fit in doctrina religionis, ad quod mendacium nulla condicione quiuis debet adduci. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Decretum, Causa 22, quest. 2, c. 14: Ne quis arbitretur perfectum et spiritualem hominem pro ista temporali uita, morte cuius sua uel alterius non occiditur anima, debere mentiri, sed quoniam aliud est mentiri, aliud uerum occultare; siquidem aliud est falsum dicere, aliud uerum tacere; ut si quis forte non uelit ad istam uisibilem mortem hominem prodere, paratus esse debet uerum occultare, non falsum dicere, ut neque prodat, neque mentiatur, nec occidat animam suam pro corpore alterius. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Decretum, Causa 22, quest. 5, c. 20: Cauete, fratres, mendacium, quia omnes, qui amant mendacium, filii sunt diaboli. §. 1. Non solum in falsis uerbis, sed etiam in simulatis operibus mendacium est. Mendacium namque est, Christianum se dicere, et opera Christi non facere. Mendacium est episcopum, sacerdotem uel clericum se profiteri, et contraria huic ordini operari. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Cf. Gregory, *XL Homiliarum in Evangelia* 2.23.1 (PL 76:1182): Verba quidem contulit, duritiam intellectus increpavit; sacrae Scripturae mysteria quae de seipso erant aperuit, et tamen quia adhuc in eorum cordibus peregrinus erat a fide, se ire longius finxit. Fingere namque componere dicimus; unde et compositores luti figulos vocamus. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Bernard, *Sermones de diversis* 22.3 (PL 183:596): Et audi ingenium malitiamque serpentis. Nequaquam, inquit, moriemini (Gen. III, 4). Deus affirmat, mulier dubitat, Satan negat. Sic et ego timeo, ne sicut serpens Evam seduxit astutia sua, sic et sensus vestri corrumpantur a castitate, quae est in Christo Jesu (II Cor. XI, 3). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Cf. Pliny, *Natural History* 10.82.169 (LCL 353:398-401): Rursus in terrestribus ova pariunt serpentes, de quibus nondum dictum est. coeunt complexu, adeo circumvolutae sibi ipsae ut una existimari biceps possit

LXXXII. On the other hand among land animals, the snake is oviparous; we have not yet described this species. Snakes mate by embracing, intertwining so closely that they could be taken to be a single animal with two heads. The male viper inserts its head into the female viper’s mouth, and the female is so enraptured with pleasure that she gnaws it off. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Isidore, *Etymologiae* 12.4.10 (PL 82:443): Vipera dicta, quod vi pariat. Nam cum venter ejus ad partum ingemuerit, catuli non exspectantes naturae maturam solutionem, corrosis ejus lateribus, vi erumpunt cum matris interitu. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. (Pseudo-)Chrysostom, *Opus imperfectum in Mattheum* homilia 19 ex cap. 7:22 (PG 56:743): quoniam qui mendax est, neminem putat dicere veritatem, neque ipsum Deum. Qui enim non seductioni diaboli deceptus mentitur, sed proposito mendax est, numquam desinit esse mendax, neque post mortem. Nam mors quidem animam a carne separat, animae autem propositum non immutat. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Gregory, *Moralia* 18.3.5 (PL 76:40): Nonnunquam enim pejus est mendacium meditari, quam loqui. Nam loqui plerumque praecipitationis est, meditari vero studiosae pravitatis. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Isidore, *Sententiarum* 2.30.1 (PL 83:632): 1. Mendaces faciunt ut nec vera dicentibus credatur. Reddit enim saepe hominem multa falsitas etiam in veritate suspectum. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. (Pseudo-)Chrysostomus, *Opus imperfectum in Mattheum*, homilia 43 ex capite 23:12 (PG 56:878): Vis apparere sanctus? Circa tuam vitam est austerus, circa alienam autem benignus. Audiant te homines parva mandantem, et grandia videant facientem. Talis est autem sacerdos, qui sibi indulget, et am aliis grauia exigit. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)