

ALAN BRINTON

Associate Professor of Philosophy, Boise State University, Idaho

ST AUGUSTINE AND THE PROBLEM OF DECEPTION IN RELIGIOUS PERSUASION

A substantial body of literature has been produced in the twentieth century by religious and philosophical writers on the ethics of belief. Discussion of this topic has generally focused on the processes leading up to belief within the individual, so that it would not be inaccurate to say that for most of these writers 'the ethics of belief' means 'the ethics of coming-to-believe'.¹ There has been little attention among these writers, however, to the moral questions which surround the production or inducement of beliefs in others, to the ethics of *persuasion*. An extension of the ethics of belief to cover moral issues which arise in connection with persuasion seems reasonable; the ethics of belief, widely construed, might be said to encompass questions about both the production of beliefs within oneself and the inducement of beliefs in others.

While the subject of persuasion has been neglected by twentieth century religious and philosophical writers concerned with the ethics of belief, there has been a long history of interest in the ethics of persuasion among rhetorical theorists, an interest first expressed by Socrates and Plato and culminating in the twentieth century in a large number of articles appearing in speech-communication journals on the ethics of rhetoric.²

¹ The point of departure for most of the twentieth-century literature on the ethics of belief is William James' essay, 'The Will to Believe', in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (1897; rpt. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979). Important recent treatments include Robert R. Ammerman, 'Ethics and Belief', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, N.S. LXV (1969), 41–58; Richard M. Gale, 'William James and the Ethics of Belief', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, xvii (1980), 1–14; Van A. Harvey, 'Is There an Ethics of Belief?', *Journal of Religion*, XLIX (1969), 41–58, and 'The Ethics of Belief Reconsidered', *Journal of Religion*, LIX (1979), 406–20; Jack W. Meiland, 'What Ought We to Believe? or The Ethics of Belief Revisited', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, xviii (1980), 15–24; H. H. Price, 'Belief and Will', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, supp. vol. xxviii (1954), 1–26; and Bernard Williams, 'Deciding to Believe', in *Language, Belief, and Metaphysics*, eds. H. E. Kiefer and Milton Munitz (Albany: SUNY Press, 1970).

² Among the more significant contributions to the recent literature are B. J. Diggs, 'Persuasion and Ethics', *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, L (1964), 359–73; Richard L. Johannesen, 'Richard M. Weaver on Standards for Ethical Rhetoric', *Central States Speech Journal*, xxix (1978), 127–37; Christopher L. Johnstone, 'An Aristotelian Trilogy: Ethics, Rhetoric, Politics, and the Search for Moral Truth', *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, xiii (1980), 1–24; Richard Murphy, 'Preface to an Ethic of Rhetoric', in *The Rhetorical Idiom: Essays in Rhetoric, Oratory, Language and Drama*, ed. Donald C. Bryant (NY: Russell and Russell, 1966); William Schrier, 'The Ethics of Persuasion', *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, xvi (1930), 476–86; and Richard M. Weaver, 'A Responsible Rhetoric', *Intercollegiate Review*, xii (1976–7), 81–7. For further references, see F. J. Antczak and A. Brinton, 'The Ethics of Rhetoric: A Bibliography', *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, xi (1981), 187–90.

The ethics of belief, whether construed narrowly or taken in the wider sense suggested above, is of special interest with respect to religious beliefs. In this essay, I would like to deal with one of the central problems for the ethics of religious persuasion, primarily through an examination of views expressed by St Augustine. Augustine's formal education was in rhetorical theory, and he was himself a teacher of rhetoric. Book iv of his *De Doctrina Christiana* is his own formal written treatment of the subject. There are four ethical problems for religious persuaders which are either explicitly addressed or suggested by what is said in *De Doctrina*. (1) Are techniques of persuasion (for example, the devices of classical rhetoric) appropriate at all in communicating religious truth and attempting to bring others to religious belief? (2) Do appeals to *emotion* have a legitimate role to play in religious persuasion? If so, what is that role? (3) Is it wrong for the religious persuader to aim to please or entertain hearers? (In other words, what role if any should *pleasure* play in religious persuasion?) and (4) Is 'personal salvation' or the eternal good of the soul an end of such transcending importance as to justify the use of deceptive means in religious persuasion?

It is the fourth of these problems, a problem about means and ends, which is the subject of the present essay; so I will report only briefly what Augustine has to say on the other three. There might be some doubt about whether the first of these four problems is really an ethical problem. But for Augustine, and within the context of classical rhetorical theory, it must be so regarded, since it has to do with the duties of the religious speaker or communicator: What efforts is it the responsibility of the religious speaker to exert? Within the framework of Augustine's Christianity, religious belief is from the human point of view a matter of individual choice and from the divine point of view a matter of the action of the Holy Spirit. Should religious speaking, then, aim to persuade at all? Or should it simply involve a presentation of religious truth? In other words, should religious speaking just be a matter of proclamation? Early in Book iv of *De Doctrina*, Augustine defends the use of rhetorical skills and devices by the Christian orator on the grounds that there is nothing inherently objectionable about the tools of rhetoric, since they may be used for either good or evil. Indeed, his view seems to be that their natural and highest use is to promote belief in the highest truths. 'Since by means of the art of rhetoric both truth and falsehood are urged,' he asks, 'who would dare to say that truth should stand in the person of its defenders unarmed against lying? ... While the faculty of eloquence, which is of great value in urging either evil or justice, is in itself indifferent, why should it not be obtained for the uses of the good in the service of truth if the evil usurp it for the winning of perverse and vain causes in defence of iniquity and error?'¹ In Book iv of *De Doctrina*, it has been argued, Augustine is coming to terms

¹ *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson, Jr (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958); all references here are to this edition.

with his own classical education in rhetoric. An analogous problem, about the use of principles and precepts in the interpretation of religious doctrine (which is the subject of the other three books of *De Doctrina*), is dealt with in the Prologue.¹

The problems of emotion and pleasure are really, at least in part, more specific elaborations of the first problem, since pleasure and emotion are among the intended effects in the use of rhetorical devices. Augustine raises these two issues in connection with Cicero's three 'ends' of rhetoric: to teach (*docere*), to delight (*delectare*), and to move (*flectere*).² Speaking of the second and third of these ends, Augustine says 'Just as [the hearer] is delighted if you speak sweetly, so is he persuaded (*flectitur*) if he loves what you promise, fears what you threaten, hates what you condemn, embraces what you commend, sorrows at what you maintain to be sorrowful; rejoices when you announce something delightful, places pity on those whom you place before him in speaking as being pitiful, flees those whom you, moving fear, warn are to be avoided; and is moved by whatever else may be done through grand eloquence toward moving the minds of listeners' (pp. 136–7). Emotion has often been regarded as a problem in the ethics of belief and in the ethics of rhetoric because it seems often, as Plato complained, to interfere with reasoning. There is no indication in *De Doctrina* that Augustine thinks that emotion has any legitimate role to play in the formation of belief. The ultimate end of rhetoric for Augustine, however, is to change hearers and move them to action. Sometimes belief by itself will be enough to effect these changes; but when it will not, eloquent appeals to the emotions may be required: 'When it is necessary, it is to be done, and it is necessary when they know what should be done but do not do it' (p. 137).

Pleasure has sometimes been regarded as problematic in rhetoric when the aim is to entertain or flatter hearers rather than to improve them or move them to necessary courses of action. It presents a special problem for Augustine, since he holds that one ought not to take pleasure in anything for its own sake, except those things which are eternal and immutable.³ But he justifies the pleasing of hearers in Chapters 12–14 of Book IV on the grounds that it is needed by religious speakers to get and keep the attention of their hearers.

There is a conception of rhetoric which has its origins in Socrates and Plato; which threads its way through the writings of a number of important classical

¹ For an insightful discussion of Augustine's intentions in writing Bk. IV of *De Doctrina*, see James J. Murphy, 'St. Augustine and the Debate about a Christian Rhetoric', *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, XLVI (1960), 400–10.

² For the Latin text of Bk. IV, with commentary, see A. Aurelii Augustini, *De Doctrina Christiana liber quartus*, trans. Sister Therese Sullivan, Catholic Univ. Patristic Studies, vol. XXIII (Washington, D.C.: 1930).

³ Book I, Ch. xxii. For an even more austere account of the role of pleasure in rhetoric, see François Fenelon, *Dialogues on Eloquence*, trans. Wilbur S. Howell (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), which originally appeared in 1717.

rhetoricians; and which seems particularly suited to religious persuasion, at least within the Christian tradition. This conception arose partly out of ethical concerns, and it gives rise to at least two fundamental principles of ethical persuasion. It will be worth our while to take a brief but careful look at it before dealing with Augustine's fourth problem, since some attention to it will help us to appreciate more fully the nature of that problem, and since Augustine seems to be influenced by this conception.

Plato has often been regarded as an enemy of rhetoric on account of his attacks on the Sophists, especially for his criticisms in the two dialogues which are explicitly about rhetoric, the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus*. A central question in the *Gorgias* is whether rhetoric is truly an art (*technē*) as Gorgias claims it to be. When Gorgias and Socrates speak of rhetoric, they are both concerned with the persuasive use of discourse (as is Augustine). Gorgias, like most Greek and Roman rhetoricians, is thinking more exclusively than Socrates in terms of public speaking. But they agree that rhetoric has to do with verbal persuasion. Socrates seems in the *Gorgias* and elsewhere to have two main reasons, in addition to the inability of rhetoricians to explain the nature of their activity, for thinking that rhetoric as he knows it to have been practiced is not an art. One reason is that its proponents do not know or emphasize their subject-matter and are concerned with appearances rather than reality. The other reason is that in practicing rhetoric Gorgias and others do not aim to benefit and improve their hearers; they aim instead at their own benefit. It is Plato's view that a genuine *technē* has by definition a *telos*, an end at which it aims, which is the improvement and well-being of that on which it operates; the Sophistic rhetoricians, however, aim at their own enrichment, and only flatter and entertain their hearers.

These criticisms – that rhetoricians fail to take their subject-matter seriously and that they show little concern for the well-being of their hearers – emerge at two stages in the *Gorgias*: in the initial exchange between Socrates and Gorgias, and in the well-known comparison between rhetoric and cookery in Socrates' discussion with Polus. The problem about subject-matter arises when Gorgias claims at 452 that the skilled orator will be more persuasive, even on a subject on which he is relatively ignorant, than the expert, and that rhetoric is the greatest of goods since it gives its practitioners freedom to do as they please and power over others. All the orator has to do is manage appearances, so that real knowledge is unnecessary. Gorgias anticipates moral objections about the uses of rhetoric by arguing that it is simply a set of skills, a neutral tool which may be used for either good or evil ends. The view expressed here by Gorgias, which we may refer to as 'the instrumental view of rhetoric', is characteristic of Sophistic rhetoric and pervades much of classical rhetorical theory. Plato not only regards the instrumental view as morally objectionable; he also refuses to dignify the mere mastery of skills by regarding it as a *technē*.

Both of Plato's criticisms of Sophistic rhetoric are made strongly in the

comparison between rhetoric and cookery at 462D ff. Cookery simulates what medicine does. One of the concerns of the art of medicine is to determine which foods are good for the human body and under what circumstances – in other words, medicine is concerned with nutrition. So the physician takes an interest in various kinds of foods and the effects they have on the body; and, by definition, medicine aims at making and keeping the body healthy. Cookery, on the other hand, is concerned with making food *seem* good. It is a form of ‘flattery’ (of the food); it adorns food, makes it attractive. And it aims to delight the eater, producing pleasure in the body rather than improving and maintaining it. As cookery is to the body, so Sophistic rhetoric is to the soul. It is concerned with the appearance of its subject-matter rather than with its true nature, and its only concern with hearers is that they be persuaded, usually for the benefit of the persuader.

Had Plato gone no further than these criticisms, he might truly be said to be an enemy of rhetoric, although there are already in his criticisms hints of what a true *technē* of rhetoric would be. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates eventually suggests the possibility of a ‘right sort of rhetorician’, one who is really ‘just and well-informed of the ways of justice’, and the context indicates that such a rhetorician would be concerned with improving souls.¹ But Plato goes much further in the *Phaedrus*. After criticizing sample speeches, Socrates says that there is no shame in writing or delivering speeches: ‘The disgrace’, he says, ‘consists in speaking or writing not well, but disgracefully and badly’ (258D). ‘Speaking well,’ as the notion is developed in the *Phaedrus*, will qualify as a *technē*, since it is based upon the appropriate sorts of knowledge and since it aims at the improvement of souls. Two sorts of knowledge essential to speaking well are emphasized in the *Phaedrus*: knowledge of the ‘truth of the matters’ about which the orator is to speak (259E), and knowledge of the nature of the soul. The true orator will understand the nature of souls partly from a desire to improve them through the practice of the true art of rhetoric. As Richard Weavers points out in his analysis of the *Phaedrus*, it is no accident that the sample speeches are about *eros*; since, according to the conception of *eros* developed by Plato in the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*, the true lover aims at improving the soul of the beloved.²

In his defence of the use of rhetorical skills by religious persuaders, Augustine appears perhaps to endorse an instrumental view of rhetoric, since he says that it is in itself ‘indifferent’ (*in medio posita*). But this is, I think, only an appearance.³ However, even if Augustine does view rhetoric in

¹ 508c, trans. W. R. M. Lamb in the Loeb Classical Library (1925; rpt. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975). Further references to Plato, as here, will be by Stephanus page numbers. References to the *Phaedrus* are to the H. N. Fowler translation, also in the Loeb Classical Library (1914; rpt. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966).

² Richard M. Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric* (South Bend, Indiana: Regnery/Gateway, 1953), chap. i.

³ While Augustine does hold that rhetorical skills may be turned to either good or evil purposes, there are good reasons for thinking that his commitment to the instrumental view is only apparent. The passage

general as neutral, it is clear that he views *religious* rhetoric in teleological terms, as aiming by its very nature to benefit hearers. So, at the very least, religious rhetoric is for Augustine what the true art of rhetoric is for Plato. Plato's conception of rhetoric is motivated by ethical considerations as well as by his view of the true nature of *technē*, and it suggests two norms for ethical persuasion which are particularly applicable in religious contexts: (1) that responsible persuasion involves a genuine concern for subject-matter, for the 'message' in persuasion, and (2) that responsible persuasion involves a genuine concern for the character and well-being of the person being persuaded. Both of these principles will be important in our discussion of the problem of deception in religious persuasion. Religious rhetoric for Augustine aims to influence hearers toward a commitment to religious truth in order to secure the eternal well-being of their souls. The emphasis on the eternal good of hearers as a *teleos* is, of course, the source of the difficulty about means and ends. And we may anticipate that the emphasis on a commitment to subject-matter will be for Augustine part of the solution to that difficulty.

The question of ends and means is perhaps the thorniest of ethical problems in religious persuasion. Let us begin by putting the difficulty in the barest and crudest of terms. Suppose that one small deception will make the difference: that without it a soul will go down in unbelief into eternal torments, while with it that same soul will go off into eternal bliss. Suppose even that the deception is a sin, a punishable offence. Are not little deceptions, thoughtless little deceptions, common enough already in our daily lives, and for much less noble purposes? Could the consequences, for the persuader, of some small well-intended sin possibly outweigh the prospect of eternal punishment for the potential convert? Or, even supposing the harshest of penalties for the deceiver, would not the deception in question be the noblest of personal sacrifices?

Many religious people still have, as Augustine had, such conceptions of the consequences of belief and nonbelief. For them the problem at hand is most intense. But for those who reject such conceptions but maintain that religious belief is the means to achieving the highest good for human beings, there is an essentially similar problem. If the highest of goods is to be attained through belief, and if belief will come only through deception, is it not at least excusable for the religious persuader to set aside scruples about accuracy and full truthfulness on appropriate occasions?

So baldly stated, the case for deception in religious persuasion seems obviously perverse. At the same time, many actual religious persuaders .

itself suggests that he believes that the natural use of rhetoric is to promote truth, and that its use to promote false belief is a perversion, a usurpation. As is well known, Augustine holds that evil is a privation, involving the absence of something which ought to be present or the distortion of things which are in themselves good. In *De Magistro*, he expresses the view that the natural end of human language and communication is to communicate the truth. The highest end of rhetoric, then, will be to promote the highest of truths.

apparently find its logic irresistible. This is not to say that deceptive religious persuaders typically run consciously through such a line of reasoning before bending the truth; but at least while they are in the process of persuading, many religious persuaders are in fact moved to compromise the truth, and occasionally to tell lies, by the importance of the end which they have in view, the eternal (or even the temporal) well-being of the persons they aim to persuade.

The problem of the legitimacy or the usefulness of deception in religious persuasion is not explicitly raised in *De Doctrina*, although that book does include some comments on lying. The issue is raised, however, in *De Mendacio* and in *Contra Mendacium*.¹ These two books deal with the general question, 'Ought one ever to tell a lie?' Our concern is in one respect wider than Augustine's and in another respect narrower. It is wider in that we are interested here in distortions of the truth in general, and not just in lies. It is narrower in that it is just in the context of religious persuasion that we will be concerned about deception. It will be an advantage to arguments against the use of deception in religious persuasion if they are independent of the answer to Augustine's general question. He himself ends up arguing that one ought never to lie. On the other hand, Augustine takes this position with some hesitation; but then he argues that even if there are some cases in which a lie is excusable one must never lie on matters of Christian doctrine.

In his two books on lying, Augustine identifies a variety of kinds of cases in which a lie might be thought to be morally acceptable. The kind of case which concerns us is one in which the eternal well-being of a soul is at stake. He considers three such cases as examples. Two of these cases are brought up in Chapter 11 of *De Mendacio*, when Augustine suggests that some may think it right to lie on behalf of another person 'that he may live the while, or not be offended in those things which he much loveth, to the end that he may attain unto eternal truth by being taught' (p. 463). The third case is raised in *Contra Mendacium*:

But sometimes a peril to eternal salvation is put forth against us; which peril, they cry out, we by telling a lie, if otherwise it cannot be, must ward off. As, for instance, if a person who is to be baptized be in the power of impious and infidel men, and cannot be got at that he may be washed with the laver of regeneration, but by deceiving his keepers with a lie. From this most invidious cry, by which we are compelled, not for a man's wealth or honors in this world which are fleeting by, not for the life itself of this present time, but for the eternal salvation of a human being, to tell a lie, whither shall I betake me for refuge but unto thee, O truth? (p. 499)

There is a fourth case which provided the occasion for the writing of *Contra Mendacium*. The book was written by Augustine in order to dissuade his friend

¹ Both works are translated by the Rev. H. Browne in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff (1887; rpt. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1976), vol. III. The comments on lying in *De Doctrina* are in chapter xxxvi of Bk. 1; Augustine admits there, as elsewhere in his writings, that a person may benefit from being deceived.

Consentius from using deception to infiltrate the Priscillianist heresy. Among the doctrines of the Priscillianists, ironically, was the view that religious lies are sometimes not only acceptable, but commendable. Consentius and some other Catholics were pretending to accept Priscillianist teachings which they actually rejected, in order to infiltrate and expose the heretics. One gathers from Augustine's discussion that one of the justifications for using this tactic must have been that some of the exposed heretics would eventually come to saving belief.

So we have four cases: (1) lying to preserve someone's life, in the hope of later conversion; (2) lying to keep a potential convert from being offended and thus turned away from the saving truth; (3) lying to free a man from captors, so that he may receive saving baptism; and (4) lying in order to infiltrate the camp of heretics, in the hope that they will eventually be converted.

In dealing with the first two cases, in Chapter 11 of *De Mendacio*, Augustine gives two arguments against lying. I will call these 'the adultery argument' and 'the authority argument'. The adultery argument is an example of what is sometimes called 'an argument by logical analogy'. The advocate of such lies does not understand, says Augustine, 'that there is no flagitious thing which he may not upon the same grounds be compelled to commit' (p. 463). This is a favourite argument of Augustine's in both of his books on lying; I call it 'the adultery argument' because his favourite analogy with lying as a means is adultery or lewdness as a means. It is the sole argument which he gives in discussing case (3) in *Contra Mendacium*: 'For why, if those keepers may be enticed to admit us to baptize the man, by our committing lewdness, do we refuse to do things contrary to chastity, and yet, if by a lie they may be deceived, consent to do things contrary to truth?' (p. 499). If the salvation of an eternal soul as an end will justify lying as a means, Augustine argues, then it will justify adultery or anything else that might conceivably serve the same end. That adultery or lewdness could be justifiable under any circumstances seems to Augustine to be utterly out of the question.

The essence of the authority argument is expressed in Augustine's objection that by lying in cases (1) or (2) 'the authority of the doctrine itself is cut off and altogether undone' (p. 463). There are, however, two different senses in which this might be taken, and so two different versions of the authority argument. We shall return to it and them shortly.

Notice that the first and third of our four examples involve lying to someone other than the potential convert, and that neither is likely to involve the deceptive manipulation of religious subject-matter (although either might). Lying to save someone's life or to free someone from captors is not likely to either involve or be a part of religious persuasion. These two cases are essentially like the case of lying to save someone's life under more ordinary circumstances (which Augustine discusses in some detail in both books on

lying). It is as if the Devil came steaming up to us in pursuit of some soul and asked 'Which way did it go?' The objection to lying in such cases will be a general objection to lying as a means. The adultery argument is just such a general objection. It is not an objection which applies especially to the context of religious persuasion. It is an objection to ever using lying as a means to any end, no matter how important. And it is an objection which is unlikely to convince those who can imagine circumstances in which they would feel justified in lying to save a human life. Their instincts about committing adultery to save an eternal soul are likely to be the same, if they can really conceive of circumstances in which such an option would arise.

The authority argument, unlike the adultery argument, is more specifically an objection to deception in persuasion, especially to deception in religious persuasion. Cases (2) and (4), the lie to avoid offending potential converts and the lie to infiltrate the camp of heretics, are more typical instances of deception as a part of religious persuasion. Case (4), as it arises for Augustine in connection with attempts by Consentius to expose the Priscillianist heretics, is peculiar. But it is an instance of a common phenomenon in religious persuasion: the persuader feigns common interests or associations or beliefs with nonbelievers, or otherwise approaches them by means of deception, in order to get among them and obtain a favourable hearing. For example, a religious worker on a campus pretends to be a student, or a church member on door to door visitation claims to be merely taking an opinion poll, or a religious speaker pretends to share religious or other beliefs with an audience. Case (4), then, may be taken as a peculiar representative of a more common tactic: making use of deception in order to get a hearing. So taken, it is essentially like case (2), which involves the use of deception in order to avoid losing a favourable hearing. It is characteristic of the ancient rhetoric handbooks, with which Augustine was no doubt familiar, that they recommend the use of various techniques, some involving deception, to make audiences receptive.¹ It is likely that in discussing case (2) Augustine has such recommendations in mind. The discussion of the role of *delighting* in *De Doctrina* makes it clear that Augustine does not object to efforts to make audiences receptive; but he does object to the use of deception for that purpose.

Cases (2) and (4) are instances of what we may call 'external' deception; they are preparatory or attendant to the presentation of the religious message. They may or may not involve misrepresentation of religious subject-matter or doctrine. Their aim is to create and maintain a favourable context for persuasive argumentation. 'Internal' deception in religious

¹ See, for instance, the *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum*, trans. H. Rackham, in the Loeb Classical Library (1937; rpt. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), chs. 29–34; and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, trans. Harry Caplan, also in the Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1954), Bk. 1, ch. vi. There is also some discussion of such techniques in Aristotle's *Art of Rhetoric*, trans. J. H. Freese, Loeb Classical Library (1926; rpt. Cambridge, 1975), Bk. III, chs. 14 ff.

persuasion, on the other hand, will be a matter of what goes on within the process of persuasive argumentation itself; and it will involve distortion or misrepresentation of the religious subject-matter itself, either in its content or in its supports. Since the distinction between the context of argumentation and argumentation itself is relative, the distinction between external and internal deception will not be absolute. The two will tend to merge into one another, and there will be borderline cases. But the main difference is that *external* deception need not involve deceptive handling of religious subject-matter; and, when it does, the misrepresentations are more superficial. *Internal* deception, on the other hand, essentially operates with the subject-matter, and it involves the deceptive manipulation of the very processes by which the persuaded will come to belief. The typical devices of internal deception are the familiar 'tricks of dishonest argument', such as the intentional use of equivocations, various forms of begging the question, the use of ridicule or other diversionary tactics to evade serious objections, outright falsification or misrepresentation of evidence, *ad hominem* attacks on opponents, and distortion of opposing points of view (for example, fastening on and magnifying some trivial aspect of the opponent's position). These sorts of tactics are employed in essentially the same ways in religious persuasion as they are elsewhere; they have been widely discussed in logic books and need no special treatment in connection with the religious context.

Let us return now to the authority argument. There are, as I mentioned earlier, two senses in which the 'authority of doctrine' might be 'cut off and undone', and thus there are two different versions or levels of the authority argument. It is the first of these two senses which seems to be most directly applicable to external cases such as case (2), and which is emphasized in Augustine's formulation of the argument in Chapter 11 of *De Mendacio*: the credibility of the messenger will be undermined by lying. 'How can there be any believing one who thinks it is sometimes right to lie?' Augustine asks. The *credibility* argument, while mainly pragmatic rather than moral, is not to be taken lightly and is not without moral import. Augustine appeals to it on several occasions in both *De Mendacio* and *Contra Mendacium*. Although we are looking for arguments which will not depend upon or entail the claim that every lie is wrong, it must at least be allowed that there is a moral presumption against lying. Any moral justification for deception in religious persuasion in terms of the importance of ends will have to overcome that presumption and is likely to depend upon pragmatic considerations, upon the potential effectiveness of deception as a means. The religious persuader, like the secular orator dealing with questions of morality, must have a special concern with credibility and with appearances. Such a persuader is not likely to be effective without at least the appearance of a deep commitment to truth and truthfulness. According to several of Augustine's important predecessors in rhetorical theory (especially Isocrates and Quintilian), such an appearance

is unlikely if not impossible unless the commitment is actual. Augustine himself stresses the character and reputation of the Christian orator in the last few chapters of *De Doctrina*; and it seems clear that moral uprightness and truthfulness, are, for Augustine, not only important for effectiveness, but are also fitting for the bearer of such a message.

The second and more important sense in which Augustine thinks that the authority of the doctrine might be 'undone' is that the religious message itself might be corrupted by deception. Let us call the second version of the authority argument 'the integrity argument'. It is the integrity of the subject-matter, rather than that of the persuader, which is the issue in the integrity argument. The message itself is corrupted when the religious subject-matter is manipulated deceptively. Falsifications or distortions involving religious doctrine are, for Augustine, the most deplorable of deceptions. While there is room for discussion about other sorts of lies, under no circumstances whatever are lies to be told on matters of religious doctrine. In Chapter 25 of *De Mendacio*, Augustine says 'first to be eschewed is that capital lie and far to be fled from, which is done in the doctrine of religion; to which lie a man ought by no consideration to be induced'. He says the same in Chapter 37 and then in Chapter 42 says 'There must therefore be no lying in the doctrine of piety: it is a heinous wickedness, and the first sort of detestable lie.' Even 'unto eternal salvation', he adds, 'none is to be led by aid of a lie'.

The argument in support of these condemnations is given most explicitly in Chapter 40 of *De Mendacium*, in which Augustine is making a comparison between 'pudicity of body, and chastity of soul, and verity of doctrine', the last of which he judges to be most important. 'Verity of doctrine, of religion and piety', he argues, 'is not violated unless by a lie.' Piety in this life he sees as grounded in doctrine and truth, 'which by lying is possible to be corrupted' and 'is most of all to be kept incorrupt'. There is the unmistakable implication in Augustine's pronouncements that doctrinal truth is more important than the eternal destiny of particular human souls. So his commitment to the first of Plato's emphases (subject-matter) is deeper than his commitment to the second (well-being of hearers).

There is another brief but interesting line of argument in *Contra Mendacio* which involves the emphasis on subject-matter and which is related to Augustine's view of the nature and function of language. At the beginning of that book, Augustine suggests that there is a sort of inconsistency in using lies to expose the false doctrines of heretics and to promote the truth. Then, near the end of the book there is an attempt to develop this suggestion into an argument:

How does lying take into itself truth as its patroness? Or, is it for her own adversary that she conquers, that by herself she may be conquered? Who can bear this absurdity? In no wise therefore may we say, that they who assert that it is sometimes

right to lie, in asserting that are truthful; lest, what is most absurd and foolish to believe, truth should teach us to be liars. . . . But then if this thing truth teaches not, it is not true; if not true, it is not meet to be learned; if not meet to be learned, never therefore is it meet to tell a lie. (Chap. 38)

Augustine holds, then, that there is an incoherence of some kind in thinking that lies can serve the truth or that the truth can commend lying. The precise nature of this incoherence is not explained; and, in fact, it is not clear that there is any logical difficulty in the notion that a lie might do more to maximize the number of true instances of believing in the world than would any alternative *true* utterance. On the other hand, there does seem to be hypocrisy on the part of the religious persuader who uses lies in the name of truth; and we shall see shortly that this provides the basis for a more definite argument against the use of lies, an argument which applies especially to the context of religious persuasion.

Classical rhetorical theory, especially after the time of Aristotle, typically thought of rhetorical situations in terms of a division into three elements: (1) the speaker, (2) the speech or message, and (3) the audience. Plato's ideal rhetoric, as we saw earlier, places emphasis on the second and third of these elements, and gives rise to two general obligations for the persuader: a commitment to the subject-matter and a commitment to the well-being of hearers. The difficulty about ends and means, as it has been raised here, arises out of a disproportionate and restricted emphasis on the third of the three elements and on the second of Plato's two principles. Of the two versions of the authority argument, we might say that the *credibility* argument emphasizes the *speaker*, mostly in practical term, but with ethical overtones. The role of the speaker in persuasion is discussed in classical rhetorical theory in terms of the notion of *ethos*, which has two senses which correspond to the pragmatic and moral aspects of the credibility argument: *ethos* may refer to the reputation of the speaker, or it may refer to the actual character of the speaker.¹ On the other hand, the *integrity* argument emphasizes the *message*. These are the two main objections which Augustine offers against deception in religious persuasion. A third main objection, however, one which involves an emphasis on *audience*, may be developed within the context of Augustine's point of view.

Let us call the third main objection to deception in religious persuasion 'the autonomy argument'.² It has reference to hearers, but with an emphasis

¹ See William M. Sattler, 'Conceptions of *Ethos* in Ancient Rhetoric', *Speech Monographs*, xii (1947), 55–65. There are, however, complications, some of which arise from the fact that the ancients were less inclined than we are to distinguish sharply actual character from reputation, and others of which arise from etymological considerations. See Thomas E. Corts, 'The Derivation of *Ethos*', *Communication Monographs*, xxxv (1968), 201–2.

² The issue of autonomy has been addressed in a more general way by a number of writers on the ethics of rhetoric. See, for example, Diggs, p. 372; Franklyn S. Haiman, 'A Re-Examination of the Ethics of Persuasion', *Central States Speech Journal*, iii (1952), 1–9; and Douglas H. Parker, 'Rhetoric, Ethics and Manipulation', *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, v (1972), 69–87.

on their status as autonomous moral and spiritual beings who are entitled to make their own decisions, rather than an emphasis on their eternal destiny. This emphasis is analogous to that which the integrity argument places on the message: just as there ought to be a respect for subject-matter, so there should be a respect for persons being persuaded. This principle of respect for the autonomy of hearers has a special significance in religious persuasion, and particularly within the context of Augustinian Christianity. The nature of religious faith for Augustine is such that it essentially involves a conscious decision which is really the individual's own decision. In fact, for Augustine it is part of the message itself that the individual must consciously make such a decision, at least this is so from the human point of view.

Now we can see why there is after all a kind of incoherence or inconsistency in using deception to bring about saving faith. It is not really saving faith in so far as it is not a matter of the believer's own decision; and it is not the believer's own decision in so far as it is the work of deception. The ethical dimension of this for the religious persuader is also clear: the persuader cannot ethically intend anything less than that the decision for religious faith is wholly (from the human point of view) the hearer's own autonomous decision; to intend anything less is inconsistent with a full commitment to the content of the message itself. The problem of deception in religious persuasion is, like the appropriateness problem which was discussed earlier, a difficulty about the role of the persuader. I mentioned earlier that, within the context of Augustinian Christianity, religious faith is from the divine point of view a matter of the action of the Holy Spirit and from the human point of view a matter of individual choice. Augustine argues in *De Doctrina* that a total rejection of the use of persuasive devices unduly minimizes the role of the religious persuader as an instrument in bringing others to belief. The use of deception, on the other hand, unduly magnifies the role of the persuader: from the divine point of view it has the persuader usurping the role of the Holy Spirit, while from the human point of view it has the persuader usurping the role of the convert. But, since this latter usurpation involves a meddling in and corrupting of the very processes which are the determiners of belief, it makes the production of religious faith by deception logically incoherent.¹

The centrepiece of an Augustinian ethics of religious persuasion is the message itself. There are obligations which have to do with the speaker's character; these arise in part out of pragmatic considerations, but the central point for Augustine seems to be that there should be a kind of consistency between the character of the speaker and the content of the message.

¹ This same line of argument will apply within the context of Plato's view of the true art of rhetoric, in which the 'lover' aims to improve the soul of the 'beloved', since this improvement is to be understood in terms of the education of the reasoning part of the soul and in terms of the soul's acquiring *noesis*. The contrast between deceptive seduction of the soul and its genuine improvement is nicely drawn in the early pages of Plato's *Lysis*, in the playful banter between Socrates and Hippothales, who has his sights set on Lysis.

Secondly, there are obligations which arise out of the importance of the subject-matter; it ought not to be corrupted with falsehoods or distortions. And, thirdly, there are obligations to the person being persuaded; these are partly a matter of concern for the eternal well-being, but also partly a matter of the autonomy of the person. We have been concerned chiefly with the problem of deception; but a good deal of what has been said ought to be applicable to other ethical problems in religious persuasion.