

Second Series II

Love Believes All Things—and Yet Is Never Deceived

Patricia Maitland Edition · Provisional AI-assisted translation

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Before you read

Editorial introduction; not part of Kierkegaard's text.

Kierkegaard asks how love can believe all things without becoming merely credulous or surrendering judgment. His answer turns on a distinction between knowledge, which can hold opposed possibilities in equilibrium, and the inward choice by which mistrust or love interprets another person.

Love cannot guarantee that every statement about another person is factually true. Its security lies elsewhere: no deceiver can take away love's own blessedness unless the loving person abandons love. Judgment therefore reveals the judge, while love believes all things and remains itself.

1 Corinthians 13:7. Love believes all things.

Read the English translation

¶ 1

“So faith, hope and Love now remain, these three; but greatest among these is Love,” which indeed for that reason is the Ground of all things, is before all things and remains, when everything else has been done away with. Love is therefore “greatest” among “these”; but the one who, in the sense of perfection, (and what could be more perfect to compare with than faith and hope) is the greatest, must also be able to undertake, if I may so put it, the work of those beneath it and perform it still more perfectly. In worldly terms, someone may indeed sometimes be the foremost, without being the greatest in the sense of perfection, but this is precisely the imperfection of the worldly. In truth, the principle holds that the greatest must be able to do what the lesser ones can do; and in truth this holds of Love, that it can undertake the work of faith and hope, and perform it still more perfectly.

This we will now consider, as we consider

Love believes all – and yet is never deceived.

¶ 2

We will first consider, how we are to understand, that Love believes all, and next, how the loving one, precisely by believing all, can be secure against every deception; for truly, not everyone, who believes all, is therefore the loving one, and not everyone, who believes all, is therefore secure against every deception – not even faith, if it wills to believe all. And though it might seem, that being so, to be secure against every deception, is a good for Love, an advantage it has, so that this consideration therefore was not really suited as an object for consideration in a writing about Love's works: yet this is not so. Being secured against every deception is a deed, is a task, altogether equivalent to believing all, so that one can say with equal and unconditional validity, that Love believes all, as that it is never deceived, since it is one and the same; it is not as it ordinarily is, that acting is one thing and prudence, which sees to it that one is not deceived, another thing.

Nor is it in the sense of prudence, that Love is never deceived; for to love in such a way, that one is never deceived, is, in prudence's sense and language, the stupidest and most foolish thing one can do, indeed, it is to prudence an offence—and thereby clearly recognisable as belonging essentially to Christianity.

¶ 3

Love believes all.—levity, inexperience, guilelessness believe all that is said; vanity, conceit, self-satisfaction all the flattering things that are said; envy, malicious joy, depravity all the evil that is said; mistrust believes nothing at all; experience is to teach, that one acts most wisely in not believing all: but Love believes all.

¶ 4

Thus mistrust believes nothing at all, it does exactly the opposite of what Love does. Generally speaking, now, mistrust is admittedly not well regarded among people; but it by no means yet follows from this, either, that one is altogether agreed with oneself about unconditionally detesting all mistrust, or, that one is altogether agreed with oneself about, unconditionally praising Love, which believes all. One perhaps rather forms, oddly enough, an agreement, thus a discordant agreement between mistrust, which—somewhat loving—nevertheless believes something, and Love, which—somewhat mistrustful nevertheless has one suspicion or another. Yes, if one were properly to expound mistrust’s sagacious secret, on a supernatural scale clothe it in prudence’s, cunning’s, cleverness’s dazzling appearance, then it would indeed even tempt many; there might perhaps be someone, who cleverly let us understand, that it was precisely what he had discovered—proud of his discovery. And in contrast to this Love, which believes all, would indeed as so often happens to the good, look very poor, so that many a person would not even dare acknowledge it by admitting, that he could wish to be so simple-hearted.

¶ 5

What, then, is mistrust’s sagacious secret? It is a misuse of knowledge, a misuse, which, without further ado, in a single breath will attach its ergo to what is entirely true as knowledge, and becomes something quite different only then, when, back to front, it is believed on the strength of that knowledge, which is just as impossible as it is back to front, for one does not believe by virtue of knowledge. What mistrust says or expounds, is really nothing but knowledge; the secret and the falsity lie in this, that it now, without further ado, converts this knowledge into a belief, acting as though it were nothing, acting as though it were something that did not even need to be mentioned, ‘since, of course, everyone who has the same knowledge, must necessarily conclude in the same way’, as though it were therefore eternally certain and entirely settled, that, when knowledge is given, then it is also given, how one concludes.

The deception is this, that mistrust, *from* knowledge (for the semblance and the falsity lie in this, that it is by virtue of knowledge)—*by virtue* of unbelief, which is in the mistrustful person, concludes, assumes, believes what it concludes, assumes, believes, while one, *from* the same knowledge, *by virtue* of faith, can conclude, assume, believe exactly the opposite. Mistrust says: ‘Deception extends unconditionally just as far as truth, falsity unconditionally just as far as honesty, there is no unconditional mark of truth or of the honest person, the sincere person. Likewise in relation to Love; hypocrisy and guile and cunning and seduction reach in deceiving unconditionally just as far as Love extends, can resemble true Love so deceptively, that there is no unconditional mark, because with every expression of truth or, here, with every expression of true Love there comes into being the possibility of a deception, corresponding exactly to it.’ And so it is indeed, so it must be.

Precisely because existence must test 'you', test 'your' Love, or whether there is Love in you, precisely for that reason it places you with the help of understanding truth and deception in the balance of mutually opposite possibilities, so that, as 'you' now judge, that is, as in judging you now *choose*, must become manifest, what dwells in you. Alas, many a person thinks, that judgment is something, that lies ahead beyond the grave, and so it is indeed; but one forgets, that judgment lies much nearer, that it takes place at every moment, because existence at every moment, you live, judges you, since to live is to judge oneself, to become manifest. Precisely for that reason existence must be so arranged, that you do not by relying on the certainty of knowledge shirk revealing yourself in judging, or in, how you judge. When, then, deception and truth are set in mutual opposition within the balance of possibilities, then the decision is this: whether there is now in you mistrust or Love.

For see, Someone says 'even what appears as the purest feeling could nevertheless be a deception'—very well, it is possible, it must remain possible: 'therefore I choose mistrust, or believe nothing', that is to say, he reveals his own mistrust. Let us reverse the conclusion 'Truth and falsehood extend equally far without qualification, therefore it may be possible, that even what appears as the most despicable conduct could be pure Love'—very well, it is possible, it must remain possible: therefore the loving person chooses to believe everything, that is to say, he reveals his own Love. A confused person admittedly thinks that existence is a rather murky element; oh, not even the sea is so transparent! If, therefore, someone can prove that one should believe absolutely nothing because deception is possible, then I can prove that one should believe everything—because deception is possible. If someone thinks that one should not believe not even the best person, for it was still possible that he was a deceiver, then the reverse must also hold, that even the worst person you can believe capable of good, for it was still possible that his wickedness was a mere appearance.

¶ 6

Love is the exact opposite of mistrust, and yet Love is initiated into the same knowledge; in knowledge they are, if you will, not distinguishable from one another (for knowledge is precisely what is indifferent in the infinite sense); only in the inference and decision, in *faith* (to believe all, and to believe nothing) they are exact opposites. For when Love believes all, it is by no means in the same sense as levity, inexperience, guilelessness, which because of ignorance and lack of understanding believe everything. No, Love is as knowledgeable as anyone, knowing everything, everything mistrust knows, yet without being mistrustful, knowing, what experience knows, but also knowing, that what people call experience is actually the mixture of mistrust and Love.

¶ 7

'How much may lie hidden within a person, or how much may remain concealed; how resourceful in concealing itself and in deceiving or in eluding others is hidden

inwardness, which would wish above all, that no one even suspected it existed, shyly fearing of being seen, and fearing it like death, to be made completely manifest! Is it not so, that one person never completely understands the other; but if one person does not completely understand another, then it always remains possible, that what is most certain might nevertheless have an entirely different explanation, and which, note well, was the true one, since an assumption can explain very well a great number of cases and thereby confirm its truth, and yet prove to be untrue, as soon as the case arises, it cannot explain—and it was, after all, possible, that this case or this small further qualification might arise even at the final moment. That is also why that all calm and, in the spiritual sense, passionless observers, who nevertheless, surely, especially ought to know how to probe searchingly and discerningly into what is inward, that these very people judge with such infinite caution, or preferably simply let it go, because they, enriched by observation, have a developed conception of that mysterious world of the hidden, and because they as observers have learnt to exercise mastery over their passions.

Only superficial, impetuous, passionate people, who do not know themselves and, naturally, on account of that are likewise unaware that they do not know others, rush to judgement. Never so the insightful person, the knowledgeable person. A young, inexperienced person, who perhaps has never before sat on a horse, jumps without hesitation up onto the very first horse at hand; but the enormously strong yet so practised a horseman—you will see, how closely he observes the horse unfamiliar to him that he is for the first time to mount, how uncertainly and cautiously he proceeds, how he scarcely even ventures to mount it, but first lets it run on a line, to investigate its disposition; and, on the other hand, how long he continues testing, long, long after the inexperienced person has given up. For the inexperienced person, who knows no horse at all, he thinks “one horse is like another—ergo I know them all”; only the horseman has a developed conception of what great difference there may be, how one in the most diverse and most contrary ways can be mistaken about a horse, and how uncertain all identifying signs are, because every horse is nevertheless something distinct in itself.

And now, the difference between one human being and another! How infinite! If it were not so, the human being would be degraded; for the human advantage over the animal is not only what is most often named, the universally human, but also, what we most often forget, that each single individual is, within humankind, essentially different or distinctive. And this advantage is, properly speaking, the truly human advantage, the first advantage is humankind’s advantage over the animal species. Indeed, if this were not so, that one human being, honest, sincere, respectable, God-fearing, can act in the same circumstances the very opposite of what another person does, who is nevertheless also honest, sincere, respectable, God-fearing: then the relationship to God would be not essentially present, not present in its deepest meaning. If one with absolute certainty could judge every person by a general fixed standard, then the relationship to God would

be abolished in its essence, then everything would be turned outwards, reaching its pagan fulfilment in political or social life, then living would have become far too easy, but also profoundly empty, then neither the exertion nor the inward self-deepening would be possible or necessary, which precisely amid infinite misunderstanding's hardest collision develops the relationship to God within a human being."

¶ 8

Can you now tell me, who said this? No, it is impossible; it is wholly ambiguous; the most mistrustful and the most loving person can, in the capacity of a knower, equally well have said it. No person has said it, it is spoken impersonally, it is a consonant, which first becomes human speech through personality's differentiating breath, which gives it utterance by lending it a voice. It is knowledge, and knowledge as such is impersonal and is to be communicated impersonally. Knowledge sets everything within possibility, and is thus, in possibility, outside the actuality of existence; only with an ergo, with *faith* the individual begins their life. But most people do not notice at all, that, in one way or another, every minute they live, live by virtue of an ergo, of a faith—so carelessly do they live. In knowledge there is no decision; The decision, its determination by personality and its determinacy is found only in the ergo, in faith. Knowledge is the infinite art of ambiguity or infinite ambiguity itself, at its highest, it consists precisely in placing mutually opposed possibilities in equilibrium.

To be able to do this is to be a knower, and only the one, who knows how to communicate mutually opposed possibilities in equilibrium, only he communicates knowledge. To communicate decision in knowledge or knowledge in decision is a reversal, which, admittedly, in these times has become—yes, a reversal it is and remains, but in these times it has become the genuinely profound the genuine profundity of profound thinking. knowledge is not mistrust; for knowledge is infinitely impartial, is infinite impartiality in equilibrium; knowledge is not love either, for knowledge is infinitely impartial, is infinite impartiality in equilibrium; knowledge is not contamination either, since it is infinite impartiality. the mistrustful person and the loving person have knowledge in common, and neither is the mistrustful person mistrustful by this knowledge, nor is the loving person loving by this knowledge. But when knowledge in a person has placed the mutually opposed possibilities in equilibrium, and he is about to or intends to judge: then it becomes apparent, in what he then believes on that basis, who he is, whether he is mistrustful or loving. Only very confused and half-experienced people think they judge another person by virtue of knowledge.

This comes from the fact that they do not even know what knowledge is, that they have never given themselves either time or effort to develop the infinite, impartial sense for possibilities, or with the art of infinite ambiguity to apprehend possibilities and bring them into equilibrium, or to be grounded in transparency. In a kind of fermenting state they have a sluggish or passionate partiality for a certain kind of possibility; a little of it is

enough, then they judge, and call it judging by virtue of knowledge, and think, self-satisfied in thus—*believing—by virtue* of knowledge (nothing but contradiction), to be secured against error—what is to be reserved for faith (a new contradiction).

¶ 9

It is quite common to hear people express a great fear of going wrong in judging; but when you listen more closely to what is being said, alas, then it is so often a sorrowful misunderstanding concerning this—earnest fear. Behold, that noble simple sage of antiquity, he became what he became—yes, it was nothing great, neither a great man of wealth or a high-ranking public official in this best of worlds; impoverished, laughed at, mocked, accused, condemned, he became the noble simple sage, yet the rare one, probably very nearly the only one, who truly made a distinction between what he understood and what he did not understand, and this he became, precisely because he “feared most of all being in error”. Can it really be this elevation, this equilibrium of elevation that people have in mind, when they fear going wrong in judging? Perhaps. But it was indeed also quite possible, that the fear is sometimes somewhat one-sided. We human beings have a natural fear of going wrong—by believing too well of a person. The error, on the other hand, of believing too ill of another person, is perhaps not feared, or at least not in proportion to the first.

But then we do not fear most of all being in error, then we are, on the contrary, in error, by having a one-sided fear of a certain kind of error. It offends vanity and pride to believe, or to have believed, too well of the cunning person, to have been foolish enough to believe him—for it is a contest between prudence and prudence. One is angry with oneself, or at least one finds, that it is (yes, that is how we say it, and that helps very little, or rather, it is a deception, in an edifying discourse to use a more solemn, an alienating expression), that it is “so embarrassing” to have been made a fool of. But ought it not, nevertheless, seem to us to put it mildly, just as embarrassing, to have believed the evil, or, mistrustfully, to have believed nothing, where the good was! Might it not even in eternity become something more—than “embarrassing”; for let us simply use the word used incessantly in the world, it looks so good when coupled with eternity!

But here in the world it is not “embarrassing” to believe ill of a good person, it is, after all, a superiority, whereby one gets rid of the good easily, but “embarrassing” to believe well of an evil person, therefore one secures oneself—since one fears so much being in error. The loving person, on the other hand, truly fears being in error, therefore he believes all.

¶ 10

The world tempts in many ways, among other things, also by giving the appearance that it should be so narrow-minded, so foolish: *lovingly* to believe all. But this is a misunderstanding. One draws a line through love (alas, instead of underlining it!), and then one places the emphasis on the foolishness: to believe all; instead of the whole

emphasis lying on, that it is “love” which believes all. Truly, it is not knowledge, that contaminates a person, oh, far from it, knowledge is like sheer transparency, most perfect and pure precisely then, just as water's perfection is to taste of nothing. The servant of justice is not contaminated, because he, better than the criminal, knows all the schemes. No, Knowledge does not contaminate a person, it is mistrust, that contaminates a person's knowledge, just as love purifies it.

¶ 11

In relation to judging another person knowledge at its highest leads to the equilibrium of mutually opposed possibilities—then the difference becomes visible, in what is now concluded. For Scripture warns against judging, and adds, “that you should not in turn be judged”, so it nevertheless appears, as though one could sometimes judge without being judged in turn. But this is not the case. The very minute you judge another person, or assess another person, you judge yourself; for to judge another is ultimately merely to judge oneself, or oneself to be disclosed. You may not notice it, it escapes your attention, how serious existence is, how it by showing you all these many people as though prompts you to judge, so that you even count yourself fortunate, that you are among those—favoured by good fortune without merit, who are nothing, and therefore, quite carefree, have the convenient task of judging others—and then it is existence, that is courteous or stern enough not to regard you as nothing, then it is existence, that judges you. How greedy a person can be to judge—if he knew, what it is to judge: how slow he would become!

How eagerly he can seize upon merely the smallest scrap, in order to get an opportunity to judge—that is an opportunity to catch himself. Through knowledge you reach only the equilibrium, precisely when the art is practised perfectly; but the conclusion returns into the judge's being and makes it manifest—that he is the loving person, for he concludes: therefore I believe all.

¶ 12

Mistrust, by contrast, has (naturally not through its knowledge, which is infinite impartiality, but through itself, through its *unbelief*) a preference for evil. To believe absolutely nothing is precisely the boundary, that begins to believe evil; for the good is indeed faith's object, and therefore the one who believes absolutely nothing, has begun to believe evil. To believe absolutely nothing is the beginning of being evil, for it shows, that one has no good within oneself, since faith is precisely the good in a human being, which does not come with great knowledge, nor need it be lacking, because knowledge is slight. Mistrust cannot keep knowledge in equilibrium, it contaminates its knowledge, and therefore draws near to envy, malicious delight, depravity, which believes all evil. But what if the one, who was so eager to judge, to pour out his wrath, his powerful or powerless resentment against another, without, however, truly knowing, what he was judging, what if, in eternity, he now discovers and is compelled to acknowledge, that the

one judged was not only to be excused, but that he was the noblest, the most selfless, the most magnanimous human being.

It has been said, that we shall surely one day in eternity (alas, hoping, that we ourselves shall not be excluded) will, with wonder, miss this person and that, whom we had so definitely expected to find there; but might one not also, with wonder, see this person and that there, whom one had readily excluded, and see, that he was so much better than oneself, not as though he had later become so, but precisely in relation to that, which led the condemning person to exclude him. But the loving person believes all. With the blessed joy of wonder he will one day see, that he was right after all; and if he erred by believing too well—to believe good is in itself a blessedness. Lovingly to believe good surely is no error, but then one therefore does not err by it either.

¶ 13

Mistrustfully to *believe* absolutely nothing (which is entirely different from *knowledge* of the equilibrium of the opposed possibilities) and lovingly to *believe* all is thus not an act of cognition, nor a conclusion of cognition, but a choice, which enters precisely when knowledge has set the opposed possibilities in equilibrium; and in this choice, which admittedly has the form of a judgment upon others, the one who judges is revealed. That thoughtlessness, inexperience, ingenuousness believes all, is an act of cognition, it is a foolish act of cognition; *lovingly* to *believe* all is a choice by virtue of love. Instead, as mistrust does, to use its acuity in order to make itself secure in believing nothing, love uses its acuity to discover the same thing, that deception and truth unconditionally extend equally far, and now it draws its conclusion—by virtue of the faith within it, which it has within itself: therefore, I believe all.

¶ 14

Love believes all—and yet is never deceived. Marvellous! To believe nothing at all so as never to be deceived, that seems plausible enough; for how could one deceive someone who believes nothing at all! But to believe everything and thereby, as it were, to surrender oneself, as prey to every deception and every deceiver, and yet, by precisely that, to secure oneself without limit against every deception: that is remarkable. And yet, can it be that one, even if one is not deceived by other people, still avoid being deceived, be deceived in the most terrible way, indeed, by oneself, by believing nothing at all, be deprived of the highest good, of surrender—the blessedness of love! No, there is only one way to make oneself secure from ever being deceived, it is to believe all in love.

¶ 15

let us put it this way: can anyone deceive God? no, in one's relation to God a human being can deceive only themselves; for one's relation to God is thus the highest good, that whoever, who tries to deceive God, deceives oneself in the most terrible way. Or let us consider a relationship between one human being and another. can a child deceive its

parents? no, the child only deceives itself; it is only an appearance (and therefore a deception), an illusion born of short-sightedness, that, to the child, and to anyone, who understands no better than the child, it appears, as if the child were the one, who had deceived the parents, alas, while the poor child is in truth deceiving itself. it is reasonable to assume, that, in relation to their child, parents possess such superiority in wisdom and understanding, and consequently also such superiority in genuinely loving the child, which scarcely understands how to love itself, that deceiving the parents would be the greatest calamity, that could befall the child, the greatest calamity, were the child not itself to blame.

But then, of course, it is—in truth—not the parents who have been deceived; on the contrary, it is the child, and it is only an appearance (a deception), namely, that the child deceived its parents; in a merely *childish* and *foolish* understanding *that is how it appears*: that the child deceived its parents, but *consequently* it is, of course, *not true*, because it is true only in “childish and foolish understanding.” On the other hand, would it not be a wretched, a revolting sight to behold a father or mother who, in relation to the child, lacked the true, deeply serious, responsibly concerned conception of superiority, founded upon under an eternal responsibility truly to will what is best for the child—would it not be wretched and revolting to behold a father or mother, who, for that reason, could descend into an improper squabble with the child, become, out of concern for himself, provoked and made bitter, because either parent childishly entertained the foolish notion, that the child was the one who had deceived them! a relationship of this kind between parents and a child is surely improper, indeed, almost mad, as though, if striking the child were supposed to mean to fight with the child, and in this way, casting aside every dignity, loftiness, the authority of true superiority, do nothing more than prove, that the father or mother was in the physical sense the stronger one.

¶ 16

Therefore, true superiority can never be deceived, provided it remains faithful to itself. But true love stands in relation to everything, whatever is not love, and therefore in relation to every deception, is unconditionally superior: consequently it can never be deceived, when it, by believing all things, remains faithful to itself, or continues to be true love.

¶ 17

This is indeed very easy to understand; the difficulty, then, lies elsewhere: there is a lower sphere of thought, which as yet has no inkling of true love, of love in and for itself, and of its blessedness within itself; the difficulty is this: that a vast multitude of deceptions of the senses will hold a person down within the lower sphere of thought, where deceiving and being deceived mean precisely the opposite of what it means *within the infinite conception of love*. *Within this conception, to be deceived means solely and entirely to cease to love, to allow oneself to be swept into abandoning love in and for itself and*

thereby lose the blessedness it bears within itself. For, infinitely understood, only one deception is possible: self-deception; in the infinite sense, one need not fear those who can kill the body; to be killed is, in the infinite sense, no danger, nor is that kind of deception what the world calls a danger at all. And once again, this is not difficult to understand.

What is difficult is to carry the task through, to gain the true conception of love, or, more precisely, to become the truly loving person; for it is precisely in this way that he defends himself, by believing all things, against the deception of sensory appearance, and struggles to remain within true love. But sensory deception will keep pressing itself upon him, rather like the sensory illusion which makes it seem that the sun is moving, although one knows perfectly well that it is the earth that moves.

¶ 18

There is a lower understanding of love, and therefore a lower form of love, which has no conception of love as it is in and for itself. It regards love as making a demand (the demand is to be loved in return), and it regards being loved (love returned) as an earthly good, as something temporal—alas, and yet as the very highest happiness. Indeed, if that is how matters stand, then deception can indeed take command, just as it does in the world of money. One pays out one's money to purchase some convenience or other; the money has been paid, but the promised convenience was not received: well then, then one has been cheated. One turns love into a transaction; one gives one's love away, in order to make an exchange, but received no love in return: well then, then one has been deceived. Deception is thus said to consist in that the deceiver had gained the deceived person's love, so that the deceived person may perhaps be unable even to stop loving him, because he was loving to such a degree—that he could love only one person in all, and that one person was the deceiver.

This reflection does not aim to deny that the loving person was deceived, nor does it deny that the deceiver was—indeed, that he was a contemptible deceiver; but its purpose is to deny that this loving person was truly loving. For anyone who is so extraordinarily loving that he can love only one person, is not truly loving, but merely someone in love, and someone in love is self-loving, as was shown earlier. But that a self-loving person can be deceived is something this discourse has never sought to deny. Here, as everywhere, there is something deeply profound in existence. At times one hears this loudly proclaimed complaint that one has been deceived in love. The accuser means precisely to prove what an exceptionally loving person he himself is, and thereby, in turn, how exceptionally contemptible the deceiver is—and was, and he proves this by declaring of himself that he can—and could—love only one person.

He fails to notice that the more vehement his accusation becomes, the more it turns into an accusation of himself, which reveals him as someone who was—and

remains—self-loving, and who, therefore, quite naturally, could love only one person (for the truly loving person loves everyone without demanding love in return), and therefore, quite naturally, could indeed be deceived, something impossible for the truly loving person. That is to say: Anyone who maintains, as an essential and decisive claim, that he has been so deceived in love that he has lost what is best, indeed, perhaps everything, he thereby reveals himself as self-loving; for what is best is love in and for itself, and one can always keep it, provided one is willing to be truly loving. Therefore, anyone who wants only the lower, deceptive, conception of what love is, he must take great care not to be deceived, let him learn from men of finance or from people who conduct commercial transactions, what precautions are taken against fraudsters.

Alas, and despite every one of these precautions, indeed, even if he managed by these means to protect himself against every deception: he and everyone who thinks like him are nevertheless deceived in the essential sense because they live their lives in the world that is Deception, in that world, where everyone is essentially deceived, whether one person complains to another that he has been deceived, or another boasts that he has not been deceived. The difference is no greater than if, in an asylum, one mentally ill inmate were to flatter himself that he was not mentally ill in the same way as the other person, although, in the essential sense, they were all mentally ill.

¶ 19

The lower conception, together with sensory deception, which visits people on that conception's errand and in its service, is temptation; The difficulty is precisely to guard oneself against it in action; for it is easy enough in a quiet hour to recognise, that the truly loving person, who believes all, cannot be deceived. "But it is still so embarrassing to be deceived." If you yourself were truly loving, who believes all, then you would readily see, that it is impossible, you would see, that you had not been deceived. But is there anything embarrassing in knowing inwardly, that one has not been deceived? No. "But it is still so embarrassing, that it must look that way to other people." Look, here is the sensory deception. To know inwardly and in accord with the truth, that one has not been deceived, and yet find it embarrassing, that one appears to have been deceived, what is that called? It is called vanity, or—which here amounts to the same thing—it may be called: not quite being truly loving after all.

Alas, and if vanity were able to gain power over the truly loving person, then he really would be deceived, for then vanity draws him out of love down into what is low, the world of pettiness and wrangling, where people fool and are fooled, vainly proud of being able to fool others, embarrassed at being fooled, and therefore vainly proud of being able to escape it.—When we see someone who truly loves being deceived by the cunning person, the schemer, the hypocrite, we become indignant, and sometimes for this reason: because outwardly we do not see punishment and retribution, and so because we demand to see imperfection and outwardness offer a spectacle that satisfies the senses, where

retribution is outwardly visible, and so because we sink into the lower sphere of thought, and so because, sluggishly and thoughtlessly, we forget that the person who truly loves cannot be deceived. We are right to cry woe against the person who leads a blind person astray; it is entirely proper for us to demand to see outward punishment here; for a blind person can be deceived, being blind does not protect against every deception; but the person who truly loves, who believes all things, cannot be deceived.

For, in a certain sense, the loving person can know very well whether someone is deceiving him, but by refusing to believe it, or by believing all things he preserves himself in love and is thus not deceived—and so here we see an example of how foolish it is, how misguided the busyness is that supposes that knowing is higher than believing; for what precisely protects the loving person who, in a certain sense, knows that he is being deceived, from being deceived, is believing all things.

¶ 20

The person who truly loves, who believes all things, cannot be deceived, for *to deceive him is to deceive oneself*. For what is the highest good and the greatest blessedness? Surely this: to love in truth; next after this, to be loved in truth. But then it is, after all, impossible to deceive the loving person who precisely by believing all things remains in love. If it were possible to deceive someone financially in such a way that the so-called victim kept his money: would he then have been deceived? But this is precisely the case here. The deceiver makes himself contemptible by the attempt, while the loving person preserves himself in love and remains in love and is thus in possession of the highest good and the greatest blessedness, and thus surely has not been deceived! The deceiver, on the other hand, deceives himself. He does not love, and thereby has already cheated himself out of the highest good and the greatest blessedness. Next after this comes being loved by the one who loves in truth—otherwise, indeed, being loved could become a great misfortune to one.

This, again, is what the deceiver is now in the process of cheating himself out of, insofar as he prevents himself from having the true benefit of it, and insofar as he might succeed, when his deception was supposedly discovered, in forfeiting the other person's love, making the loving person unhappy by his ceasing to love in truth—instead of, by believing all things, remaining in love, secured against the deception.

¶ 21

Let it for once happen before our eyes, so that it may become quite clear, how wretched the deceiver appears in relation to the true loving person—for much is said about seducers and seductions, about deception and deceivers, but so seldom does one speak of or portray the *true* loving person. So I imagine a cunning man, a schemer, a hypocrite; I take pleasure in equipping him, who is initiated into all the mysteries of deception, with every seductive gift. What does he want now? He wants to deceive the loving person; he

wants (for despite his depravity he has enough understanding to see what a great good it is to be loved) by his cunning to make sure that he is loved. But why all these elaborate preparations, this utterly lavish store of cunning and intrigues? It is the true loving person whom he wants to deceive; but the true loving person loves all, so the deceiver can attain being loved far more simply.

Yes, if it were a person in love (a self-lover), of whom the discourse were speaking, then there would at least be some sense in the deception, for the person in love can love only one single person, and so it would now be a matter of, if it were possible, by the deceptive art of cunning and subtlety to become this one and only person. But in relation to the true loving person the deception is meaningless from the very beginning, and the deceiver is from the very beginning cast in the most wretched light. Now let us go further. Naturally, then, he succeeds in being loved, naturally—yes, the deceiver thinks and naturally must think, that this is due to his cunning, his intrigues and art; poor deceived man, he does not notice, that the person he is dealing with is the true loving person, who loves him, because the true loving person loves all. In what meaninglessness is the deceiver's wretchedness now trapped, not as if the deception had failed, oh, no, that punishment is far too slight, no, the deception succeeds and the deceiver is proud of his deception! But where, then, does the deception lie, what kind of deception is it that he speaks of?

Naturally, it is supposed that the deception lies in this, that he, while the loving person loves him, besides enjoying this good of being loved, also, coldly, proudly and mockingly, enjoys the self-satisfaction of not loving in return. It wholly escapes his notice, naturally, (for how could it occur to a deceiver, that true Love existed!), that he is dealing with the true loving person, who loves without making any demand for love in return, indeed, locates Love and its blessedness precisely in not demanding love in return. The deceiver has thus cunningly got the loving person to love him—but that is precisely what the loving person so infinitely gladly wishes; The deceiver has supposedly fooled him by not loving in return—but the true loving person regards precisely demanding love in return as a contamination, a degradation, and loving without the reward of love in return as the highest blessedness. Who, then, is the deceived one; what kind of deception is being spoken of; The deceiver is, after all, talking nonsense and does not himself know what he is saying, like that man, at whom we all laugh, that man, who lay in the ditch, and yet thought, that he was riding.

To deceive in that way is it not like, if one wished to call this stealing: secretly slipping money to a man! The person who truly loves has become richer; for every additional person he has to love, and each further time he gives his love away renouncing love in return, he becomes richer. Or is the person who truly loves deceived, if it remains hidden, what an unworthy object of love the deceiver is? Loving is, after all, the highest good, but then only the love that demands love in return, that is, untrue love, be deceived by remaining unaware that its object is unworthy. Or is the person who truly loves deceived,

if it becomes apparent, what an unworthy object the deceiver is—and was? Loving is, after all, the highest good and the greatest blessedness. Consider someone who, in money matters, in order to obtain money for himself, turns to a man whom he had trusted, and whom he had believed had money: he is cheated, if the man proves insolvent and has no money. But someone who wants to give his money away and not in the slightest degree wishes or demands to receive it back, surely he has not been cheated—because the recipient has no money.

But the cunning deceiver, moves through subtlety's most supple and most ingratiating twists and turns, without noticing how clumsily he behaves. He believes himself superior, smiling to himself in self-satisfaction (ah, as if you saw the self-satisfied smile of someone who is mad, a smile that calls both for laughter and for tears); he has no inkling that the loving person is infinitely superior. The deceiver is blinded, he does not even perceive his terrible powerlessness: his deception succeeds—and he does a good deed; his deception succeeds—and he makes the person who truly loves richer still; his deception succeeds for him, it succeeds for him—and yet it is he himself who is precisely the deceived one. Poor deceived man, even this path to salvation is cut off from him: the failure of his deception! If someone who is mad wishes to convince a rational person of the correctness of his insane idea, and, in a certain sense, manages to do so, is this not then the most dreadful thing of all, is it not almost as though existence itself were merciless, for if it had failed, then perhaps the person who was mad might thereby have become aware that he was mad; but now this is hidden from him, and his madness may well be incurable.

So it is with the deceiver; but this is not merciless, it is the just punishment upon him: that his deception succeeds—and precisely through that, his perdition.

¶ 22

But what, then, is truly at issue between the deceiver and the loving person? The deceiver wants to trick him out of his love. This cannot be done; the person who truly loves has, precisely by unconditionally demanding not the least love in return, taken up an impregnable position; to deceive him out of his love is no more possible than tricking a man out of money that he is standing there giving you as a gift. The real issue, therefore, is something else: whether it might be possible for the deceiver (something he neither aims at nor thinks of in the least) to become the occasion of the loving person's fall, so that the loving person fell away from Love and sank into the world of sensory illusion, into childish wrangling with the deceiver, because the loving person gave up Love, which loves without demanding love in return. But it is precisely against this that the person who truly loves defends himself by believing all things, that is, by loving the deceiver. If the deceiver could understand this, he would lose his mind.

A person in love (the self-loving person) believes himself deceived precisely when the deceiver has tricked him into loving him, while giving no love in return—whereas the

person who truly loves considers himself saved precisely when, by believing all things, he succeeds in loving the deceiver; the person in love regards it as a misfortune to go on loving the deceiver, whereas the person who truly loves regards it as the victory if only he may succeed in continuing to love the deceiver. How astonishing! In his own way, the deceiver must become more and more conceited, because the deception succeeds for him so extraordinarily well; in the end it will probably come to this: he will regard the loving person as a narrow-minded, pathetic wretch. And yet it is precisely through this very thing that the person who truly loves is eternally and infinitely secure against being deceived! Do you know, my listener, of any stronger expression of superiority than this: that the superior person should, on top of everything, look like the weaker one? For the stronger person, who looks stronger, provides a measure of his superiority; but the person who, although superior, looks like the weaker person, denies measure and comparison, that is, he is infinitely superior.

Have you never seen in life this relation of infinite superiority, which admittedly cannot be seen directly, for the infinite is never seen directly. Take someone infinitely superior to others in understanding, and you will see: he looks like a simple poor soul; only someone who thinks he has rather more understanding than others, but is not quite sure of it, or narrow-minded and foolish enough to pride himself on a comparative relation, strives to look like the one superior in understanding.

¶ 23

So it is with the loving person, who believes all things. It can so easily be mistaken for narrow-mindedness, and yet the depth of wisdom lies in this simplicity; it can so easily be mistaken for weakness, and yet the powers of eternity lie in this powerlessness; he can so easily look like a poor, defenceless person, whom anyone can deceive, and yet he is the only one who is eternally and infinitely secure against deception. But this cannot be seen directly, humanly speaking, the confusion is natural enough, especially in these clever times, which have become too clever to believe in wisdom. The confusion is natural enough, for the loving person who believes all things is not directly manifest, he is like those plants whose propagation takes place in secret: he breathes in God, he draws nourishment for his love from God, he strengthens himself through God. That, humanly speaking, he is deceived, he himself sees, in a certain sense; but he knows, that deception and truth extend equally far, and that it was therefore still possible, that the deceiver was not a deceiver, and therefore he believes all.

For this, the loving person has courage, courage to believe all (truly, the highest courage!), courage to endure the world's contempt and scorn (truly, the greatest victory, greater than any victory won in the world, for this victory overcomes the world), courage to endure that the world finds it so indescribably foolish, while it can nevertheless understand perfectly well that from which he draws his conclusion, but not his conclusion

itself, any more than the *mistrustful* world can understand the blessedness which the truly loving person has within.

¶ 24

Yet suppose that one day in eternity it became clear that the loving person had *actually* been deceived. How could it *actually* be necessary to repeat it once more! When loving is the highest good and the greatest blessedness; when the loving person, precisely by believing all, remains in love's blessedness: how then could he in time or in eternity, be deceived! No, no: in time and in eternity there is only one possible deception in relation to true love: self-deception, that is, giving up love. The truly loving person will therefore be unable even to understand the objection. Alas, the rest of us, unfortunately, can understand it only too easily; for the lower sphere of thought and the earthly passions' alliance with the deceptions of the senses are so difficult to break free from. Just when one has understood the truth most fully, the old way suddenly comes upon one again. The infinite, the eternal, thus, the truth, is so alien to the natural human being that it goes with him just as it does with the dog, which may indeed learn for a moment to walk upright, yet constantly longs to walk on all fours.

One can almost compel a person's thought to admit, that, since deception extends without qualification just as far as truth, one person cannot therefore truly judge another, but the judge merely reveals himself—rather as when someone strikes with all his might at a strength-testing machine, without knowing that it is a strength-testing machine, and so he thinks that he really is striking a blow, while in fact his strength is only being tested. And once one has understood this, one may still seek one further evasion: one may adopt an inquisitive attitude towards eternity, counting on eternity then to make it clear whether the person *actually* was a deceiver. But what does this prove? It proves that one is not the truly loving person who has love's blessedness within, nor possesses a truly earnest conception of eternity. If a person yields to this prompting, it immediately draws that person down into the low regions of pettiness, where the ultimate and highest thing is not love's blessedness in itself, but petty wrangling over who is in the right.—But the truly loving person believes all—and yet is never deceived.

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