

Hoping Without a Future: Augustine's Theological Virtues Beyond Melancholia

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For St. Augustine, Christian living is constituted by the inseparably connected theological virtues of faith, hope, and love, where happiness is found in a precarious and changeable world through hope in a future secured in eternity. Taking up the Hegelian philosophy of Gillian Rose, Vincent Lloyd has argued that such an understanding of hope is melancholic, leading him to reject hope as a virtue and thus invalidating the theological virtues under an Augustinian conception. However, in my view Lloyd misreads Rose by failing to recognize the silent character of hope in her work. I shall argue that Gillian Rose rescues Augustine's theological virtues by recasting hope in an eternal present.

“Keep your mind in hell, and despair not.”¹

Is it possible to have a hope without a future? In his latest film *Melancholia*, Lars von Trier probes the depths of despair in a phenomenology of apocalyptic depression.² As if to preclude any easy consolations, the film begins with a series of slow but devastating scenes in which the main characters struggle to keep their feet from sinking into the ground—a vain struggle that finally ends as the rogue planet Melancholia collides with Earth, destroying all life. The

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¹ A saying of the Russian monk Staretz Silouan, quoted in Gillian Rose, *Love's Work: A Reckoning with Life* (New York: New York Review Books, 2011), epigraph and 105.

² *Melancholia* was written and directed by Lars von Trier, and produced by the Danish film studio Zentropa in 2011.

message is clear: if there is any hope to be found amid the difficulties of living, it is not in the future. There is no future.

Such a despairing tone, while familiar to elements of First Testament wisdom literature, stands in stark contrast to the Christian eschatology found in figures such as St. Augustine of Hippo. For Augustine, unlike von Trier, while life on earth might remain a sinkhole of despair, Christians are rescued from it through their hope in the Supreme Good of eternal life.³ Together with faith and love, hope thus enables the Christian to negotiate the precarious tensions of this temporal pilgrimage, making possible a life to be lived in happy anticipation of an even happier future. A far cry from the life-destroying and future-denying despair of *Melancholia*, hope in Augustine predicates itself upon a future that rests in security.

Yet in the wake of the ethnic cleansing of colonialism, in the wars and the genocides of the twentieth century, in a nuclear age, and in an age of impending ecological and economic collapse, even for many Christians this security is no longer persuasive. Unlike the time of Augustine, the twenty-first century holds the unique possibility of being the last for life on earth. As in von Trier's *Melancholia*, the future can no longer guarantee happiness in the present.

Whither the theological virtues? Should hope be excluded, whittling the virtues down to faith and love? Or should the theological virtues be discarded completely and a new moral philosophy sought? In what follows, I will argue that the twentieth-century British Hegelian philosopher Gillian Rose rescues Augustine's theological virtues by recasting hope in an eternal present. In Augustine's philosophy, the theological virtues are inseparably interconnected, each with its own object and function, where hope works to provide a measure of happiness through an anticipation of an eternal future. However, in taking up the philosophy of Gillian Rose, the contemporary American theorist of religion and rhetoric Vincent Lloyd argues that this understanding of hope is melancholic. According to Lloyd, hope is not a virtue, it is a rhetoric that Rose rightly replaces with joy. Yet in my view Lloyd misreads Rose, failing to recognize how she does not reject hope but recasts it in an eternal present. This shift moves hope beyond melancholia, preserving the integrity of Augustine's theological virtues for a world in which the future remains an open question.

³ Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 19.4.

Faith, Hope, and Love in Augustine

Around the year 421 CE, while he was still working on his *magnum opus*, *City of God*, Augustine produced a work entitled the *Enchiridion*, a short treatise on the theological virtues. Requested by Laurentius, who may have been a catechumen at the time, the *Enchiridion* was a small pocket manual intended to aid its reader in the daily living of a Christian life; in Augustine's words, "one that can be carried in the hand, not one to load your shelves."⁴ This practical form of literature was not a Christian invention, but rather an innovation on the ethical manuals of Greco-Roman philosophers such as the Stoic Epictetus, to whom an *Enchiridion* dated several centuries earlier is attributed.

While Augustine's work might share some similar characteristics with the work of Epictetus and other Roman and Greek philosophers, his conception of the virtues fundamentally differs. According to Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, virtues are learned dispositions in regards to particular objects that help their user to negotiate everyday life.⁵ "These sorts of states naturally tend to be ruined by excess and deficiency,"⁶ such that, "if . . . someone avoids and is afraid of everything, standing firm against nothing, he becomes cowardly; if he is afraid of nothing at all and goes to face everything, he becomes rash."⁷ Thus, the virtue of courage lies not in overwhelming fear, nor in fear's absence, but in the in-between: a *techne* of moderating excess and deficiency that through practice becomes *arête*.

Although for much of Greco-Roman writing Aristotle's delineations of virtue remain definitive, Augustine's theological virtues break with this tradition. For Augustine, excellence in faith, hope, and love is not achieved through moderation, but through overabundance. Unlike all the other virtues, excessive faith, hope, and love is impossible; since they are the instruments through which "God is to be

⁴ Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 6, in *St. Augustin on the Holy Trinity, Doctrinal Treatises and Moral Treatises*, vol. 3 of A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, N.Y.: The Christian Literature Co., 1887).

⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.1.1103a.15–20.

⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.2.1104a.13.

⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.2.1104a.21.

worshiped”⁸ and the purpose of humanity is to worship God,⁹ they can never be too efficient: their temporal increase is limitless.

Like Aristotle, the theological virtues remain dispositions with intended objects, such that “these three graces [address] what we are to believe, what we are to hope for, and what we are to love.”¹⁰ Yet, unlike Aristotle, they are predicated on grace, not human agency. The development of faith, hope, and love does not originate in teaching or in practice, but “in dependence on our Redeemer’s help.”¹¹ Paradoxically, for Augustine, this does not destroy human agency, for the theological virtues still need to be taken up by the believer; it simply clarifies that God provides the ground upon which this agency is made possible. Thus, in his *Confessions* Augustine famously prays, “my entire hope is exclusively in your very great mercy. Grant what you command, and command what you will.”¹²

The theological virtues also differ from Aristotle’s virtues in their inseparable interconnections. For Aristotle, one might have the virtue of courage without having the virtue of temperance, for each has a different object: courage, with its ability to moderate fear; temperance, with its ability to moderate pleasure.¹³ However, for Augustine, while the objects of faith, hope, and love are different, each is required for all to function properly. For instance, “the sure and proper foundation of the catholic faith is Christ.”¹⁴ That is, the virtue of faith is a commitment to a particular structure of beliefs, in this case, the catholic conception of Christ as codified in the Creed. According to Augustine, “we begin in faith, and are made perfect by sight,” where sight represents “that unspeakable beauty, the full vision of which is supreme happiness.”¹⁵

Yet in temporal life this sight is never achieved, for supreme happiness lies only in eternity, and so, love and hope are also required to supplement faith. Indeed, Augustine notes that “[demons], having neither hope nor love, but believing that what we love and hope for is

⁸ Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 3.

⁹ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2008), I.i.

¹⁰ Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 3.

¹¹ Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 122.

¹² Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.29.40.

¹³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.2.21–25.

¹⁴ Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 5.

¹⁵ Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 5.

about to come, are in terror.”¹⁶ This is a significant insight, for while one might maintain the correct set of beliefs, without love that moves those beliefs into action, and without the hope that a future good will result from one’s love and faith, faith sets up a happiness that excludes its beholder: faith becomes terror.

Likewise, love cannot exist without hope. According to Augustine, love’s true object is God and one’s neighbor and oneself in God.¹⁷ Yet, since God lies in eternity, and as human love is unable to know the other in-itself,¹⁸ human love in the temporal realm is always provisional: its liminality requires hope. Without hope, love ceases to produce any happiness in the present, for one’s failure to love completely will always remain a source of misery.

It may seem at this point that faith and hope hold similar functions, for both take on objects that are not fully visible within the present. Faith believes in the coming of the Supreme Good, and hope finds happiness in that object. However, Augustine works at length to distinguish them. “Faith may have for its object evil as well as good”;¹⁹ it is a commitment to a set of beliefs and those beliefs contain negative and positive content. Thus, while Christians believe in eternal life and eternal punishment, they hope only for the former.²⁰ Faith is also “concerned with the past, the present, and the future”;²¹ its belief structures include truth claims within all three periods of time and they address both oneself and others. In contrast, “hope has for its object only what is good, only what is future, and only what affects the man who entertains the hope.”²² Of the three theological virtues in Augustine’s account, hope is the most personal, for where faith and love bear responsibilities for others, hope’s only concern is one’s own participation in the good and future object of eternal life.

According to Augustine, this particular function of hope undergirds the entire project of Christian living. Reminiscent of von Trier’s *Melancholia*, in Book 19 of the *City of God* Augustine argues that all human life on earth is corruptible and prone to misery. The changeability of temporal living assures that defects will eventually spoil any

¹⁶ Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 8.

¹⁷ Augustine, *City of God*, 19.14.

¹⁸ Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 121.

¹⁹ Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 8.

²⁰ Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 8.

²¹ Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 8.

²² Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 8.

present good, and this knowledge leads to despair.²³ However, “though human life is compelled to be wretched by all the grievous evils of this world, it is happy in the expectation of the world to come”—that is to say, in eternity.²⁴ This happiness in expectation is hope: an anticipation of a good future secured in eternity. That the object of hope lies in eternity guarantees that it cannot be corrupted, providing a provisional happiness in the temporal realm. Thus for Augustine, as “we are saved in hope, it is in hope that we have been made happy; and as we do not yet possess a present salvation, but await salvation in the future, so we do not enjoy a present happiness, but look forward to happiness in the future.”²⁵

Yet, hope in the future is still dependent upon the interconnections between faith and love. To explain this, it is helpful to draw an analogy between Augustine’s threefold conception of the theological virtues and his threefold understanding of effective preaching. When preaching is done well, Augustine claims, it has three significant components: instructing, delighting, and moving.²⁶ Instructing represents the information or content the preacher is trying to communicate. Delighting is the communication of that information in a pleasing style, such that the listener is able to take that information up with joy. Moving is the ability of the preacher to bring the listener to act upon the information. If any of these elements is missing, the preacher has failed in her task. If she does not delight her listeners, the instruction will be unpleasant, the listeners will be unhappy, and they will remain unmoved. If they are delighted and instructed but not moved into action, preaching is pointless. Worst of all, if there is improper instruction, delighting is not only misleading, moving becomes dangerous.

These three components of preaching correspond to the three theological virtues, where faith is instructing, hope is delighting, and love is moving. As in preaching, if any of these components is removed, the remaining ones are diminished. Without hope, the believer’s faith will be unpleasant as there will be no happiness in the present, and thus, his love will not move him into action. Without love moving him into action, his hope is pointless, and his faith is empty.

²³ Augustine, *City of God*, 19.4.

²⁴ Augustine, *City of God*, 19.4.

²⁵ Augustine, *City of God*, 19.4.

²⁶ Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R. P. H. Green (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2008), 4.74–75.

Finally, without faith, his hope is misplaced and his love is idolatrous. Thus, each theological virtue is inseparably bound to the others such that “there is no love without hope, no hope without love, and neither love nor hope without faith.”²⁷

Hope as Melancholia

Faith, hope, and love have continued to dominate social and political theory since the time of Augustine. Even philosophers in the contemporary academy, from the neo-pragmatist Richard Rorty to the continental Maoist Alain Badiou, have taken up the theological virtues for their own social-political projects. Yet, as in von Trier’s *Melancholia*, the validity of hope can no longer be taken for granted in a world whose future remains in question. If hope is to have a future, it must be able to withstand the risk of not having one.

In his recent book, *The Problem with Grace: Reconfiguring Political Theology*, Vincent Lloyd argues that this is precisely the problem with the contemporary invocation of the virtue of hope in religious and secular circles alike: both take up the Augustinian conception of hope as being a future good secured in eternity, whether that be the Christian eschaton, the Marxist revolution, or the liberal capitalist project of globalization. Yet for Lloyd, this hope *is* melancholia. Drawing on a distinction posited in the work of Gillian Rose, he describes a critical difference between mourning and melancholia. “In both, an object is lost. To the individual for whom the object was significant, there is something missing from the external world, and this loss provokes a conscious sadness.”²⁸ In the work of mourning, this sadness is taken up such that one is able to move beyond the lost object without evading the tragedy of the situation. “Melancholia is mourning without end, mourning that ‘cannot work.’ In melancholia, loss disturbs the unconscious, and the bereaved individual feels the loss not in the external world but in herself.”²⁹ This internalized sadness, whether disavowed or revealed in, comes to define the person’s identity, causing her to orient her experience of being-in-the-world around that lost object, thereby securing a present identity in an eternal loss.

²⁷ Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 8.

²⁸ Vincent W. Lloyd, *The Problem with Grace: Reconfiguring Political Theology* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2011), 72.

²⁹ Lloyd, *The Problem with Grace*, 72.

Throughout her work Gillian Rose provides several examples of melancholia in both its disavowed and revealed forms. For its disavowed form, she describes a holiday taken with a friend who was “beset with the most remorseless *acedia*—laziness, sloth, apathy.”³⁰ These symptoms were the result of Rose’s friend refusing to come to terms with her distress, carrying resentment for decades. By refusing to acknowledge this pain and working through the loss, Rose posits that the loss itself became a source of her friend’s apathetic despairing disposition and identity, for “if you don’t feel pain, you won’t feel anything.”³¹

For melancholia that is revealed in, Rose invokes postmodernism, which she believes maintains its identity in ceaselessly “lamenting the loss of securities.”³² Here, the lost security is reason itself, which after the Holocaust is seen to be complicit in genocidal violence. Yet this lament is in turn set up as a new security in which identity is fixed in a never-ending deconstruction of reason: a deconstruction of reason forged with reason; a mourning that refuses the work of mourning. “This everlasting melancholia accurately monitors the refusal to let go,” Rose observes, and is expressed in “the phrase describing postmodernism as ‘despairing rationalism without reason.’”³³ And, as in the case of her friend, Rose argues that the refusal of the work of mourning and abiding in melancholia leads to social apathy and political passivity.³⁴

What is most interesting about Rose’s conception of melancholia, according to Lloyd, is the way it shares a similar logic with the common understanding of hope: the same understanding held by Augustine. Both hope in Augustine and melancholia in Rose secure a present identity in the existence of a lost object. “In hope, that object is projected into the future, in melancholia, it is projected into the past.”³⁵ Indeed, as was previously seen in both the *Enchiridion* and Book 19 of the *City of God*, Augustine’s vision of Christian life is predicated upon a hope directed at an object eternally lost in the present: eternity itself. The anticipation of this object provides provisional happiness on

³⁰ Gillian Rose, *Paradiso* (London: Menard Press, 1999), 37.

³¹ Rose, *Paradiso*, 38.

³² Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 11.

³³ Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 11.

³⁴ Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 36.

³⁵ Lloyd, *The Problem with Grace*, 72.

earth to Christians, whose immediate identities are secured through that always future and always good object. This anticipation shares exactly the same function as sadness in melancholia: intending an object that is absent constitutes the identity of the self. Yet this absence is not experienced as a negation of identity, or even an equivocal identity, but as the sign of a future presence in which the self's identity *will be* confirmed. Thus, identity in the present is found in the intending itself, which is secured in the object's eternal nature. If this object were to be projected into the past instead of the future, the identity of the subject would be constituted in almost the same way. Its being-in-the-past would give it an absence eternal in the present, which the subject could equally intend; only this intention would be interpreted not as anticipation but as sadness. In other words, hope in the past is melancholia and anticipation in the past is sadness.

One might agree with the above analysis without necessarily concluding that Augustine's theological virtue of hope is problematic. After all, hope and melancholia, while sharing the same structure, differ fundamentally in their temporality. It would seem as though hope is open to future possibilities while melancholia is closed off in the past. Indeed, Gregory Baum, in his article "The Meaning of Hope in Evil Times," praises Augustine's virtue of hope, claiming that by making the object of hope an eternal future instead of the present political order, Augustine was able to detach the fate of the church from the decaying Roman Empire.³⁶ It is Baum's belief that this same virtue of hope provides a helpful model for Christians amid the decay of the American Empire and the apocalyptic feelings of our times. Yet as Lloyd argues following Rose, the assumption that supreme happiness lies in a future secured in eternity is not only unpersuasive to many within modernity, it creates significant difficulties for ordinary life in the present: it is unable to acknowledge and negotiate the limitations of being.

According to Rose's Hegelian philosophy, being by its very nature is limited.³⁷ For differentiation and description to be possible, a *thing* must have a determinate form, and therefore, a *thing* by being one thing, is not something else.³⁸ This is equally true for human beings,

³⁶ Gregory Baum, "The Meaning of Hope in Evil Times," *ARC* 20 (Spring 1992): 79–83.

³⁷ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977), §110.

³⁸ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §110.

which, while being communally constituted are also singularly located creatures, each with a subjectivity different from every other. This results in a world where the identity of oneself has to be negotiated with the identity of others, a process necessarily involving difficulty, misrecognition, and failure. Thus for Rose, “to live, to love, is to be failed, to forgive, to have failed, to be forgiven, for ever and ever.”³⁹ To live in the world involves a constant provisional positing of oneself in relation to others and others in relation to oneself that can never reach a completely universal recognition in the present because of each self’s singularity. This is why Rose believes human identity always involves a risk, because there can be no security that one’s identity will be confirmed by the other (or Other). To consider one’s identity secured in a future eternity is to neglect how human life works in the present. As if in direct refutation of Augustine, Rose implores that “the only paradises cannot be those that are lost, but those that are unlocked as a result of coercion, reluctance, cajolery and humiliation, their thresholds crossed without calm prescience, or any preliminary perspicacity.”⁴⁰

However, the lack of security that Rose believes is the foundation of being-in-the-world is the very source of the world’s misery for Augustine. In this light, Lloyd claims that the virtue of hope serves as a tactic to avoid tragedy. “The plural deficiencies of the world, the many moments that do not make sense, moments of tragedy, of failure, or inexplicable disturbance, they are condensed into one. When one object is pushed so far forward that it is no longer part of our time, it is just hope.”⁴¹ This serves as a threat to ordinary life, Lloyd argues, precisely because this hope is not of our time: *the eternal future is always in the future, it is never present*. Such an absent nature of hope “explicitly has its origins in the ordinary world, yet it moves beyond the ordinary world to what is effectively an antinomian simulacrum of the ordinary.”⁴² Indeed, for the virtue of hope to function as Augustine desires, hope cannot achieve its object in the temporal world, for hope is the intention toward an absent object that signifies a future presence, such that once that absence is filled, the sign is negated and hope ceases to exist. Whereas Rose’s philosophy suggests that the recognition of the limited nature of being and the eternal negotiations

³⁹ Rose, *Love’s Work*, 105.

⁴⁰ Rose, *Love’s Work*, 40.

⁴¹ Lloyd, *The Problem with Grace*, 73.

⁴² Lloyd, *The Problem with Grace*, 71.

of the present are able to acknowledge and move beyond the pains of tragedy through the work of mourning, Lloyd believes that hope obfuscates this process. "Thus, the effect associated with hopefulness, the cheery disposition for which no cause can be found, is in fact the affect produced by a most profound melancholia."⁴³

This leads Lloyd to conclude that "hope is not a virtue, it is a rhetorical technique."⁴⁴ Returning to the analogy between preaching and the virtues, if hope has a function in the economy of theological virtues, it is not in its ability to delight but in its power to move people into action. "The rhetoric of hope juxtaposes . . . images of the object of hope with its present reality. . . . It solicits approval for a future, perfected vision, and then demands action in the present to bring about that future vision."⁴⁵ Such a behavior does not fit the description of the virtues in the Aristotelian or Augustinian tradition, for hope as a rhetoric is not the moderation between deficiency and excess, neither is its limitless increase necessarily good. Whether hope functions positively or negatively under Lloyd's account is dependent upon whether the action hope is persuading one to take is positive or negative. "Hope can be used for good or for ill. There are no guarantees."⁴⁶ In fact, since it functions with the same logic as melancholia, and at times, as melancholia, hope has an equal if not a higher chance of having negative consequences, such as the symptoms of *acedia* Rose described in relation to her friend, or the political passivity of postmodernism.

In contradistinction to hope, Lloyd argues that "faith and love . . . are always virtues; they are always beneficial."⁴⁷ For this reason, he removes hope from the theological virtues altogether, making them a diptych of faith and love. Furthermore, he posits the possibility of replacing the rhetoric of hope with a more effective rhetoric: a rhetoric of hopelessness mobilized by joy. "Gillian Rose suggests," Lloyd claims, "that it is in joy, not in sorrow, that vulnerability is most acute,"⁴⁸ and this vulnerability, this willingness to stake oneself is what is needed to negotiate the limitations of our being-in-the-world. Unlike hope,

⁴³ Lloyd, *The Problem with Grace*, 74.

⁴⁴ Lloyd, *The Problem with Grace*, 71.

⁴⁵ Lloyd, *The Problem with Grace*, 78.

⁴⁶ Lloyd, *The Problem with Grace*, 71.

⁴⁷ Lloyd, *The Problem with Grace*, 71.

⁴⁸ Lloyd, *The Problem with Grace*, 88.

joy can delight and move the hearer, and since it does not intend any future object, it eludes the problematic of hope by refusing to bypass the tragedies of real situations. "It begins in the ordinary and stays in the ordinary."⁴⁹ Thus Lloyd believes joy in the midst of hopelessness can help to rhetorically strengthen the remaining virtues of faith and love, for "the exercise of these virtues is hard work. But it is a joyful labor: that is how it is sustained."⁵⁰

Hope Beyond Melancholia

Being himself a trained rhetorician as well as a philosopher (ironically similar to Augustine), Lloyd makes a convincing argument. His critique of the common conception of hope explicates a serious problem in the Augustinian theological virtue of hope: one that too often provokes Christians to revel in endless mourning, or to disavow it in Messianic expectations. Both lead to *acedia* and political passivity. Nevertheless, I find Lloyd's final rejection of hope in favor of hopelessness mobilized by joy an ultimately unpersuasive solution, and one that misreads the work of Gillian Rose in its construction. Instead of rejecting hope, Rose recasts it in an eternal presence.

As was already noted, Augustine's theological virtues are inseparably interconnected, such that to remove hope would be to make faith and love impossible. Even with joy, to lose hope would be to invalidate love, making any remaining faith terror. Lloyd gets around this obstacle philosophically by maintaining faith and love, but redefining them using Rose. For Rose love is the negotiation between the self and the other. Happy love "discovers the stores of wonders untold, for it is the intercourse of power with love and of might with grace. Nothing is foreign to it: it tarries with the negative; it dallies with the mundane, and it is ready for the unexpected."⁵¹ In turn, faith makes love possible. The unpredictability, the inevitable failures and limitations of love's negotiations can leave one feeling wounded and vulnerable. Faith in this context is a commitment to keep going, to stay in the fray of negotiation. Thus Rose writes, "If I am to stay alive, I am bound to get love wrong, all the time, but not to cease wooing, for that is my love affair, *love's work*."⁵² Here love's work is made possible by Rose's refusal to

⁴⁹ Lloyd, *The Problem with Grace*, 88.

⁵⁰ Lloyd, *The Problem with Grace*, 88.

⁵¹ Rose, *Love's Work*, 62.

⁵² Rose, *Love's Work*, 106.

cease wooing which *is* faith: a commitment to persevere even in the prospect of certain failure.

Taking up these definitions, Lloyd argues that Rose's work suggests faith and love can exist without hope.⁵³ However, while hope in Rose is rarely explicit, it is still present, if in a negative way. Here negative is not pejorative but panegyric: hope is a silence alive to negation. It does not posit a determinate synthesis; it is the gap in which the future and past are suspended before the establishment of a new present. This is not to be confused with Augustine's hope, which derives its value in intending a lost object: an absence that signifies a future presence. For Rose, speaking of the future in this way is always anachronistic: the future will be negated in the present. Nevertheless, "the future is the time in which we may not be, and yet *we must imagine we will have been*" [my italics].⁵⁴ Living in the present, in the ordinary world, entails positing an identity for oneself in the future. The difference between Rose's positing and Augustine's is that for Rose, this identity is always speculative: it can never be secured. The future might be a time in which the agent is not, or, as in von Trier's *Melancholia*, there may be no future: there are no guarantees.

Yet for the negotiations of love to continue, for the commitment of faith to be made, a speculative identity in the future must be thought. Hope allows this speculative identity to be thought by suspending any secured links in the present to the future and the past, which allows for a present identity to be projected into the future without *a priori* confirming it. That this identity might be negated in the future, as the future will be negated in the present, does not adversely affect hope. This is because for Rose, unlike Augustine, hope's object is not an eternal future, but an eternal present. Rose writes:

"Be—and at the same time know the terms of negation." This knowledge does not fall into the opposition of mastery/passivity: it acknowledges the negative as it moves beyond eternal loss to eternal confirmation, and adds itself, without count, to the teeming mass of natural declining determinations.⁵⁵

⁵³ Lloyd, *The Problem with Grace*, 71.

⁵⁴ Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 126.

⁵⁵ Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 146.

Eternal confirmation in this case is a process of coming to be confirmed in the present, a task that is never completed, and thus *eternally present*. Hope as a silence alive to negation preserves this process, avoiding the melancholia of a past or future lost to eternity, allowing love to continue its negotiations and faith its commitments in the present.

This is why it is easy for Lloyd to mistake Rose's work as a rejection of hope, for she never advocates for hope directly. To speak of hope directly runs the risk of breaking the silence of hope through determination. And in a world in which hope often has a determinate future object, to speak of hope directly carries too high a risk of being misunderstood. Nevertheless, if one stays alert to the silence of hope in Rose's poetic style of argumentation, hope is often to be found. For instance, in her critique of her friend suffering from *acedia*, Rose lists her friend's vices as "hopelessness, lack of charity towards herself, fear of the faith that would lead along the paths of despair to the walkways of ripening olives trees."⁵⁶ Notice how each of these vices is in fact a lack of one of the theological virtues, *including hope*. Rose does not overtly state her friend should be hopeful, nor does she explain what her friend's hope should be in, she merely points out that a part of melancholia is hopelessness. Again, in her critique of postmodernism Rose argues that its endless mourning is a "council of hopelessness which extols Messianic hope."⁵⁷ Here her very deconstruction of deconstructionist hope lies in her belief that postmodernism advocates a self-negating hopelessness. Such a criticism does not pursue hope directly, but it does inductively suggest that hope has an important role to play.

Finally, in her last essay, published posthumously, Rose poetically knits Holocaust ethnology with reflections on a contemporary Jewish wedding feast. Alternating restlessly between the description of Jewish graves vandalized during the Holocaust, a wedding procession led by a seven branch menorah, and a joyful wedding feast, Rose demonstrates in the structure of her writing how identity exists in the eternal present (the wedding feast) yet is constituted by the past (Jewish graves) and the future (the seven branch menorah). The significance of these details cannot be overstated, for the seven branch menorah (as opposed to the nine branch menorah used at Hanukkah)

⁵⁶ Rose, *Paradiso*, 38.

⁵⁷ Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 70.

is a representation of the lampstand lost in the destruction of the Temple:⁵⁸ it signifies the hope in a future in which the Temple might be reestablished (confirming Jewish identity), but without providing any guarantee that this might be so. In other words, it reflects a speculative hope. Rose concludes her reflection with this explanation:

The three lights of the future, the eternal present, the past: the promise of the candelabrum, the blazing fulfillment of the chandeliers [at the wedding feast], the sky guarding over gravestones and drawing trees. Three gates to heaven bestow their virtue onto the earth.⁵⁹

Each one of these lights represents the formation of the light that illumines the eternal present, a present that is negotiated with the theological virtues of faith, love, *and* hope: a hope beyond melancholia that Rose witnesses to in silence. It is a hope for which joy is a poor substitute.

Conclusion: Faith, Hope, and Love without a Future

If Lloyd rightly reveals the inadequacy of Augustine's theological virtue of hope using Rose's philosophy, and Rose's writing when read more closely discloses the deficiencies of Lloyd's proposed solution, where does all this leave the theological virtues of Augustine? The simple answer is that Rose rescues Augustine's theological virtues by recasting hope in an eternal present. In Augustine's philosophy, the theological virtues are inseparably interconnected, each with its own object and function. Rose's recasting of hope into the eternal present preserves the interrelationship between the theological virtues *without diminishing hope*. Faith can doubly function as Augustine's commitment to a set of beliefs, and as Rose's commitment to stay in the fray of love's negotiations. The object of love is one's neighbor (the other) and God (the Other) in both Rose and Augustine. Moreover, for both Augustine and Rose, love in the present is always provisional. The only irreconcilable difference between the two philosophers' theological virtues occurs in hope. Thus, by opting for Rose's conception of hope over Augustine's, the Augustinian formulation of the theological

⁵⁸ The seven branch lamp was commanded by God to be built for the Tabernacle in Exodus 25:31–40.

⁵⁹ Rose, *Paradiso*, 63.

virtues can be kept as a cohesive moral philosophy purged of melancholia, even in a place and time when the existence of a future lies in doubt. What remains to be seen is how this revised set of theological virtues would work out in a real situation. Here I return to von Trier's *Melancholia* as a helpful phenomenology.

After the opening scenes, the film follows the negotiations and struggles of the two main characters: one who revels in her melancholia, the other who disavows it. Finally, toward the end of the film, both women are forced to confront the inescapability of their situation as they discover the rouge planet's collision with Earth is imminent: in a matter of hours, they will not be. For the woman who revels in melancholia, this is greeted as a pleasant revelation. In an Augustinian moment, she claims: "The world is evil." The implication: it is a good thing the world comes to an end. However, for the woman who disavows melancholia, this knowledge is received with absolute horror. Holding her young child—a symbol of the future that will not be—she is unable to bypass the suffering of her situation through the rhetoric of hope.

In a last ditch effort to evade the full pain of the moment, the disavowed sufferer asks the reveler to accompany her and the terrified child to the balcony to await the end with a glass of red wine listening to classical music. If she cannot avoid misery through hope, perhaps she can control it through a joyful aesthetic. Seeing through this new tactic of avoidance, the reveler refuses, and instead offers the grace of a work of mourning. Taking the woman and the child with her to a nearby hill, she sets the child to work, making a skeletal frame out of branches for a tent, in which, she suggests, they will survive the planetary collision. The ridiculousness of the plan is emphasized by the puniness of the shelter in the ever-growing size of *Melancholia*. Yet, as the reveler and the child construct the shelter, the pain of the situation begins to recede through the work itself: an act of mourning in which the eternal present is lived through with faith and love while the past and the future lie suspended. The future eventually comes—or does not come—as the planet smashes into the Earth and the women, the child, and their shelter are swallowed up into the abyss.

Is it possible to have a hope without a future?
 "Keep your mind in hell, and despair not."⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Rose, *Love's Work*, 105.