

Doubts about Doubting: Kierkegaard's Response to Skepticism in *Works of Love*

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Socratic threads run throughout the complex tapestry of Kierkegaard's thought and betray the deep influence 'that noble, simple, wise man of ancient times' had upon him. To a lesser, though significant extent, the thought of Aristotle lies beneath the surface of much of Kierkegaard's thinking as well.¹ Less well known is the attention Kierkegaard pays in a few places to the Greek skeptics such as Sextus Empiricus. That Kierkegaard holds their philosophical positions in high regard is particularly evident in the "Interlude" of *Philosophical Fragments*. What is it about their position or method that draws Kierkegaard's interest? How does his reading of skepticism affect his epistemology? To the chagrin of some readers Kierkegaard never provides us with a formal epistemology, though he undoubtedly has something to say about knowledge and its acquisition.

Below I will examine the skeptical strain present in the Interlude, to see how it might inform one chapter in a work less noted for its philosophical import, *Works of Love*.² In the deliberation "Love Believes All Things—and Yet Is Never Deceived," Kierkegaard concedes a skeptical point about doubt similar to one in *Fragments*, but then, after arguing that doubt and belief are equally viable options, asserts that with regard to love, it is preferable to believe. This claim has understandably struck many

¹ See volumes six (*Kierkegaard and Great Traditions*) and fourteen (*Kierkegaard's Classical Inspiration*) of the series *Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana*, (eds.) Niels Thulstrup and Marie Mikulová, (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Boghandel A/S, 1981, 1985).

² To be fair in reading Kierkegaard we must be clear when attributing quotations to him that properly belong to one of his many pseudonyms. While at times it is not easy to discern where a pseudonym like Johannes Climacus stops and Kierkegaard begins, there is reason to think that the admiration Climacus holds for the skeptics in *Fragments* applies to Kierkegaard himself. Because *Works of Love* was written in Kierkegaard's own hand we can hope to discover in greater depths how he deals with the problem of skepticism and its relation to his *own* philosophical leanings. The propensity for philosophers to overlook Kierkegaard's signed (and particularly religious) writings misrepresents him by leaving out a part of the authorship that was present all along during the writing of the pseudonymous works.

as irrational. What does it mean for love to believe all things about one's neighbor, and further, how can one possibly avoid being deceived? Is it not appropriate at least occasionally to be skeptical about others whom we deem untrustworthy in character? In what follows I will explicate Kierkegaard's argument in *Fragments* that belief is as viable an option as doubt, and then I will demonstrate how the application of this principle to Kierkegaard's ethics of love has a rational basis.

In *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* Sextus Empiricus juxtaposes skepticism with dogmatism and a general philosophic agnosticism. The agnostic claims that truth cannot be apprehended.³ Dogmatists like Heraclitus and Plato think they have found the truth⁴ when they assert their respective theories of non-evident opposites and invisible realities. What is lacking for the skeptic is not a belief that truth exists, but rather an accessible criterion of truth from which to judge. The skeptic hopes to avoid error and since the conclusions of such dogmatists are not compelling to the skeptic, he suspends judgment (*epoche*). The intended result of widespread suspension of judgment is the state of ataraxia, freedom from disturbance. In the case of the skeptics, the disturbance they hope to be free of is that caused by the anxiety of belief and the constant possibility that one's belief may be wrong. In employing a medical analogy, Martha Nussbaum describes the skeptics' treatment of the illness of belief as "the purgation of all cognitive commitment."⁵

Despite such widespread suspension of judgment the skeptics did not doubt their own immediate experiences, that which was immediately evident to them⁶. Climacus writes, "The Greek Skeptic did not deny the correctness of sensation and of

³ Sextus devotes little time to distinguishing skepticism from the position I am calling agnostic. It is not clear how his position is significantly different save the fact that skeptics still search for truth while the agnostic accepts that it cannot be found. Given the denial of a criterion of truth, however, the skeptics' ongoing commitment to seek the truth seems (in some respects) fruitless.

⁴ Truth is attainable, though varying degrees of certainty are admissible.

⁵ *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 285.

⁶ See Sextus Empiricus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1:10, "Do the Skeptics Deny Appearances", in *The Skeptic Way*, trans. Benson Mates (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 91-2.

immediate cognition, but, said he, error has an utterly different basis—it comes from the conclusion I draw.”⁷ On this view, immediate experiences are themselves certain, and therefore, a kind of knowledge (albeit rather limited), but as soon as the immediacy expires and the temptation to infer a judgment arises, certainty dissipates as does any claim to knowledge⁸. The assumption here is that in the moment of immediate sensation I am in some sense a passive recipient of experience and in that immediate experience lies an isolated certainty about the experience that cannot be doubted. Upon immediately observing a star, Climacus says, certainty lies in what we might call the immediacy of being appeared to in a ‘starry’ way. Note, however, that while one cannot be wrong⁹ or doubt how something appears to one, one *can* be wrong when inferring from the appearance that the star therefore exists. According to Stephen Evans, uncertainty arises, “because the reality of the star as a public object with a history cannot be immediately sensed.”¹⁰ Why must the star’s existence be doubted? If it is possible my judgment could be wrong and I seek to avoid error at all costs, I must suspend judgment. Sextus provides the example of the stick that looks bent in water in order to show how judgments that seem clear and even obvious can be erroneous. When I assert that the star exists I do so dogmatically—as though I had certain knowledge—and I subject myself to the possibility of error.

It seems as though the only options available, then, are doubt (like the skeptic) or the assertion of knowledge (like the dogmatist). Climacus suggests a third possibility, belief. Belief is not dogmatic because it is not a claim to certain

⁷ Kierkegaard, Søren, *Philosophical Fragments*, ed. and trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 82.

⁸ By knowledge I mean the sort of cognition that carries with it perfect certainty.

⁹ On the notion of the infallibility see two paragraphs below.

¹⁰ “Realism and Antirealism in *Postscript*”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 166.

knowledge¹¹. Nor, however, does it suppose that because I *could* be wrong I should necessarily avoid the risk of believing something untrue. Neither the act of doubting the star's existence nor the act of believing the star's existence can claim the certainty of knowledge, but both have knowledge—the immediate experience of the star—as a ground from which to choose. Belief and doubt, then, are functions of choice. The will chooses to doubt or believe the star's existence, and such choice often reflects underlying desires (e.g. the skeptic doubts based upon her desire to attain ataraxia)¹². Climacus goes so far as to say that when belief is chosen doubt is excluded; it has no force. But isn't belief distinct from certain knowledge by virtue of the fact that doubt is still possible? For Climacus, doubt and belief are equally viable options, so to choose one is to choose against the other. "The conclusion of belief is no conclusion but a resolution."¹³ In other words, when one chooses to believe that the star exists this is not conclusive (we still lack sure knowledge that it exists), but rather, in being a "resolution" the belief is a decision I have made, and as a decision it is an expression of my will. When we turn to *Works of Love* we will examine more thoroughly what it means that belief is an expression of the will. Obviously Kierkegaard does not think that the average person who informs her friend that she saw a star would refer to the sighting of the star in terms of belief.

¹¹ According to Evans, Kierkegaard maintains two distinct meanings of the word knowledge (see, "Realism and Antirealism", 165). The sense of knowledge employed throughout this discussion requires the kind of certainty that classical foundationalism thought was necessary. Kierkegaard thinks we have very little of this sort of knowledge. However, the second meaning of knowledge does not carry with it the requirement of absolute certainty, so in this sense, Kierkegaard would say we have this kind of knowledge of all sorts of things, e.g. our existence, what we ate for breakfast, our spouse's favorite ice cream flavor, etc. While we have the weaker sort of knowledge that a star exists, we lack the stronger sort of knowledge of the same proposition. Kierkegaard, in part, hopes to make the distinction between these two types of knowledge clear, so that we recognize that the stronger version is very rare (and its requirement is unnecessarily high) and the weak version relies in an important way on belief ("Realism and Antirealism", 166).

¹² Louis Pojman in *The Logic of Subjectivity* has accused Kierkegaard of direct volitionalism, the idea that one can just choose to believe whatever one wants by an act of the will regardless of evidential considerations. C. Stephen Evans argues against Pojman's claim, in part by bringing to the discussion the role of the passions and emotions so integral to Kierkegaard's concepts of faith and belief. See "Does Kierkegaard Think Beliefs Can Be Directly Willed?" in *Philosophy of Religion*, 26 (1989), 173-184.

¹³ *Philosophical Fragments*, 84.

Before moving on it might be helpful to address the relevance of such antiquated (and discredited) theories of sense data and infallibility that we see present here. In his very insightful book on *Philosophical Fragments* Robert Roberts explores, among other things, Kierkegaard's use of irony, including Kierkegaard's ironical review of the skeptics' approach toward knowledge. While, of course, Kierkegaard did not have access to the epistemological advancements of the twenty-first century, Roberts suspects that Kierkegaard's presentation of the skeptics' position through the mouth of Climacus is at times purposively problematic, though at other times just wrong¹⁴. Because of the thick irony, Roberts admits he is not certain to what extent Climacus (or Kierkegaard) seriously presents these views, or relies on the skeptic view of knowledge. For the argument of this paper I will follow Stephen Evans' view¹⁵, which claims that for Kierkegaard, skepticism (in both its ancient Greek and modern forms) *is* an important philosophical position and one that he takes very seriously.

Climacus' concept of belief, therefore, is heavily dependent upon granting the skeptic's position significant validity. That is, Climacus agrees with the skeptic that we lack certain knowledge of inferential judgments about experience. There is reason to think that Climacus speaks for Kierkegaard on this point, especially when considering the discussion of knowledge and belief in the religious deliberation, "Love Believes All Things". However, before proceeding to *Works of Love* it is necessary to make an important qualification. In *Philosophical Fragments* the object of knowledge under consideration includes historical and contingent propositions, e.g. that the star

¹⁴ Roberts applies a corrective to the problematic Climacean view that he feels still captures the spirit of Climacus. Roberts says, "For what he [Climacus] wants above all to affirm is that there is a personal or subjective ingredient in historical judgments, this ingredient is a legitimate, nay inescapable facet of them and that such judgments are properly certified (that is, rendered certain and legitimate) in part by this subjective facet," in *Faith, Reason, and History: Rethinking Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986), 120.

¹⁵ See his article "Realism and Antirealism in *Postscript*", in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 154-76.

I immediately 'know' exists or that Australia exists even though I have not seen it myself. In *Works of Love* the object of knowledge is another person, or some fact about another person. When Kierkegaard writes, "love believes all things", the goods of belief pertain to love for one's neighbor; historical facts unrelated to the neighbor are not the focus. The idea that love believes all things, then, does not mean that love believes the proposition "football is a game played with a round ball" or "the current President of the United States attended Yale". As we will see, the idea that love believes all things has a very particular ethical application. One might object that a comparison of the two passages is a comparison of apples and oranges, but as my argument unfolds it should become clear that the concession of skeptical premises is present in both places. In both passages belief and doubt are the live options to be chosen and the limits of knowledge are greatly emphasized. It is true that believing all things in love is a much stronger proposal than believing a star exists, but Kierkegaard thinks he has good reasons for defending this biblical exhortation¹⁶.

Climacus claims that certain knowledge, which comes only in immediate experience, is a kind of neutral good about which each individual must decide what to do—believe or doubt. What does it mean to say knowledge is a kind of 'neutral good'? Returning to the example of the star, knowledge is present only in the immediate experience of the star. Based upon one's underlying desires and dispositions she will then infer 'I believe the star exists' in an act of belief, or 'I doubt the star exists' in an act of doubt. Until such a decision is made, such (immediate) knowledge is "impersonal." In his journals Kierkegaard uses the following anecdote to explain this conception of knowledge: "Knowledge is the infinitely indifferent (in the sense of rank). Knowledge is like an auctioneer who puts existence on the block. The auctioneer then says: Ten dollars (the value of the property)—but it means

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 13: 7.

nothing; only when someone makes the bid, only then is the bid ten dollars."¹⁷ In *Works of Love* Kierkegaard writes, knowledge is "infinitely equal, is the infinite indifference in equilibrium."¹⁸ What does it mean to speak of knowledge as infinite, and furthermore, infinitely indifferent? Implicit in these claims is the sense that knowledge is without value on its own, until someone does something with it: either seize it in belief, or release it in doubt. Either way, given Kierkegaard's admission of skepticism—we cannot be sure of anything save immediate sensation or experience—we risk being wrong.

If we say that knowledge lacks value until one doubts or believes does this imply that knowledge is valueless or not worth having? It is this kind of concern that has motivated some to interpret Kierkegaard as an irrationalist. At times he has been caricatured as espousing something like, "knowledge gets me nowhere; pure (reasonless) acts of the will determine my action."¹⁹ But does Kierkegaard advocate such a position? Again, in saying that knowledge lacks value until one chooses to believe or doubt its claims Kierkegaard is not saying the knowledge auction should close down altogether. Rather, one must put oneself on the line, believe or doubt, by making a bid. More than this, however, Kierkegaard's primary hope is to give belief its proper desert beside doubt. That is, it is not at all apparent why it is better to doubt than to believe. "We can be deceived by believing what is untrue, but we certainly are also deceived by not believing what is true."²⁰ Just as access to knowledge other than immediate cognition and sensation is severely limited, and because doubt is a choice of the will, so too is there the third option to believe and not to doubt. "In knowledge [love and mistrust] are, if you please,

¹⁷ Kierkegaard, Søren, *Journals and Papers II*, Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1978), # 2297.

¹⁸ Kierkegaard, Søren, *Works of Love*, Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 231.

¹⁹ See Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*, chapter 4.

²⁰ *Works of Love*, 5.

indistinguishable."²¹ That is to say, belief and doubt, or in the language of *Works of Love*, love and mistrust, have the same amount of money in their pockets at the auction. The one who loves or believes has no more *or less* means to bid than the one who mistrusts or doubts. The doubter has no cognitive advantage over the believer.

One might admit that the doubter has no cognitive advantage over the believer, but this does not refute the charge of irrationalism. What are the believer's reasons for resolving to believe? If the playing field is even, what should motivate me to believe instead of doubt? At this point Kierkegaard develops a critique of Greek skepticism that goes beyond Climacus' view in *Fragments*. The issue revolves around the presumption that the worst position for a person to be in is error. This is the presumption of the Greek skeptics and it is similar to a presumption of the famous evidentialist, W. K. Clifford.²² For Clifford, to believe something on insufficient evidence and in doing so, risk being wrong, is akin to moral failure. For the skeptics, to believe something on insufficient evidence and in doing so, risk being wrong, invites anxiety and disturbance. However, Kierkegaard calls such fear of error one-sided. Sure one should fear being in error with regard to a judgment. Climacus notes how Socrates himself greatly feared this. But what about the flipside? Should we not also fear that if we suspend belief across the board we will miss out on some good? Kierkegaard provides us with an example: "We human beings have a natural fear of making a mistake—by thinking too well of another person. On the other hand, the error of thinking too ill of another person is perhaps not feared, or at least not in proportion to the first."²³ So while we fear thinking too well of a person, we merely say it is *stupid* that we should not think well enough of someone. However,

²¹ Ibid., 228.

²² His infamous summation goes, "it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence." See "The Ethics of Belief", in Louis Pojman (ed.), *Philosophy: The Quest for Truth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 109.

²³ *Works of Love*, 232.

Kierkegaard wonders, "should it not seem just as stupid to us to have believed the evil or mistrustingly to have believed nothing—where there was good!"²⁴ To return once again to the quotation from the first page of *Works of Love*, "We can be deceived by believing what is untrue, **but we certainly are also deceived** by not believing what is true."²⁵

The reason why skepticism is ultimately unacceptable to Kierkegaard is that it one-sidedly fears being wrong, but it does not fear missing out on what is right, what is good, what contributes to one's well-being. The reason Socrates' fear of error is admirable is that it is not categorical. Unlike the skeptics, Socrates, besides doubting many things and avoiding error, also believed many things²⁶ and in doing so avoided missing out on the good. His famous claims of ignorance are not identical to claims of doubt. What's more, claims to ignorance are compatible with belief claims; for instance, I do not know x, but I believe x.²⁷ Nowhere is this difference from skepticism more apparent than at his trial: "To fear death, gentlemen, is no other than to think oneself wise when one is not, to think one knows what one does not know. No one knows whether death may not be the greatest of all blessings for a man, yet men fear it as if they knew that it is the greatest of all evils."²⁸ Based on the inactivity of his daimon, Socrates *believes* that death may be good after all.

Kierkegaard presents a second reason why belief is preferable to doubt. It involves the Augustinian distinction between good and evil where the good *is*, or has being, while evil is devoid of being or is non-being, nothing. The one who mistrusts, the doubter, believes *nothing* at all, and "To believe nothing at all is the very border

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 5; bold mine.

²⁶ For instance, he believed his daimon was a reliable source of moral guidance.

²⁷ For example, I do not know with utmost certainty that Australia exists; I have never seen it for myself. Yet I believe it exists for good reasons.

²⁸ Plato's *Apology* in *The Trial and Death of Socrates*, 3rd edn., trans. G. M. A. Grube (Cambridge: Hackett, 2000), 29a-b.

where believing evil begins."²⁹ Why? The line between epistemology and ethics is fuzzier than some philosophers might think. To some extent, as one thinks, one acts. "To believe nothing at all is the beginning of *being* evil, because it shows that **one has no good in oneself**."³⁰ To clarify, it is not knowledge of evil that corrupts but rather mistrust of the good, lack of belief. Again, knowledge is neutral until one chooses to believe or doubt on the basis of that immediate knowledge, but when the resolution is made to believe or doubt, what is revealed is the good or its lack. Therefore skepticism fails for Kierkegaard additionally because it says something about the character of the doubter. "Mistrust cannot maintain knowledge in equilibrium; it defiles knowledge and therefore verges on envy, malice, and corruption, which believe all evil."³¹

If the skeptic ends up with such vices, should we not be fair and consider the vices that apply to the believer: namely, light-mindedness, naiveté, shallowness, weakness, credulity. Kierkegaard anticipates that the believer and especially the one who believes all things will be misunderstood. "The confusion is quite natural," he admits.³² Nevertheless, these descriptors do not apply to the one who believes all things, the one who loves. But how can it be that one who believes all things, the one who loves, is never deceived? Before defending the legitimacy of this position it might be helpful to discuss the larger project of *Works of Love*, and why I have assumed that 'love' and 'mistrust', the terms that appear in this chapter, can be understood as analogues to belief and doubt, the terms of *Fragments*.

In the first half of *Works of Love* one of Kierkegaard's primary aims is to distinguish an explicitly Christian love from all other conceptions of love that have come before. Whereas other understandings of love—erotic love and friendship—

²⁹ *Works of Love*, 234.

³⁰ *Ibid*; bold mine.

³¹ *Ibid*.

³² *Ibid.*, 243.

have been praised throughout history by countless poets, neighborly love comes from a command of Christ and is unique, or so Kierkegaard argues, to the Judeo-Christian faith. What sets neighbor love apart from erotic love and friendship is its non-preferential nature. Whereas the two 'pagan' kinds of love are directed toward the individuals of one's choosing, neighbor love is directed to the one who is my neighbor, namely everyone I see. The task is obviously momentous, but Kierkegaard does not shy away from its demand because it appears impossible. Because it is a command of Christ we are obliged to love in this way.

In the chapter under discussion Kierkegaard draws upon the Apostle Paul's famous litany of love in his letter to the church at Corinth. Love believes all things. More specifically, *the one who loves with neighbor love* believes all things. What does it mean to believe all things? Is not such an ethic the epitome of gullibility? The notion that love believes all things pertains specifically to how one construes her neighbor in a particularly loving way. Kierkegaard concedes that "experience will teach that it is most sagacious³³ not to believe everything".³⁴ But experience and what one determines based on outward appearances are not always reliable indications of truth. Those whose outer appearance is unlovely may be concealing a deeper side of themselves. It is possible that those who appear unlovely are actually very loving. "The one who loves, who believes all things, is not directly manifest. He is like those plants whose propagation is hidden—he breathes in God; he draws nourishment for his love from God, he is strengthened by God."³⁵ The primary concern of the sagacious person is to avoid being deceived. Surely if one believes all things she is bound to fall prey to deception. Hence, the sagacious one mistrusts. The important alliance between mistrust and doubt can be confirmed when

³³ A better translation of the Danish term *klogskab* might be clever, shrewd, or calculating.

³⁴ Ibid., 226.

³⁵ Ibid., 244.

considering the following quote that opposes the claim that knowledge is on the side of the doubter, when, as we saw above, it is neutral with regard to doubt and belief.

The deception is that *from* knowledge (the pretense and the falsity are that it is by virtue of knowledge) mistrust concludes, assumes, and believes what it concludes, assumes, and believes **by virtue of the disbelief inherent in mistrust**, whereas *from* the same knowledge, *by virtue* of belief, one can conclude, assume, and believe the very opposite.³⁶

Kierkegaard thinks that just as the sagacious one or the one who mistrusts thinks she can 'demonstrate' on the basis of deception that one should not believe anything at all, one can likewise 'demonstrate' "that one should believe everything—on the basis of the possibility of deception."³⁷

For one thing, "The individual first begins his life with 'ergo,' with *belief*."³⁸ If any kind of deception exists it lies in the phenomenon that so many do not realize how much they rely on belief (not sure knowledge) in their daily lives. But to believe all things still seems unpalatable. Kierkegaard calls the choice to believe all things one that is made "on the basis of love."³⁹ Because doubt has no more access to knowledge than belief, believing all things is not *prima facie* impossible. However, aware of how unreasonable it seems, Kierkegaard makes a subtle distinction between the vice of naiveté and the virtue of love, a vice and a virtue that themselves can appear indistinguishable. The naïve person *acts* as a knower yet is irresponsible in her unreflective willing to believe the good about someone. Love believes all things but does so responsibly by *choosing* to do so "on the basis of the faith it has within itself."⁴⁰ What does this faith involve?

The chapter "Love Believes All Things" follows the chapter "Love Builds Up." Developed in significant detail there is the idea of presupposing love in the neighbor,

³⁶ Ibid., 227; italics Kierkegaard's, bold mine.

³⁷ Ibid., 228.

³⁸ Ibid., 230. Thomas Reid calls this the principle of credulity.

³⁹ Ibid., 234-5.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 235.

and by exploring this concept, we will begin to fill in the content of what it means to believe all things. (I do not have the space to develop Kierkegaard's argument, but the following quotation summarizes it, and greatly aids us in making sense of the subsequent chapter under present examination).

To build up is to presuppose love; to be loving is to presuppose love; only love builds up. To build up is to erect something from the ground up—but, spiritually, love is the ground of everything. No human being can place the ground of love in another person's heart; yet love is the ground, and we can build up only from the ground up; therefore we can build up only by presupposing love.⁴¹

Presupposing love involves a belief that God has equally placed love deep within every human heart. Outward assessment may suggest the contrary. It may appear that some people have no love within them, but Kierkegaard has a strong theologically-rooted egalitarianism wherein every human being possesses the same capacity to love primarily because every human being is a creation of God, who, in creating, demonstrated his love for human beings. The one who loves with neighbor love is therefore never deceived in "believing all things", because she presupposes love within the neighbor, whether or not the love is visible. To believe all things, then, is a way of construing the neighbor as one who, by virtue of the fact that she was created by a loving God, has as the ground of her being, love. That one is not deceived in believing all things is thus qualified by the notion that in presupposing love in one's neighbor, one is never wrong, despite outward appearances.

Another reason why the one who loves with neighbor love is never deceived returns us to our previous discussion about the good. If for the Christian, God is the highest good, is it possible for God to be deceived? Kierkegaard says, "No, in relation to God a person can deceive only himself, because the God-relationship is the highest good in such a way that the one who deceives God deceives himself in the

⁴¹ Ibid., 224.

most terrible way."⁴² If God is the highest good and God is identified with love⁴³ it follows that the highest good is also to relate to God in love, and to relate to his commandment to love one's neighbor in obedience and earnestness. One cannot be deceived because in loving one's neighbor not only does one presuppose the love placed there by God, but, in loving, one participates in a kind of divine activity—love—that is commanded by the one who himself cannot be deceived.

One still might not be convinced that the idea, "love believes all things", is a defensible ethical position. I will offer two more ways to address this concern and perhaps present the ethic in a more palatable light. First, in the claim that certain knowledge is neutral, Kierkegaard would surely admit that there are some things we just know⁴⁴ about people that are not up to belief. For instance, a child beaten up on a playground just knows that his bully harmed him wrongfully. Kierkegaard's point is not for the victim to deny knowledge of this event; he does not mean that what you believe you know is untrue. Rather, Kierkegaard's aim is cautionary—the inferences we draw from what we think we know are not so certain. That is, the child may know that the bully harmed him, but this action still requires interpretation. Perhaps the bully is abused at home. While such knowledge might not justify the bully's actions, it would in fact help the victim to be more forgiving toward the bully.

Second, Kierkegaard obviously realizes that people who follow this policy will sometimes be wrong. The child beaten up on the playground may respond to the bully in forgiveness, and yet it turns out that the bully had no good reasons for his action but some arbitrary Augustinian pear-stealing reasons. In this case the child's charitable response to being harmed seems mistaken. Kierkegaard believes that overall, folks who are mistaken in ways like this are not deceived because they grasp what love really is. That is, they grasp the truth that at each person's core is a

⁴² Ibid., 235.

⁴³ 1st John 4:7-8.

⁴⁴ Admitting, for the time being, that such things we 'know' may lack some degree of certainty.

ground of love placed there by a loving Creator. In this sense, the victim who construes his bully by presupposing love as the ground of his being, not only is not deceived, but in an important sense, seems to know the bully better than the bully knows himself. The one who seeks to protect herself from being mistaken in such ways, the one Kierkegaard calls "sagacious", ultimately misses out on what love really is because she fails to believe that love grounds each human being. In the end, the sagacious one is deceived by failing to presuppose love in the other.

That love believes all things and is never deceived rests, therefore, on both philosophical and theological supports fleshed out most richly in *Works of Love*. Having granted the skeptic's denial of certain knowledge based upon inferential judgments about experience, Kierkegaard goes further when he claims that one need not doubt everything nor claim sure knowledge, but instead one can believe with just as much justification as the doubter—just as much access to knowledge. Moreover, when applying this to his ethics of love, Kierkegaard presents reasoned arguments that show how believing all things in love is the basis for a coherent ethical outlook. Ultimately the decision to love with neighbor love and to believe all things rests in a choice of the will that presupposes the Creator's love within every created human being. This choice is not irrational but rests on the belief that the highest good is worth risking one's life for, even if the possibility of error remains.