On Gillian Rose and Love

The contemporary American philosopher David Velleman recently noted, "Love is a moral emotion precisely in the sense that its spirit is closely akin to that of morality."[1] Although their kindred spirits are manifest, at first glance it is the tension between love and morality that is striking. Love seems to be supremely personal, unique to one individual and directed at another for highly contingent and possibly mysterious reasons. Even if Kantian or Utilitarian fantasies of objective morality are dismissed, the common alternatives that put emphasis on community values or obligation to the Other are still distant from an affect directed at a concrete individual. Not even Nietzschean or Foucaultian ethics of self-creation seem to share a kindred spirit with love. Love has an anomic quality; it seems to reside in a different register than any project of imposing a regimen on oneself.

Perhaps Velleman's observation of the similarities between love and morality sounds plausible just because it represents a slightly veiled secularization of elementary Christian ethics: from the maxim "love thy neighbor" to its theorization by Augustine through Aquinas through Niebuhr. Perhaps Velleman has not taken a sufficient dosage of Nietzschean medicine to recognize a "love ethic" as the ethic of the weak, instituted by slave revolt and then disguised and naturalized.

But perhaps in the phenomenology of love, in the lived experience of lover and beloved, in the tension and teasing, in the fulfillment and frustration, perhaps in the sorrow and in the confrontation with another being, distinct yet demanding – perhaps this is where the similar spirits of love and morality reside. This is where Gillian Rose turns

in *Love's Work*, her philosophical memoir which is at once a work of autobiography and an ethical-political polemic.[2] The culmination of two decades of investigation of Hegel, Marx, the Frankfurt School, post-structuralism, Christian theology, and the Jewish tradition, as well as four decades of living life as sensually suffused as it was intellectually robust, *Love's Work* offers a (Hegelian, not Husserlian) phenomenology of love which explicates and concretizes Rose's prescient and incisive views on morality and politics.

After first exploring Rose's retelling of the Arthurian legend which encapsulates the issues she wants to raise for love, morality, and politics, we will suggest thesis and antithesis positions concerning the phenomenology of love which Rose puts in tension. Then, we will turn to an examination of what Rose says about love and morality in *Love's Work* and to a consideration of its implications.

The question of the relationship between love and morality is posed by Rose allegorically through her narration of the story of Camelot. The question is posed but not resolved – the resolution, or rather the work of resolution, is the project of *Love's Work* as a whole. The story Rose retells is this: in a time of endless feuding and bloodshed, King Arthur has a vision. He wanted to create a kingdom that was based on justice and equality. There would not be favoritism, the rule of law would be respected, and knights would sit at a Round Table to participate in the governance of the regime on equal footing. A regime founded on justice and equality, Arthur believed, would be an island of peace and prosperity in a sea of chaos and violence.

King Arthur recruited knights to Camelot who shared his aspirations. The French knight Launcelot, emotional and idealistic, befriended King Arthur and joined the Round

Table. But Launcelot fell in love with King Arthur's wife, Guinevere. According to the laws of Camelot, Launcelot must be banished and Guinevere must die. But King Arthur deeply loved his wife and his friend. King Arthur is faced with a choice. If he follows Camelot's laws, he will stay true to his ideal of ruling a kingdom based on justice and equality. However, he will lose those individuals who are closest to him. If King Arthur makes an exception to Camelot's laws, he will be able to save his wife and friend but Camelot will be tainted. The people will know that the laws are not always applied fairly, that exceptions are made for those who the King favors.

The choice that King Arthur must make is a choice between his two loves: between his love for the ideal of Camelot and his love for his wife and friend. It is the tension between these two sorts of loves as allegorized in the story of King Arthur, and the way that this tension might be resolved, which frames Rose's understanding of the phenomenology of love. But the choice that King Arthur must make is also, clearly, an issue of morality and of politics. To what extent should his allegiance be to his nation (better: to the ideals for which it stands) and to what extent should it be to his family and friends?

King Arthur decides to follow the law, but Launcelot manages to rescue Guinevere before she is executed. The banished Launcelot and King Arthur fight a war which King Arthur wins. But Camelot is no longer a peaceful kingdom and King Arthur has lost his wife and his friend. Rose concludes that, regardless of what choice King Arthur would have made, "the King must now be sad." And, more generally, "sadness is the condition of the King" (123). When law is understood as an ideal, whether imposed by a King or a sovereign people, "humanity is forgotten, and so will be the law" (124).

This is because the focus on a distant ideal allows the lawmakers to forget their personal vulnerability and power, with inevitably tragic results. But tragic results would have just as surely followed had King Arthur favored his family and friends and forgotten his ideal.

When philosophy is done right, Rose thinks, philosophy is about the sadness of the King. When philosophy is done wrong, it is about finding an easy way out, accepting one of the King's options as obvious, ignoring (but actually suppressing) this sadness. The result is melancholy: interminable fixation on suppressed sadness (Rose names neo-Kantianism, post-structuralism, and neo-pragmatism as victims of this melancholy). Philosophy done the right way acknowledges that, regardless of the choice that is made, there will inevitably be regret. Philosophy done the right way does not dwell on this regret but is propelled by it back into the fray to try again at justice. Metaphysics is "the perception of the difficulty of the law" and ethics is "the development of it… being at a loss yet exploring various routes, different ways towards the good enough justices, which recognizes the intrinsic and contingent limitations in its exercise" (124).

Rose concretely develops this philosophical prospectus by building on the Hegelian notion of "speculative identity." As Rose explains it, a speculative identity simultaneously acknowledges identity and non-identity.[3] Instead of understanding Hegel as a teleological thinker, collapsing difference into totalizing identity, Rose argues that we should understand Hegel as allowing difference and identity to persist together, in tension, one never triumphing over the other.[4] "A is B" and "A is not B" at once. The apparent contradiction does not make the statement vacuous. Rather, the identity "must be understood as a result to be achieved."[5] It is through experience, historical and social, that the identity is achieved. It is thus only through a thorough examination of social and

historical context, minding the winds of the actual existing world, that one is able to explicate a speculative identity.

The elements of a speculative identity are this-worldly and other-worldly, immanent and transcendent. For example, Rose examines the development of jurisprudence, witnessing the evolving tension between positive law and natural law through the ancient world into modernity.[6] Natural law supposes a transcendent foundation for law; positive law supposes law to be posited by humans. Rose does not align herself with one position or the other. Instead, she charts the tension as the two develop in relation to each other. She bears witness to their speculative identity.

The speculative identity with which Rose appears to be concerned with in regard to love is similarly the identity of an immanent option and a transcendent option. Rose does not explicitly examine these options: *Love's Work* is, first of all, a memoir, not a philosophical treatise. But by filling out this identity in a manner that parallels Rose's method regarding law, we will try to shed light on what Rose might have in mind regarding her own positive account of love. These immanent and transcendent conceptions of love will be filled out by turning to their formulation in ancient Greece. The immanent understanding of love exemplified by Homer will be contrasted with the transcendent understanding of love exemplified by Plato. In both cases, these conceptions of love have clear ethical and political implications.

The difference between the immanent and the transcendent conceptions of love, as their labels imply, is that the former conception takes love to be a natural, worldly phenomenon while the latter conception takes love to be somehow other-worldly. In Homer's *Iliad*, forms of the verb *philein* are used for a broad variety of contexts ranging

from friendship to spousal love to quite different uses. For instance, *philos* is used reflexively to indicate a special bond with something rather like the English word "dear." A soul, heart, life, or breath could be *philos*, as could a body part like a knee. In addition to the reflexive "dear" usage, *philos* was used to describe bonds of friendship. When there was some sort of reciprocal agreement between two parties, an agreement creating what might be called a friendship, the individuals became *philoi*. Gods could have *philoi* among humans, those who they favored and who did them favors. The word also applied to less formal arrangements, such as between comrades in war. The verb *philein* also took on the meaning "to kiss" as a kiss was an action which signified a reciprocal agreement between friends.[7]

To make sense of these varying uses and their evolution, Beneveniste suggests that *philein* began meaning a formal, reciprocal agreement but later evolved to mean a relationship with "emotional color" involving a "sentimental attitude" beyond the formal institution of friendship. *Philos* described things that were, broadly, mine: things relating to my household and my family, for instance, as well as my physical body and spirit. *Philos* described "'a scale of affection' involving 'a fixed gradation of friends and relations,'" where a wife was situated at the top of the scale.[8] Affection for one's wife was not qualitatively different from affection for servants or colleagues or even one's own soul. Rather, affection for a wife was different only in quantity, in the special degree to which she was close to oneself.

In sum, love in the Homeric, pre-Platonic sense was a special quantity of affect, where affect attached to objects and people because of their "closeness," in a rather existential sense, to oneself.[9] Closeness here does not refer to physical proximity but

rather to the amount of comfort and attachment that one has to the object or person in question. The more comfort and attachment, the closer it is. What one loves, on the Homeric view, is that with which one is most comfortable, that to which one is most attached. Love is entirely this-worldly, immanent. It simply describes a fact about human existence. Everyone loves just as everyone eats, just as everyone has parents.

In the Socratic dialogues we occasionally see the implications of this immanent conception of love. In the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*, for example, the naive understanding of justice is helping friends (*philoi*) and hurting enemies. What one *should* do is to benefit those who are closest to oneself, those who one loves. A further implication of this conception of love is that there is no need to change one's self because of one's love. On the contrary, one becomes more entrenched in one's self (one's body, the people one likes, the things one has) as one acts to advance the interests of those one loves.

This, of course, is exactly what Plato's Socrates argues against. He argues that one might have to change one's behavior, to alter one's self, based on love for something which is other-worldly, transcendent. To be good is not to benefit one's friends. It might take strenuous physical or intellectual effort. It might make one uncomfortable. Through his persistent questioning, Socrates pushes his interlocutors to abandon their comforting beliefs and practices; he forces them to part with those things which they love in the Homeric sense.

On Plato's view, the world is full of deception, of mere images. But Plato is concerned with reality, and he thinks reality is what everyone ought to be concerned with. For Plato, love (*eros* now, not *philia*) has to do with desire.[10] But desire can be

deceptive. We desire to go to the doctor for the sake of our health, but we desire health for the sake of being able to do activities we enjoy and we desire activities we enjoy because… into an infinite regress, or so it seems. But, Plato argues, these worldly things we desires are mere images, the equivalent of shadows in the *Republic's* allegory of the cave. The question which interests Plato is: what is the "first object of love, for whose sake we say all other objects are loved?"[11]

This question is elaborated, among other ways, through the ascent from worldly love to other-worldly love described in Plato's *Symposium* (especially 210b-211b). Although readings of this passage are contentious, for the ideal-type presentation needed here we can simply note the ascent from the material to the transcendent. Diotama instructs Socrates on the ways of love. First, the young man should love just one physical body. Then, he advances to loving all beautiful bodies, now finding his fixation on just one body petty. He then advances to love for mental beauty. He can now love someone without attractive physical attributes but with an attractive mind. He penultimately advances to love for what makes minds attractive: knowledge. And, finally, he ascends to love for something eternal and purely attractive, the form of beauty in which all other instances of beauty participate. The young lover has advanced from the state of a "small-minded slave," focusing on individual, material instances of beauty, to one who gazes on "the vast sea of beauty" (210d). This transcendent conception of love functions as an escalator out of the material world to something higher.

If we were to continue following Rose's methodology, examining the speculative identity of immanent and transcendent conceptions of love, we might note how the Homeric conception of love is refined in Aristotle's discussion of friendship and virtue

and we might note more distant echoes in Aquinas and recent communitarians. Nietzsche vividly described the avatars of the Platonic conception of love in Christianity, Kant, and beyond. Further, we would trouble these conceptions, noting their longings for sufficiency frustrated by their interdependence.

Both the immanent and the transcendent conceptions of love are closely tied to value. On both views, what one loves is what one values. What one values is what one will organize one's life around or, less abstractly, what one will change one's behavior in response to. On the immanent conception of love, the conception on which love is reaffirming what one already cares about, one both loves and values what is close to one's self. Moreover, one works to advance the interests of those one loves (helping friends, hurting enemies). On the transcendent conception of love, it may seem less clear how one can value something like "the beautiful" or "the good." But there certainly is a sense in which one's life can be organized around a transcendent love. One's daily practices and beliefs are changed on the basis of the transcendent object of one's love for the committed Platonist – and, of course, for the committed Christian.

What does Rose herself have to say about love and its relationship to morality and politics? Recall how the problem was stated in her narration of the story of King Arthur. Torn between two loves, King Arthur would inevitably be sad. However, the King's sadness was magnified because his imagination was limited to two options, and he wanted both. He imagined an ideal kingdom of peace based on justice and equality as well as everlasting love for his wife and for his friend, Launcelot. The acuteness of King Arthur's sadness was due to his dedication to ideals rather than to the hard work of real

life and real love, the hard work of what Rose calls the "middle," the space where the tension between identity and non-identity plays out.[12]

Rose's autobiographical "first love," as she describes it, was the same sort of love that she attributes to King Arthur. As a child, Rose was infatuated with Roy Rogers. As she writes, "it caused me acute physical pain just to think of him, and the high point of every week was watching his programme on television" (61). Rose wore cowboy clothing, played with plastic pistols, and taught herself to urinate standing up. In short, she had an "unshakeable desire *to be* him" (61).

Rose's love for Roy Rogers appears at first to be of the transcendent variety. Roy Rogers was not a real person, not a material entity with whom Rose had become comfortable, used to, attached to. Certainly one could describe Roy Rogers; his name did attach to some definite characteristics. But most of Roy Rogers was mystique. Rose's behavior certainly did change because of Rogers: she started to imitate his behavior, to change her life to more closely resemble his.

Despite these clear affinities with the transcendent conception of love, Rose very quickly reminds us of the ubiquitous but often hidden link between the transcendent and immanent conceptions of love. Roy Rogers was on television at the exact time that she was supposed to leave her mother's house to visit her father – her parents having been involved in an especially messy divorce. Despite the appearance of distance, of abstraction from her material surroundings, Rose's love for Roy Rogers was very much rooted in those things and people around her which she cared about, to whom she was attached. Like the sophists' rhetorical techniques, Rose's love for Roy Rogers was a

means by which Rose could help her friends and hurt her enemies, could attach herself to her mother's house and could resent her distant father's intrusion.

The sort of love that Rose had for Roy Rogers, like the sort of love that King Arthur has, is the wrong sort of love, the sort of love which is personally and politically problematic. It involved elements of both immanent and transcendent conceptions of love. But it did not synthesize them; it did not put them in dynamic tension. It allowed for a seemingly easy choice – a choice for one (Roy Rogers) which was really the other (her mother): just the sort of easy choice which all of Rose's *oeuvre* condemned. But Rose offers an alternative. She offers a phenomenology of love without idealization as either immanent or transcendent.

In her description of writing, an activity Rose describes as a less intense form of loving, the characteristics of her positive account of love begin to unfold. Writing is a "mix of discipline and miracle, which leaves you in control, even when what appears on the page has emerged from regions beyond your control" (59). Here, we find, first, the opposition between immanent and transcendent, between law (discipline) and grace (miracle), which forms of the core of Rose's thought. Instead of standing in confrontation, "discipline and miracle" mix, they are somehow (through speculative identity) both present in writing. Indeed, writing is the product of the fecundity of their tension. Discipline, the this-worldly, immanent ingredient, "leaves you in control." You feel as if you are determining the outcome. You have created the regime, you have set pen to paper for this hour, you have created this outline, you are addressing these topics. So what you write is yours. Yet somehow what you say – that is, what appears on the page to yourself and to your readers – is always something different. It "emerged from

regions beyond your control," it includes an element of miracle. Perhaps more familiarly, the concert pianist who rehearses hours each day for a performance practices a highly disciplined regime yet the product that the concert-goers – and the pianist – hear at the performance is somehow not reducible to that disciplinary regime.

In the space between presenting oneself in words on a page and that self being represented as those written words are read, there is an unbridgeable gap, the entry point of miracle.[13] As the author is confronted with the words that she wrote, she is forced to change herself to accommodate the different person who she now sees that she is. In the case of writing, the words written remain static, engraved in ink, as it were. But in loving, when the relationship is between two individuals, there is a dynamic feedback process in which each presentation and representation is constantly forcing alterations in the parties. The lover and the beloved, as they interact with each other, are constantly forced outside of themselves by the miracle of love, by the miracle enacted in the space between them. Neither party remains who they were before the interaction; each, through the interaction, is forced to become a new person. Loving involves greater intensity than writing; it is punctuated by "joy" and "agony" to a degree which writing is not.

In this process we can see how the speculative identity of immanent and transcendent conceptions of love plays itself out. Like the immanent conception of love, Rose's understanding of love takes the beloved to be a concrete individual: the object of love wears a tight semantic belt. But, unlike the immanent conception of love as articulated in the Homeric tradition, the clarity and concreteness of objects of love does not result in any sort of stasis. The lovers must change themselves because of their love.

Their objects of love, though concrete and this-worldly, force the same sort of change that results from other-worldly beloveds on the transcendent conception of love.

This reconstruction of Rose's view of love makes sense of otherwise opaque passages in *Love's Work*. Rose describes the experience of love as being one in which there is "someone who loves *and* desires you, and he glories in his love and desire, and you glory in his ever-strange being, which comes up against you, and disappears, again and again, surprising you with difficulties and with bounty" (60). When Rose writes of one who "loves *and* desires," we can quickly think of *philos* and *eros*, the immanent and transcendent conceptions of love in Homer and in Plato. The conjunction is crucial because it reaffirms the distinctness of the two conceptions of love while also linking them in the new formulation which Rose offers. The "ever-strange being" is equally crucial, for it reminds us of the mechanism by which Rose seeks to synthesize and surpass the immanent and transcendent conceptions of love. In the immanent conception of love, those who are loved are never strange. Indeed, they are the opposite of strange: they are as familiar as possible, for that is precisely the reason that they are loved. Yet it is them, those very specific "beings," who are loved. They are not loved because they are representatives of something else, because of the bit of beauty or good (or God) in them.

The precise mechanism of love, as Rose describes it, is a pushing and pulling, an ever-present tension which performs what love is. The lover "comes up against you, and disappears, again and again." The lover challenges you, surprises you, makes you uncomfortable. In reacting to the advances of the lover, one changes oneself, grows in response, and through response, pushes back at the lover, forcing the lover to respond – "again and again." This process is not an easy one but it is a rewarding one – it is

characterized by "difficulties" and "bounty." It is painful to be pushed, to be ill at ease, to be forced to respond in ever novel ways. But this is where the magic of love in its true sense, neither immanent nor transcendent but the speculative identity of the two, resides.

The intensity of love, greater than that of other relationships in life, is due in part to the absolute vulnerability that love entails, according to Rose. Colleagues have roles to play. They interact with each other as colleagues, following the script assigned to their positions. Their interactions are mutually beneficial, but they are like trains on a track: they may be able to travel far and in varied directions, but their interactions are always closely guided by pre-laid rails. In contrast, lovers interact with each other not as people putting on a performance, not as people playing a role, but as what is most essentially human in them. You do not see your lover as a postman, a brunette, or a golfer; you see your lover as a human being stripped of all social roles.[14]

Because of this nudity with which we interact with our lovers, because of this lack of rails, anything is possible. They are under no obligation to act towards us in a predetermined way, in a manner that we can anticipate. As Rose writes, lovers "have absolute power over each other" (60). Because there is no "contract," no agreed rails to guide the interaction, "one party may initiate a unilateral and fundamental change in the terms of relating without renegotiating them" (60). In sum, "There is no democracy in any love relation: only mercy" (60). This is what so greatly intensifies the relationship of love over life. Although the push and pull that characterizes love also characterizes life in the world more generally for Rose – as a version of the struggle for recognition, perhaps – in love this struggle is magnified because it starts *ex nihilo*, it cannot rely on previously acknowledged customs as a starting point. The miracle of love, in other

words, is that lovers walk together over a cliff, on thin air. Occasionally, they may experience vertigo, but they continue walking, all that they can do, together.

As a lover, one must understand not only one's "absolute vulnerability" but also one's "absolute power" (60), in sum, one's "riskful engagement" (71). It is not only you who are at the mercy of your lover, but your lover who is at your mercy. You too can take advantage of the lack of rails, can take advantage of your lover. At any moment, you have the ability to radically alter the relationship between the two of you just as the relationship can be radically altered by your lover.

"Happy love is happy after its own fashion" while "All unhappy loves are alike," writes Rose (62). This conclusion straightforwardly follows from Rose's positive account of love. Happy love is no more than the performance of the give and take between lovers. This is a dynamic performance, ever changing, involving different pulls, different pushes, as the personalities, and the persons, of the lovers differ and develop. Unhappy love, in contrast, always follows the same structure. Unhappy love has an effectively empty content: it is either solipsistic (on the immanent conception) or refers to an effectively empty signifier (on the transcendent conception), both of which collapse into one and the same thing – as Rose showed with her example of Roy Rogers. In unhappy love, one elevates an opaque object to the position of most loved, one structures one's life around that object – which, it turns out, is really just a reflection of one's own self, one's own desires exteriorized into an object.

But the story is more complex still. "The unhappiest love is a happy love that has now become unhappy" (62). In such cases, there was once the dynamism of happy love, performed in the space of the "middle," between the two lovers and between immanence

and transcendence. But, for whatever reason, the love has been lost; its dynamism has been stilled. It has become a memory, incorporated into the being of each lover, part of them in love's immanent form and projected as a broken hope in love's transcendent form. The pain of happy love turned unhappy is especially acute because of the loss involved, because of the personal knowledge that it was once animated. It is a taxidermied pet rather than a taxidermied animal in a museum diorama.

Rose's first love, her love of Roy Rogers, was a story of failed love, of loving the wrong way. If King Arthur had loved rightly, he would have loved according to Rose's account of love, an account which she exemplifies with her description of her relationship with Father Dr. Patrick Gorman (Rose's pseudonym for the priest-scholar). Their relationship begins with exchanged notes and mystery: Gorman claims to have seen Rose; Rose searches her memory to recall on what occasion this might have been. At a meeting, Rose senses "an intense aura emanating from someone whom I had never seen before, an intense, sexual aura, aimed precisely and accurately at my vacant being" (65). She is introduced to Gorman and realizes that he is the same man she earlier encountered at the faculty meeting. She is invited to dine with Gorman and, as she enters, "he gripped my hand and, looking straight in the eye, did not release the tension between our clasped hands and locked eyes" (66). It is in this tension, this exchange of advances in which each party's desire manifests itself in various modalities as the love progresses, as the future lovers become closer, that love is performed.

"We knew we wanted each other in the way those who become lovers do – with simultaneously a supernatural conviction of unexpressed mutual desire and a mortal unsurenesss concerning declaration and consummation" (68). Here again, in yet another

form, the transcendent and the immanent meet. The practical realities of growing closer, of physical proximity, the material manifestations of love as deep bodily, sexual, attachment are set in tension with desire, *eros*, the "supernatural," the transcendent conception of love in which the object is purely desired but only vaguely defined. As Rose points out, in her particular circumstances this tension was magnified: there was a material obstacle (the priestly vocation of Gorman) as well as a supernatural supplement (again, the priestly vocation of Gorman).

Rose and Gorman finally consummate their love. In her graphic yet delicate description of their physical intimacy, Rose again exemplifies the phenomenology of love which she offers. "The sexual exchange will be as complicated as the relationship in general – even more so. Kiss, caress and penetration are the relation of the relation, body and soul in touch…" (69). Each touch, in love, is a push, at once eliciting a response, at once transforming the lovers and propelling the performance of love forward. In bed together, the nudity of the lovers is literalized: their vulnerability and their power magnified. The immanent (body) and the transcendent (soul) are put in dynamic tension, "in touch." The lover "succumbs so readily and with more joy than I could claim" (69), with an excess which is reducible neither to the immanence of the material bodies of the lovers nor to the transcendence of their desire for their ideal images of each other.

Rose characterizes a night spent together as a "shared journey," "unsure yet close" (70). The immanent conception of love is "close," that is its defining feature. Yet it is also sure of itself, it is characterized by certainty, predictability, lack of surprise. In the immanent conception of love, one loves what one is most used to, what is closest to one's self and so is most well understood, not what one is "unsure" of. Yet the "unsure"

character of the love, and its nature as a "journey," does not unequivocally point to the transcendent conception of love. Although the transcendent conception of love involves a movement forward, an alteration of one's own conduct and life based on an underdetermined object, the transcendent conception of love takes love to be an individual phenomenon. Rose most definitely considers love "shared" and "close." In her phenomenology of love, love is definitively between two material beings, yet the two beings move beyond themselves through their interactions with each other.

In an opinionated aside, Rose articulates her opposition to "sex manuals" and "feminist tracts which imply the infinite plasticity of position and pleasure" (69). Her opposition arises from the same roots as her opposition to the stark choices which King Arthur sees. To imagine countless varieties of pleasure is to settle for an ideal, to imagine – and to seek to create – a Camelot. Such a project is inevitably doomed. But, more importantly, even the consideration of such a project is problematic. It is an easy solution, a way out of the difficult work of negotiating the push and pull of life and love. Sex manuals are "dangerously destructive of imagination, of erotic and of spiritual ingenuity" (69). It is against the stasis implied by both immanence and transcendence and in favor of the dynamism of negotiating their synthesis that Rose's phenomenology is positioned.

Lovers walking together without rails, walking together over a cliff – this is how Rose links love and faith. In the morning, after a night spent with a lover, Rose writes, "There can be no preparation or protection for this moment of rootless exposure" (70). The lovers have opened themselves to each other; love has been performed. They have walked over the cliff and they now, in the morning light, realize where each stands,

together, walking on thin air – this "holy terror," this "rootless exposure." At this moment, Rose writes, love is replaced by faith. It is only faith which keeps them together, keeps them walking on thin air, prevents them from falling – against all odds.

What can Rose's phenomenology of love tell us about morality and politics? First, it becomes clear that Rose understands love and morality to be kindred spirits. "To spend the whole night with someone is… ethical. For you must move with him and with yourself" (70). It is an experience that twins love and faith. She describes love as "sacramental even without the benefit of sacraments;" she describes love as offering the possibility that lovers can "achieve the mundane" (71). So it seems as though Rose is suggesting that somehow the experience of love alters one's experience of the world. Somehow, love offers a conduit of the holy (in an unconventional sense) into the ordinary.

On the immanent conception of love, love reinforces the way one already lives. On the transcendent conception of love, love forces one to change one's way of life in accordance with an underdetermined abstract object. In contrast, Rose's development of a speculative identity between the two conceptions turns love into an exemplary instance of how one should live. Rose wants to suggest that a life lived well is a life continually pushing and being pushed – by and against individuals, groups, and institutions. When we are in a true love relationship, we are taken into a corner of the world where life is lived more intensely and from which we can return to life all the more dedicated to continuing to participate in the difficult work of living, all the more committed to rejecting the easy options of falling into the stasis of pure immanence or the fantasy of pure transcendence.

One of the most profound elements of Rose's account of love – and morality, and politics – is her explicit acknowledgment of the pervasiveness of tragedy in a way that few others dare to suggest. "There are always auguries, not only of future difficulties but also of impossibility" (71). During the love affair, as the love is performed through the tension of push and pull between the lovers, the tragic nature of love is forgotten, elided. In Rose's own case, in her relationship with Gorman, this was particularly acute and explicit. He was, of course, a priest. In the performance of their love, the impossibilities inherent in the situation are easily overlooked. But Rose suggests that her relationship with Gorman is just a particularly acute instance of a much more general phenomenon. Love that is happy becomes unhappy; lovers change irreconcilably; lovers die.

Yet the inevitably tragic nature of love should not discourage us from participation – in love, such as in life. As the epigraph of *Love's Work* tells us, "Keep your mind in hell, and despair not." Rose offers the vivid image of the paradoxical circularity involved in learning to swim. Before one enters the water, one must know how to swim, yet one cannot know how to swim by being told how on dry land. One must enter the water. To think one knows how to swim before entering the water is to believe in Camelot, to believe in the immanent/transcendent ideal. In our short lives, in our few loves, we will never learn to swim well, Rose suggests. We will only flounder about, thrashing our arms and legs, pushing and pulling ourselves against the water as we try to begin to swim. Once in awhile, we succeed, beginning to find a rhythm, but more often we thrash about again, gasping for breath. Yet there is something indisputably more desirable about the novice swimmer thrashing about in the water than the person

who has never been in the water but believes she can swim because she read how in a book.

Again, Rose's view of love functions as a microcosm of her view on life. *Love's Work* is decorated with examples of decline and death, ranging from a friend dying of AIDS to an octogenarian cancer survivor to vivid descriptions of Rose's own terminal illness. In all of these cases, Rose admires and advocates persistence in the face of apparently insurmountable difficulties. King Arthur cannot remain silent. He must choose, and then he must move on to choose again. His weakness is that he imagines that he can avoid difficult choices, avoid the work of love, the work of ethics, the work of life. Rose concludes, on the final page of *Love's Work*, that she aspires "to be exactly as I am, decrepit nature yet supernature in one… I will stay in the fray, in the revel of ideas and risk; learning, failing, wooing, grieving, trusting, working, reposing – in this sin of language and lips" (144).

[1] David Velleman, "Love as a Moral Emotion," *Ethics* 109 (January 1999), p. 341.

[2] Gillian Rose, *Love's Work: A Reckoning with Life* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), page references parenthetical in text.

[3] Gillian Rose, *Judaism and Modernity: Philosophical Essays* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993), p. ix.

[4] See, for instance, Gillian Rose, *Dialectic of Nihilism: Post-Structuralism and Law* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1984), p. 139, and idem, *Hegel contra Sociology* (London: Athlone, 1981), *passim*.

[5] Rose, *Hegel contra Sociology*, p. 49.

[6] This is one level of the project of Rose's *Dialectic of Nihilism*.

[7] Emile Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society*, trans. Elizabeth Palmer (Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami Press, 1973), pp. 273-288. Cf. Henry Staten, *Eros in Mourning: Homer to Lacan* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Jopkins University Press, 1995).

[8] Henry Staten, *Eros in Mourning*, p. 28, citing J. T. Kakridis, *Homeric Researches* (Lund, Sweden: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1949), p. 20.

[9] Compare Jean-Yves Lacoste's discussion of "place" at the start of his *Experience and the Absolute: Disputed Questions on the Humanity of Man*, trans. Mark Raftery-Skehan (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004).

[10] The slippage from *philos* to *eros* here might seem suspicious, but it is useful and not unprecedented. Catherine Pickstock allows the same slippage in her "The Problem of Reported Speech: Friendship and Philosophy in Plato's *Lysis* and *Symposium*," *Telos* 123 (2002): 35-64.

[11] Lysis 219d; cf, Gregory Vlastos, "The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato," in *Platonic Studies* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 3-34.

[12] The theme of the "middle" is developed in greater theoretical depth in Rose's *The Broken Middle: Out of Our Ancient Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

[13] For the "presented" and "represented" terminology, see Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* (London: Continuum, 2005).

[14] Cf. Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other: And Additional Essays*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987).