Objection 1. It appears that falsity does not exist in things. For Augustine says (Soliloq. ii, 8), "If the true is that which is, it will be concluded that the false exists nowhere; whatever reason may appear to the contrary."

Objection 2. Further, false is derived from "fallere" [to deceive]. But things do not deceive; for, as Augustine says (De Vera Relig. 33), they show nothing but their own species. Therefore the false is not found in things.

Objection 3. Further, the true is said to exist in things by conformity to the divine intellect, as stated above (q. 16). But everything, in so far as it exists, imitates God. Therefore everything is true without admixture of falsity; and thus nothing is false.

On the contrary, Augustine says (De Vera Relig. 34): "Every body is a true body and a false unity: for it imitates unity without being unity." But everything imitates the divine unity yet falls short of it. Therefore in all things falsity exists.

I answer that, Since true and false are opposed, and since opposites stand in relation to the same thing, we must needs seek falsity, where primarily we find truth; that is to say, in the intellect. Now, in things, neither truth nor falsity exists, except in relation to the intellect. And since every thing is denominated simply by what belongs to it "per se," but is denominated relatively by what belongs to it accidentally; a thing indeed may be called false simply when compared with the intellect on which it depends, and to which it is compared "per se" but may be called false relatively as directed to another intellect, to which it is compared accidentally. Now natural things depend on the divine intellect, as artificial things on the human. Wherefore artificial things are said to be false simply and in themselves, in so far as they fall short of the form of the art; whence a craftsman is said to produce a false work, if it falls short of the proper operation of his art.

In things that depend on God, falseness cannot be found, in so far as they are compared with the divine intellect; since whatever takes place in things proceeds from the ordinance of that intellect, unless perhaps in the case of voluntary agents only, who have it in their power to withdraw themselves from what is so ordained; wherein consists the evil of sin. Thus sins themselves are called untruths and lies in the Scriptures, according to the words of the text, "Why do you love vanity, and seek after lying?" (Ps. 4:3): as on the other hand virtuous deeds are called the "truth of life" as being obedient to the order of the divine intellect. Thus it is said, "He that doth truth, cometh to the light" (Jn. 3:21).

But in relation to our intellect, natural things which are compared thereto accidentally, can be called false; not simply, but relatively; and that in two ways. In one way according to the thing signified, and thus a thing is said to be false as being signified or represented by word or thought that is false. In this respect anything can be said to be false as regards any quality not possessed by it; as if we should say that a diameter is a false commensurable thing, as the Philosopher says (Metaph. v, 34). So, too, Augustine says (Soliloq. ii, 10): "The true tragedian is a false Hector": even as, on the contrary, anything can be called true, in regard to that which is becoming to it. In another way a thing can be called false, by way of cause—and thus a thing is said to be false that naturally begets a false opinion. And whereas it is innate in us to judge things by external appearances, since our knowledge takes its rise from sense, which principally and naturally deals with external accidents, therefore those external accidents, which resemble things other than themselves, are said to be false with respect to those things; thus gall is falsely honey; and tin, false gold. Regarding this, Augustine says (Soliloq. ii, 6): "We call those things false that appear to our apprehension like the true:" and the Philosopher says (Metaph. v, 34): "Things are called false that are naturally apt to appear such as they are not, or what they are not." In this way a man is called false as delighting in false opinions or words, and not because he can invent them; for in this way many wise and learned persons might be called false, as stated in Metaph. v, 34.

Reply to Objection 1. A thing compared with the intellect is said to be true in respect to what it is; and false in respect to what it is not. Hence, "The true tragedian is a false Hector," as stated in Soliloq. ii, 6. As, therefore, in things that are is found a certain non-being, so in things that are is found a degree of falseness.

Reply to Objection 2. Things do not deceive by their own nature, but by accident. For they give occasion to falsity, by the likeness they bear to things which they actually are not.

Reply to Objection 3. Things are said to be false, not as compared with the divine intellect, in which case they would be false simply, but as compared with our intellect; and thus they are false only relatively.

To the argument which is urged on the contrary, likeness or defective representation does not involve the idea of falsity except in so far as it gives occasion to false opinion. Hence a thing is not always said to be false, because it resembles another thing; but only when the resemblance is such as naturally to produce a false opinion, not in any one case, but in the majority of instances.