

THE NARROW PLANK: ROSENZWEIG AND KIERKEGAARD ON THE POSSIBILITY OF ROMANTIC LOVE

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Abstract

Søren Kierkegaard and Franz Rosenzweig have opposite reputations in terms of their perspectives on romantic love: Kierkegaard is the pessimist who rejects it as fleeting and unethical, and Rosenzweig is the optimist who celebrates it as homologous with divine love. Upon closer examination, however, we see that Kierkegaard and Rosenzweig actually struggle with some of the same doubts and uncertainties about romantic love—Rosenzweig apparently cannot resolve all of them. This constructed dialogue between them suggests that their views are not as disparate as they may seem. Furthermore, according to Sharon Krishek’s interpretation of Kierkegaard and my interpretation of Rosenzweig, these two thinkers convey remarkably similar visions for how a romantic relationship can endure despite romantic love’s fragility and ephemerality.

Keywords: Franz Rosenzweig, Søren Kierkegaard, romantic love, momentariness, preferential love, freedom, commandment, Sharon Krishek.

Introduction

Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) and Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929) both wrote thoughtfully and extensively about the issue of romantic love.¹ At first glance, it

¹ I use the expression “romantic love” loosely in this paper in order to refer to a feeling or bond between individuals that has erotic aspects. I employ the term ‘romantic love’ in a twofold manner: First, it may refer to the (inter)subjective, emotional experience of love at a single moment between individuals. Second, it may refer to the love that presumably underlies and animates a sustained romantic relationship over time. For the sake of clarity, I sometimes refer to this latter dimension specifically as “enduring romantic love.” Rosenzweig and Kierkegaard generally emphasize the first sense of romantic love.

appears that they hold diametrically opposed views on this topic.² Kierkegaard is the solitary proto-existentialist philosopher, forever heartbroken after sabotaging his own betrothal,³ who bitterly rejects the ethical and ontological validity of romantic love. In contrast, Rosenzweig is the young philosopher of dialogue who, while down in the nightmarish trenches of the First World War, formulates a theology in which romantic love figures as the foundation of divine revelation. Whereas scholars such as MacIntyre, Mackey, Adorno, and Buber cast Kierkegaard as an anti-social philosopher, concerned only with “the single individual,”⁴ Rosenzweig is commonly regarded as a dialogical theologian who praises the power of friendship and romance.

Of course, any reputation—any terse summary of a human individual—inevitably involves reductionism and combines both fact and fantasy. To be sure, Kierkegaard writes more pessimistically about romantic love than Rosenzweig does, and these two thinkers draw different conclusions with regard to its definition and value. However, as we shall see in Part One of this paper, they both wrestle with some of the same doubts concerning the possibility of romantic love. Each of them struggles with similar questions: Can romantic love be both spontaneous and enduring? Does the “preferential” aspect of romantic love pose ethical and religious problems? Can romantic love, which thrives on freedom, be reconciled with a sense of duty or obligation?

Kierkegaard addresses these questions in his writings and launches attacks on romantic love from those grounds. As we shall see, he insists that romantic love simply cannot last and therefore is immoral, inasmuch as it lacks eternity; its preferential nature is antithetical to Christian love; and the only way the romantic lover can gain true freedom is through surrendering to the religious duty to “love

However, as we shall see in Part Two of this paper, their works may also shed light on the possibility of the second type of romantic love.

² For scholars who suggest that Kierkegaard does not ultimately provide helpful or constructive reflections on interpersonal relationships (at least preferential relationships, such as friendships and romantic partnerships), see note 4 below. In contrast, I am not aware of a single scholar who suggests that Rosenzweig neglects the importance of preferential human relationships, despite the fact that they may be fleeting and fragile in the yet to be redeemed world.

³ For Kierkegaard’s personal account of his failed engagement to Regina Olson, see his journal entry of August 24, 1849 in Søren Kierkegaard, *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, ed. Robert Bretall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 14-18.

⁴ See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1984); Louis Mackey, “The Loss of the World in Kierkegaard’s Ethics,” *Points of View: Readings of Kierkegaard* (Tallahassee: Florida State Press, 1986); Theodor W. Adorno, “On Kierkegaard’s Doctrine of Love,” *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* 8: 413-429; Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, trans. R. Gregor-Smith (London: Routledge Classics, 2004).

thy neighbor.”⁵ In comparison, Rosenzweig’s ruminations on romantic love are a bit more subtle. On the one hand, he boldly affirms the ontological and theological gravity of romantic love. He associates it with divine revelation and even refers to the erotic Song of Songs as the Bible’s “focal book (*Kernbuch*) of revelation.”⁶ One might conclude that, for Rosenzweig, romantic love is only a metaphor for divine love, but Rosenzweig insists that the association is much stronger than mere analogy. In his introduction to his commentary on the Song of Songs, he writes:

The analogue of love permeates as analogue all of revelation ... But it is precisely meant to be more than analogy. And this it can be only when it appears without a “this means,” without pointing, that is, to that of which it is supposed to be the analogy. Thus it is not enough that God’s relationship to man is explained by the simile of the lover and the beloved. God’s word must contain the relationship of lover to beloved directly, the significant, that is, without any pointing to the significate.⁷

Romantic love is not merely a metaphor for divine love; it is homologous with divine love.⁸ If we take Rosenzweig’s claim seriously—and I believe that we should—then we must conclude that his reflections in *The Star* about the relationship between the divine Lover and the beloved soul shed light on relationships between human lovers.⁹ In fact, as a biographical note, while Rosenzweig was in the process of writing on Revelation in *The Star*, he wrote to Margrit Rosenstock, his lover at the time, that this section of the manuscript was an expression of their romance: “Part II, book II is so beautiful ... in a way, you

⁵ Kierkegaard elucidates these points most explicitly in *Works of Love*, and also through the voice of Judge William in “On the Aesthetic Validity of Marriage” in *Either/Or*. In these texts, Kierkegaard at times refers to romantic love as “preferential love” (romantic love is one form of preferential love), “erotic love,” and “aesthetic love.” As we shall see in Part Two of this paper, Kierkegaard’s views on romantic love might actually be more nuanced than his most explicit attacks suggest.

⁶ Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. William W. Hallo (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 202.

⁷ Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, 199.

⁸ Paul Mendes-Flohr explains: “The human and the divine do not inhabit two separate realities. There is thus, certainly with respect to love, an intrinsic or rather an ontological homology between human, dialogical love and divine love.” Paul Mendes-Flohr, “Between Sensual and Heavenly Love: Franz Rosenzweig’s Reading of the Song of Songs” in *Scriptural Exegesis: The Shapes of Culture and the Religious Imagination: Essays in Honour of Michael Fishbane*, ed. Deborah A. Green and Laura S. Lieber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 312.

⁹ Although the God-soul relationship undoubtedly differs in ways from human romantic relationships (as we shall soon discuss), Rosenzweig suggests that the similarities are strong.

already know it, of course, that just as much of you as of me is in it.”¹⁰ This divine light that Rosenzweig casts on romantic love suggests that he overcomes some of the doubts that Kierkegaard raises. Indeed, we shall see that Rosenzweig tends to defend romantic love against Kierkegaardian attacks. On the other hand, however, Rosenzweig recognizes the potential fickleness and fragility of human love. As Mendes-Flohr notes:¹¹

The ontological homology between divine and human *eros* does not imply that they are identical. For one, as Kierkegaard noted, human love is preferential, whereas God loves, in principle, everyone. As Rosenzweig puts it, ‘man loves because God loves and as God loves.’¹² Further, because preferential human love is unreliable and subject to mercurial emotions, it is liable to collapse. In contrast, divine love is universal and unailing, or as Shakespeare would put it, ‘marble constant.’

In other words, romantic love is like divine love except for the fact that the former is fragile and based on the shaky foundations of the beloved’s mutable characteristics. Suddenly, Rosenzweig’s notion of romantic love is not so far afield from that of Kierkegaard! Rosenzweig also suggests an additional difference between human and divine love: Between God and the human soul, God is always the lover and the soul is always the beloved, and this fixed dynamic produces a robust and continual love: “[T]he relationship between God and the soul ever remains the same. God never ceases to love, nor the soul to be loved.”¹³ This is most certainly not the case between human beings: “Indeed, it is only to the soul and the love of God that all this applies in the strict sense. Between man and woman the roles of giver and receiver of love pass back and forth,”¹⁴ thereby rupturing the possibility of an enduring romantic love. With such unstable dynamics and constantly shifting roles between human lovers, long-term love looks messy and virtually inconceivable. In short, Rosenzweig harbors grave doubts about romantic love. Although he tends to defend it against Kierkegaard’s criticisms, his defenses usually consist of new *perspectives* on the “problems” of human love, as opposed to actual *solutions*.

I do not wish to suggest that Rosenzweig systematically or even consciously responds to Kierkegaard’s arguments about romantic love. Although this is conceivable insofar as he takes Kierkegaard’s writings seriously and even situates his own “new thinking” in relation to Kierkegaard’s rejection of Hegelian

¹⁰ As quoted in Yudit Kornberg Greenberg, *Better than Wine: Love, Poetry, and Prayer in the Thought of Franz Rosenzweig* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 97 n. 49.

¹¹ Mendes-Flohr, “Between Sensual and Heavenly Love,” 317 n. 12.

¹² Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, 199. Emphasis added by Mendes-Flohr.

¹³ Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, 169.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 169.

Idealism,¹⁵ this is not my point. Rather, I contend that a constructed “dialogue” between Kierkegaard and Rosenzweig on the topic of romantic love sheds light on their respective philosophies and theologies, as well as on the central questions and uncertainties about romantic love that they share.

The ultimate aim of this paper, however, is not simply to point fingers, so to speak, and to declare that Rosenzweig is nearly as uncertain as Kierkegaard is about the possibility of romantic love. After clarifying Rosenzweig’s perspective on romantic love *vis-à-vis* that of Kierkegaard in Part One, we shall then, in Part Two of this paper, attempt to discern from the works of these two thinkers how an enduring romantic relationship might be possible, despite the challenges of such an endeavor. It is important to note from the outset that such an inquiry may very well diverge from the projects of Rosenzweig and Kierkegaard.¹⁶ An

¹⁵ Rosenzweig praises Kierkegaard for shifting attention away from the cognitive All and, rather, to the particular human individual, “saddled with first and last name.” See Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, 7.

¹⁶ In fact, Rosenzweig’s own biography may suggest that he personally did not even believe in—or even necessarily *desire* for himself—traditional ideals of long-term romantic relationships. His passionate affair with Margrit “Gritli” Rosenstock, the wife of his close friend Eugene Rosenstock, is well known today. See Franz Rosenzweig, “*Die ‘Gritli’-Briefe: Briefe an Margrit Rosenstock-Huessey*,” ed. Inken Rühle and Reinhold Mayer (Tübingen: Bilam, 2002). It is significant that all three individuals (Rosenzweig and both Rosenstocks) knew about and even actively shaped this “Rosenzweig-Rosenstock triangle” between 1918-1922, supporting the notion that Rosenzweig had quite unconventional views of marriage. See Michael Zank, “The Rosenzweig-Rosenstock Triangle, or, What Can We Learn from *Letters to Gritli?*: A Review Essay,” *Modern Judaism* 23 (2003):74-98. It is noteworthy that this affair was taking place while Rosenzweig wrote *The Star* (see above, p. 4). Although Rosenzweig did marry (he was engaged to Edith Hahn in 1920 and they married in 1922), there is reason to believe that this was largely a marriage of convenience, and an often frustrating one at that. Zank comments, “He [Rosenzweig] hoped in 1919 he would find a mate who would help him to establish a traditional Jewish household. Franz and Edith did indeed get married rather quickly... Yet, as soon as the decision was made, Franz began to describe her in terms that make his disdain for her obvious and show that he chose her to prove to himself and to the world (or, more precisely, to his mother and his Christian interlocutors) that his Judaism was, to use an apt phrase, ‘for real life.’ The lack of affection for Edith was prevalent from the day of their engagement on January 6, 1920, until the time in mid-January 1922 when Rosenzweig was diagnosed with ALS and when his correspondence with Margrit Rosenstock began to dry up. For the first two years of their marriage, Edith figured as an irritant in Rosenzweig’s life, one of the causes of his perpetual feeling of despondency and failure” (Zank, “Rosenzweig-Rosenstock Triangle,” 76-77). Therefore, I must acknowledge that my attempt to envision a healthy, long-term form of romantic love based on Rosenzweig’s writings may very well reflect notions of romance that are more conservative and traditional than those of Rosenzweig himself. The same can be said with regard to Kierkegaard’s biography. After all, he canceled his engagement to Regina Olson

interpreter of philosophy must be honest about where his own questions begin and where the questions that engaged the philosophers whom he is reading end. In this sense, the second part of this paper is largely a constructive project. In her recent book, *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love*, Sharon Krishek attempts to articulate a vision of genuine romantic love based on Kierkegaard's writings.¹⁷ According to her interpretation of Kierkegaard and my interpretation of Rosenzweig, these two thinkers provide remarkably similar ways for us to envision an enduring romantic relationship. For both Rosenzweig and Kierkegaard, the answer may lie in the dynamics of faith, and in a dialectic between non-preferential neighborly love and preferential romantic love.

One who considers the earthly intricacies of romantic love to be irrelevant for the fields of philosophy and theology might dismiss such an inquiry altogether. However, Rosenzweig clearly states that one cannot understand revelation without understanding human love. Remember, the relation between revelation and romantic love is "more than an analogy."¹⁸ As Samuel Moyn emphasizes, "Rosenzweig's theory of revelation is a *theory of eros*."¹⁹ Rosenzweig claims that human love—real, interpersonal, sensuous human love—is theologically and philosophically significant. The boundary between earthly love and divine love is blurry. In this vein, Rosenzweig asserts, "love is sensual-supersensual."²⁰ As Mendes-Flohr explains: "The human and the divine do not inhabit two separate realities."²¹ To understand Rosenzweig's theology, it is necessary to clarify his perspective on romantic love.²²

after what he considered to be a "divine protest" and "veto" from God against marriage, and he never did marry. See Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard Anthology*, 14-18.

¹⁷ Sharon Krishek, *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹⁸ Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, 199.

¹⁹ Samuel Moyn, *Origins of the Other: Emmanuel Levinas Between Revelation and Ethics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 146. Emphasis in original.

²⁰ Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, 201.

²¹ Mendes-Flohr, "Between Sensual and Heavenly Love," 312.

²² Despite the fact that both Kierkegaard and Rosenzweig deal extensively with the issue of romantic love, few scholars have seriously examined or sought philosophical insight from their perspectives on this matter. [Some notable exceptions to this with regard to Kierkegaard include Edward F. Mooney, *Knights of Faith and Resignation: Reading Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991); Rick Anthony Furtak, *Wisdom in Love: Kierkegaard and the Quest for Emotional Integrity* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005); Claudia Welz, *Love's Transcendence and the Problem of Theodicy* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008); Amy Laura Hall, *Kierkegaard and the Treachery of Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).] With regard to Kierkegaard, Sharon Krishek suggests two reasons for the relatively small amount of scholarship on his notions of romantic love (see Krishek, 1-4). First, much of his discourse on romantic love is written under pseudonyms, so it is often difficult

I. Different Responses to Similar Struggles

In the second volume of Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*, Judge William points out a paradox in the Aesthete's view of romantic love. On the one hand, the Judge observes, this lover believes that romantic love is by nature "immediate" and spontaneous—he falls for a woman because she is beautiful, because her voice moves him, because of who she is—but on the other hand, this lover imagines that his love is whole and eternal. These two assumptions about romantic love are incompatible. The Judge therefore concludes, "The lovers are sincerely convinced that their relationship is in itself a complete whole which never can be altered."

to clearly discern his personal views on the topic. Second, he is so commonly regarded as hostile to any form of preferential love that few scholars have thought to inquire deeply into his points about romantic love. Although some recent scholars have argued that Kierkegaard actually does have important ethical points to make about concrete human relationships, they have hardly investigated his perspective on romantic love in particular. For examples of this trend, see Stephen C. Evans, *Passionate Reason: Making Sense of Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); Jamie M. Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving: A Commentary on Kierkegaard's Works of Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); George Pattison, *Kierkegaard, Religion and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). In her book, *Kierkegaard and the Treachery of Love*, Hall does specifically investigate Kierkegaard's views on romantic love, but she concludes that he does not have anything truly constructive to say about romantic relationships, as the title of her book suggests.

As for Rosenzweig, virtually all scholars who seriously engage with his theology acknowledge that love is a central element in his work. For example, see Claudia Welz, *Love's Transcendence*; Greenberg, *Better than Wine*; Mendes-Flohr, "Between Sensual and Heavenly Love". Few, however, have specifically considered Rosenzweig's views on romantic love in particular, despite the fact that it is such a salient image in his writings, especially in Part II, Book Two of *The Star*. Those who have explored Rosenzweig's perspective on romantic love have done so primarily in order to show how it functions hermeneutically or how sensual love relates to divine love in his theology (this applies to the works of Welz, Greenberg and Mendes-Flohr). While such analyses are indispensable for understanding Rosenzweig's thought and do clarify the role of romantic love in his theology, they do not necessarily elucidate Rosenzweig's perspective on romantic love in the context of life itself—the meaning, value and subjective experience of it in the moment, how romantic relationships may endure over time, and so on. There are two main reasons for this gap in the literature. First, scholars have tended to focus more on Rosenzweig's philosophy than on his theology. Second, while Rosenzweig quite extensively discusses the essential dynamics of divine and human forms of love as they occur within single moments (mostly in Part II, Book Two of *The Star*), he generally falls silent with regard to how, exactly, romantic love unfolds over time and how romantic relationships actually function. In other words, he does not make it easy for his readers to apply his reflections on love to the realm of life.

But since this assurance is founded only upon a natural determinant, the eternal is thus based upon the temporal and thereby cancels itself.”²³ According to the Judge, the Aesthete’s love is immoral, for moral values must be rooted in eternity, but romantic love is trapped in finite sensuality.²⁴ For the Judge, sensuality breeds immorality because it is inherently self-centered, solely in the service of “instant satisfaction.” Sensuous “love” is verily no more than lust.²⁵ In contrast, the Judge argues, the pursuit of a moral life rooted in eternity cultivates humility and a sense of duty. For anyone who doubts that Kierkegaard personally identifies with the Judge’s position in this case, Kierkegaard reinforces this argument in *Works of Love*.²⁶ He writes about the Poet’s titillating sense of romantic love²⁷ that is truly no more than hot air, so to speak: “Behold, passion inflames, worldly sagacity cools, but neither this heat nor this cold nor the blending of this heat and this cold is the pure air of the eternal.”²⁸ With his gorgeous beloved in his arms, the Poet may fancy that eternity permeates this very moment, but Kierkegaard laments, “only this one time of erotic love is genuine love, is everything, and the next time nothing.”²⁹ Kierkegaard concludes that romantic love is only meaningful in the present moment; therefore it is not only meaningless—it is immoral.

Rosenzweig, in contrast, asserts that love *must*, by definition, be a purely present phenomenon. Of course relationships of love take place in space and time, but the element of love itself—whether the lover is God or a human being³⁰—is only active in the evanescent moment (*Augenblick*), here and now.³¹

²³ Kierkegaard, “Either/Or” in *Kierkegaard Anthology*, 83.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 83. (I am not sure this footnote is necessary, as it an indirect references to the text cited in n. 23 and n. 25

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 83.

²⁶ Kierkegaard writes *Works of Love* in his own name, unlike *Either/Or*, which he wrote under pseudonyms.

²⁷ The character of the Poet in *Works of Love* and the character of the Aesthete in *Either/Or* are, for all intents and purposes, the same type of lover. They both embody and seek “aesthetic love,” which we will discuss further in Part Two of this paper.

²⁸ Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 56.

²⁹ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 62. In *Either/Or*, the Seducer even openly admits, “The moment is everything, and in the moment, woman is everything; the consequences I do not understand” (Kierkegaard, “Either/Or,” 76).

³⁰ As noted earlier, we must take Rosenzweig seriously when he suggests that human love and divine love are homologous (*Star of Redemption*, 199). We may indeed posit that the divine Lover and the human lover love in similar ways. “God experiences love, Rosenzweig implies, in the same spontaneous, unexpected manner in which we do” [Benjamin Pollock, *Franz Rosenzweig and the Systematic Test of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 204]. While one might imagine that Rosenzweig does not actually speak about interpersonal relations in *The Star* until his discussion of

This is particularly true for the love of the lover, i.e., God's love. Rosenzweig unequivocally emphasizes that this can only be "ever young love, ever first love. For love alone is at once such fateful domination over the heart in which it stirs, and yet so newborn, initially so without a past, so wholly sprung from the moment which it fulfills, and only from that moment."³² If the lover's love lacks eternity, then so be it—it is nonetheless true love in that moment! Leora Batnitzky explains, "Love, for Rosenzweig, is always fleeting. Such is the deficiency of love between two people: while it is always renewed, it is also always gone. This problem is not love's, but time's itself."³³ Rising and falling constantly in the ever disappearing now, "as a moment gone like an arrow,"³⁴ the lover's love is fundamentally evanescent.

For Kierkegaard, the potential dissipation of love over time implies that it is meaningless and immoral. But Rosenzweig holds that speculations about the future already involve a departure from love itself, which is "present, pure and simple: how should love itself know whether it will love, whether, indeed, it has loved? It is enough that it knows this one thing: it loves."³⁵ The lover's love is purely momentary and thus utterly unpredictable. Since it has no past and no future, love essentially transcends the horizons of thought and language, and the only true statement one can honestly say about it is "Love is strong as death" (Song of Songs 8:6),³⁶ for only this can capture love's radical presentness: "Love which knows solely the present, which lives on the present, pines for the present—it challenges death."³⁷

In his insistence that love is momentary, without past or future, Rosenzweig defends romantic love against Kierkegaard's criticism that it lacks eternity. The fact that romantic love is fundamentally fleeting does not make it immoral; rather, this is simply the nature of love (however frustrating and distressing that may be

neighborly love in Redemption, I maintain that his discussion of the divine lover and the beloved soul in Revelation also pertain to relationships between human lovers and beloveds, as long as we bear in mind that "between man and woman, the roles of giver and receiver of love pass back and forth" (Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, 169).

³¹ The evanescence of the present moment for Rosenzweig is vividly illustrated by the German word for moment, *Augenblick*, literally a "blink of an eye." For Rosenzweig, love is a purely momentary phenomenon, and thus its reality is only truly visible, so to speak, in the instantaneous, barely perceptible "blink of an eye."

³² Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, 160.

³³ Leora Batnitzky, *Idolatry and Representation: The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig Reconsidered* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 117.

³⁴ Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, 201.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 164.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 202, 156-157.

³⁷ *Ibid.* Mendes-Flohr comments: "The dark shadows of death denote the anticipated 'has been' of past perfect of human existence. In contrast to death, love is utterly in the present" From which text? 315.

for romantic partners). Of course, this alone is an unsatisfying defense of romantic love, for it merely casts a positive (even divine) light on the momentary love that Kierkegaard rejects.

Rosenzweig, however, does envision a love that has constancy: the relationship between God and the beloved soul. Although divine love flickers in barely perceptible moments, the receptive soul perceives this love in a fundamentally different way—and this perception does not only transform the human being, it also transforms God. Allow me to summarize this “reversal” into revelation:³⁸ The human individual begins as the meta-ethical, defiant self, isolated and introverted.³⁹ In order to “prepare himself” to receive God’s love, he emerges from his secluded depths and develops a serene pride that can only be called humility, which “is nothing more than defiance emerging from out of its speechless self-containedness.”⁴⁰ Humility is a mode of utter receptivity and profound openness. Although God’s undying love is essentially a continual strobe of love in rapidly renewing moments, the beloved soul perceives it as a continuous flow.⁴¹ Thus, “the beloved knows as eternal, as ever and aye, that which to the lover is a moment, ever to be renewed. The love of the beloved has ‘ever’ inscribed above it.”⁴² This humble receptivity of the beloved soul is not purely passive. In fact, it reflects a faithfulness with the strength of defiance: “Not that there is still defiance in the beloved soul itself—this defiance has wholly turned to faithfulness within it—but the strength to hold fast, which the beloved soul maintains toward the love with which it is loved, this strength of trust is drawn by it from that defiance of the self which has integrated with it.”⁴³ And this

³⁸ See Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, 167-171. For an excellent explanation of this “reversal” into revelation, see Pollock, *Franz Rosenzweig and the Systematic Test of Philosophy*, 204-210.

³⁹ For the full description of this mode of human existence, see Part I, Book 3 of *The Star of Redemption*.

⁴⁰ Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, 168.

⁴¹ This imagery is interestingly reminiscent of Maimonides’ description of divine revelation. God reveals the “great secrets...like someone in a very dark night over whom lightning flashes time and time again. Among us there is one for whom the lightning flashes time and time again, so that he is always, as it were, in unceasing light. Thus night appears to him as day” [Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 7]. This “one” who receives God’s flashes so constantly that they appear as continuous light is Moses. Both Maimonides and Rosenzweig imagine a God who “strokes” the content of revelation, if you will, and a human receiver who perceives the discontinuous revelation as continuous. For Maimonides, this content of revelation is knowledge, and Moses is the only one who receives it/knowledge seemingly continuously; for Rosenzweig, the content is love, and every human soul has the capacity to receive it/love seemingly continuously.

⁴² Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, 168.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 170.

faithfulness of humility transforms the way in which God loves. Although divine love continues to be fundamentally momentary, it attains a constancy through the powerful receiving of the beloved soul: “The trusting faith of the beloved affirms the momentary love of the lover and consolidates it into something enduring...By its trust, the faith of the soul attests the love of God and endows it with enduring being.”⁴⁴ This is the image of enduring love that Rosenzweig offers.

He clearly states, however, that this is not how romantic love works between people:

Indeed, it is only to the soul and the love of God that all this applies in the strict sense. Between man and woman the roles of giver and receiver of love pass back and forth, the higher the blossoms which the plan of love generates between them, the more that it rises above itself and its subterranean roots like a veritable palm-tree, although the roots of sexuality ever restore the unambiguous relationship of nature. But the relationship between God and the soul ever remains the same.⁴⁵

Every human relationship is in a state of perpetual flux. Whereas divine love attains eternity through the faithfulness of the beloved soul, romantic love is chained to the fluttering present, just as Kierkegaard knew it to be. The beloved cannot trust that her⁴⁶ lover’s feelings will remain the same in the future. And, due to the fact that human romantic partners fluctuate between roles of giver and receiver, she must also fear that her own love is finite and momentary as well. “It is difficult to love,” Rosenzweig reflects in the afterglow of a Yehuda Halevi poem, “due to the tension between man’s infinite desire to love, his compulsion to love, and his finite ability to do so.”⁴⁷ Romantic love is human love, and thus it is delicate and vulnerable.

For Rosenzweig, this tragic finitude of love is the source of the lovers’ longings and sobs in the Song of Songs:

⁴⁴ Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, 171.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 169. Needless to say, Rosenzweig’s depiction of romantic relationships in terms of “man and woman” is heteronormative. Yet his suggestion that the roles of giver and receiver pass back and forth between partners may lend itself to less gendered, more “queer” readings of romantic love in *The Star*.

⁴⁶ Although Rosenzweig acknowledges that individuals vacillate between the roles of “lover” and “beloved” in human relationships (Rosenzweig, *The Star*, 169), he and Kierkegaard generally use masculine pronouns to refer to lovers and use feminine pronouns to refer to beloveds. For the sake of clarity and consistency, I generally preserve these gender roles in my own language throughout this paper.

⁴⁷ Franz Rosenzweig, *Ninety-Two Poems and Hymns of Yehuda Halevi*, trans. Thomas Kovach, Eva Jospe, and Gilya Gerda Schmidt, ed. Richard A. Cohen (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), 25.

They yearn for a love eternal such as can never spring from the everlasting presentness of sensation ... The beloved pleads with the lover to sunder the heavens of his everlasting presentness which defies her yearning for love eternal, and to descend to her, so that she might set herself like an eternal seal upon his ever-beating heart and like a tightly fitting ring about his never resting arm.

Such an eternal love cannot be between human lovers. Although Rosenzweig uses the imagery of the wedding ring to intimate such a relationship of constancy, he denies that it is possible for romantic love to attain eternity. Eternal love is more akin to a relationship between siblings than to a romance:

Matrimony is not love. Matrimony is infinitely more than love. Matrimony is the external fulfillment which love reaches out after from her internal blissfulness in a stupor of unquenchable longing—Oh that you were my brother...⁴⁸

Such yearnings cannot ultimately be satisfied in romantic relationships: “If this longing is to be fulfilled, then the beloved soul must cross the magic circle of belovedness, forget the lover.”⁴⁹ In the end, the reliable love between God and the beloved soul is actualized in neighborly love, not in romantic love. This is the bridge that Rosenzweig constructs between Revelation and Redemption. It involves a shift from romantic love (inasmuch as it is homologous with divine love) to neighborly love, which for Rosenzweig is inherently indiscriminate, or non-preferential. The commandment to “love thy neighbor” implies that I must love whoever is “nighest to me, at least at this moment, regardless of what he may have been before or will be afterward.”⁵⁰ In other words, the neighbor “is not loved for his own sake, nor for his beautiful eyes, but only because he just happens to be standing there, because he happens to be nighest to me.”⁵¹ Rosenzweig suggests that neighborly love has salvific elements that are absent in romantic love. While romantic love is associated with the personal transformation of Revelation, neighborly love is associated with the world-transformation of Redemption.

That said, Rosenzweig clearly does not dismiss the value of romantic love. He agrees with Kierkegaard that romantic love is ultimately fleeting, but in associating it with Revelation and thereby plugging it into his tripartite map of God’s universe (Creation, Revelation, Redemption), Rosenzweig denies that neighborly love is absolutely “superior” to romantic love, or that it should *replace* romantic love.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 204.

⁴⁹ Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, 204.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 218.

⁵¹ Ibid.

For Kierkegaard, however, romantic love is antithetical to neighborly love,⁵² and here we come to his second major challenge to the validity of romantic love: it is preferential. In *Works of Love*, he sharply differentiates between neighborly love and preferential love and vehemently argues that the former is superior to the latter.⁵³ Indeed, this is at the heart of Christian doctrine:

Christianity has thrust erotic love and friendship from the throne, the love rooted in mood and inclination, preferential love, in order to establish spiritual love in its place, love to one's neighbour, a love which in all earnestness and truth is inwardly more tender in the union of two persons than erotic love is and more faithful in the sincerity of close relationship than the most famous friendship.⁵⁴

Kierkegaard is so opposed to preferential love that he suggests that one should completely eradicate it from one's life. It is not enough for a Christian to simply say that neighborly love is *relatively* lofty compared to preferential love: "To talk thus is a double betrayal—inasmuch as the speaker has neither the spirit of the poet nor the spirit of Christianity."⁵⁵ Why is Kierkegaard so opposed to preferential love? First of all, he sees it as inherently selfish and therefore immoral. If I celebrate my love for a woman because I find her beautiful, fun, wise, and so on, then I am essentially celebrating how she makes me feel. Such sensuality goes hand in hand with selfishness: "preference in passion or passionate preference is really another form of self-love."⁵⁶ In contrast, neighborly love involves renunciation of the self: "Love of one's neighbor ... is self-renouncing love, and self-renunciation casts out all preferential love just as it casts out all self-love."⁵⁷ Insofar as neighborly love is radically indiscriminate, it also involves a certain renunciation of the Other. In other words, if all preferential love is prohibited, then I must essentially "see through" all particular characteristics of the Other that could attract or repel me. The second reason why Kierkegaard is opposed to preferential love is that he sees it as hopelessly impermanent. Any love that is based on ephemeral aspects of a beloved is prone to collapse, for such love is contingent on the continued possession of certain

⁵² Krishek challenges Kierkegaard on this apparent assertion in *Works of Love*, suggesting that it is actually incompatible with his thought in general. We will discuss this in Part Two of this paper.

⁵³ This contradiction between non-preferential neighborly love and preferential romantic love corresponds to the classical debate between *agape* and *eros*.

⁵⁴ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 58.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 59. Some scholars argue that Kierkegaard does not completely reject any sort of friendship or romance (see, for example, George Pattison's foreword in Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, xi-xiv; cf. note 8 above). However, it is clearly possible to read him in such a way (see note 3 above).

⁵⁶ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 65.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 67.

lovable characteristics; it is only a matter of time. In neighborly love, however, one does not follow one's whimsical attractions to conditional characteristics and changeable traits, but embraces the all-encompassing exhortation to "love thy neighbor." According to Kierkegaard, preferential love is sacrilegious and simply cannot last.

Rosenzweig is ambivalent about the notion of preferential love.⁵⁸ Although he cannot deny that attraction and desire naturally play roles in the course of romantic love, he attempts to differentiate between love itself and preferential love: "Perhaps want precedes love," he concedes, "But what does love know of that which precedes it? ... [T]here is no room for want within love itself, on the narrow plank of its momentariness (*Augenblicklichkeit*)."⁵⁹ Rosenzweig's definition of love as fundamentally momentary again enables him to defend love against Kierkegaardian criticisms, but only partially. As it turns out, he echoes Kierkegaard's concerns about the fragility of preferential love over time. Since all preferential attractions are based upon characteristics that are subject to change, the foundations of any long-term commitment are inherently unstable.

In *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy*, he describes the cerebral philosopher on the verge of marriage, who anxiously begins to doubt whether there is actually anything constant in his beloved to which he could unconditionally hold on. The immediate problem is that the woman who he is supposed to marry in the near future must have undergone changes since their engagement in the past—"It is impossible to know how profound the change has been."⁶⁰ Moreover, the general problem is that time will inevitably change the woman over the course of their marriage!

The lovers dare not deny, not even Romeo and Juliet, that changes, involving both of them, will inevitably take place. Nevertheless they do not hesitate ... They cling to the unchangeable. What is the unchangeable? Unbiased reflection reveals once more that it is only a name. This act [of addressing the lover by name] stands as a solitary pledge that the yesterdays of the two individuals will be incorporated in their today.⁶¹

In this passage, Rosenzweig addresses the same issue that Kierkegaard raised with regard to preferential love. Rosenzweig, however, assures his readers that a beloved *does* possess something that is constant over time: a name. Anyone with common sense can embrace this simple fact of the Other's fixed identity. Thus,

⁵⁸ Although Rosenzweig does not explicitly use the phrase "preferential love," he nonetheless addresses this issue, as I will now demonstrate.

⁵⁹ Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, 163.

⁶⁰ Franz Rosenzweig, *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy: A View of World, Man, and God*, trans. Nahum Glatzer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 49.

⁶¹ Rosenzweig, *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy*, 49.

Rosenzweig offers an antidote to the problem of preferential love (whether the antidote is effective or not, is another issue altogether). This antidote, however—the permanence of the “name”—clearly presupposes that all the other changeable characteristics are indeed threats to preferential love. While Rosenzweig seeks to defend preferential love against Kierkegaardian criticisms, he nonetheless agrees, albeit tacitly, that such love is delicate, if not doomed to disappear.

The fact that Rosenzweig ultimately turns away from the image of preferential romantic love in *Revelation* to the image of indiscriminate neighborly love in *Redemption* further highlights his discomfort with preferential love. Although his conception of neighborly love appears to resist the Kierkegaardian renunciations of self and Other,⁶² it nonetheless remains the case for him that relationships of neighborly love—through which the redemption of the world will ultimately take place—are non-preferential. Neighborly love, for both Rosenzweig and Kierkegaard, does not stem from sensual attraction to an Other, but from the divine commandment, “love thy neighbor.” We shall now turn to how these two thinkers regard such a religious “duty” in relation to romantic love.

Kierkegaard’s third main argument against the validity of romantic love pertains to the issue of freedom, which he supposes must be at the core of romantic love. The Seducer of *Either/Or* intentionally emboldens Cordelia so that he may take her in freedom: “She must owe me nothing, for she must be free; love exists only in freedom, only in freedom is there enjoyment and everlasting delight.”⁶³ For precisely this reason, the Aesthete does not believe in marriage, for such an institution strips lovers of their abilities to embrace one another freely. The Seducer says to Cordelia, “Our external union is only a separation.”⁶⁴ Marriage introduces rules, boundaries and duties—elements that could only spoil aesthetic love. A married couple simply cannot get around the fact that their relationship is contractual, and thus an adulteration of love.

In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard acknowledges, “the poet idolizes the inclinations and is therefore quite right—since he always has only erotic love in mind—in saying that to command love is the greatest foolishness and the most

⁶² “Man is not to deny himself. Precisely here in the commandment to love one’s neighbor, his self is definitely confirmed in its place. The world is not thrown in his face as an endless melee, nor is he told, while a finger points to the whole melee: that is you. That is you—therefore stop distinguishing yourself from it, penetrate it, dissolve in it, lose yourself in it. No, it is quite different. Out of the endless chaos of the world, one highest thing, his neighbor, is placed before his soul, and concerning this one and well-nigh only concerning this one he is told: he is like you” (Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, 240). In other ways, Rosenzweig’s notion of neighborly love does involve elements of self-renunciation.

⁶³ Kierkegaard, “Either/Or,” 57; cf. *ibid.*, 63-64 (not clear to what this references: if to “Either/Or,” as it se can write 57; 63-64)

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 72.

preposterous kind of talk.”⁶⁵ However, this ironically proves that there is, in fact, no true freedom even in aesthetic love. The Poet *must* reject any command. He has no other choice, for he is enslaved to his own romantic restlessness. When he loses interest in his beloved (which will inevitably happen), he is then *obligated* to leave her and search for another lover—and another, and another. His thirst for romantic partners can never be quenched, so he is always on the move, like him “who strolls here and there, an armed highway man who turns in wherever twilight finds him.”⁶⁶ This poetic lover cannot escape the “anxiety over the possibility of change.”⁶⁷ As an antidote to such illusory love, Kierkegaard affirms that the duty to “love thy neighbor” provides a freedom that the Aesthete could never feel. Only through surrendering to this religious obligation can one break free from one’s unquenchable, self-centered thirst for instant satisfaction—only then can one embody the vast and free-flowing grace of eternity. Thus, the “duty” to love is only an “apparent contradiction.”⁶⁸ In fact, “*only when it is a duty to love, only then is love made eternally free in blessed independence.*”⁶⁹ Whereas the Poet always feels a need to “possess” his beloved, the Christian carries the duty to love in his heart and thus rests assured that he can love anyone, anywhere. Therefore, “duty alone makes for genuine freedom. Spontaneous love makes a man free and in the next moment dependent.”⁷⁰

Rosenzweig conceives of the religious “duty” to love in a very different way from Kierkegaard. For Kierkegaard, the duty to “love thy neighbor” is a yoke that one bears and with which one wrestles until one internalizes its meaning: “As Jacob limped after having struggled with God,” he explains, “so shall self-love be broken if it has struggled with this phrase [‘Love your neighbor as yourself’].”⁷¹ Thus, Kierkegaard holds that one responds heteronomously to the duty to “love thy neighbor” (at least initially), and while he acknowledges that a commandment to love is “preposterous” for the Poet, he suggests that it is appropriate for the Christian.⁷² Rosenzweig, in contrast, insists that a duty (i.e., law, *Gesetz*) to love

⁶⁵ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 63.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 47. A legitimate objection to Kierkegaard’s portrait of the Poet lies in the possibility that the Poet is actually happy in his continual promiscuity. What if the poet does not actually feel “anxiety” over his endless escapades and his wanderings from partner to partner? What if that erotic transience brings him joy? What if he does not feel a need for “eternity” in his love life? Does he not, then, actually attain freedom? Kierkegaard does not sufficiently address this challenge to his case against aesthetic love.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 52. Emphasis in original.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁷¹ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 35. (all the footnotes from the *Ibid* refer to *Works of Love*, so it is not clear why citing here again. Make sure that the author is not referring in the earlier footnotes 66-70 to “Either/Or”). *Ibid.*, 35.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 63.

is always preposterous for anyone, regardless of whether the duty is to “love thy God” or “love thy neighbor.” He recognizes that love must always be an autonomous act of freedom.⁷³ As he remarks: “Thou shalt love—what a paradox this embraces! Can love then be commanded? Is love not rather a matter of fate and of seizure and of a bestowal which, if it is indeed free, it withal only free? And now it is commanded?”⁷⁴ Rosenzweig articulates a philosophy of commandment (*Gebot*) that reconciles the notion of free love with the commandments to love:

Yes of course, love cannot be commanded. No third party can command it or extort it. No third party can, but the One can. The commandment to love can only proceed from the mouth of the lover. Only the lover can and does say: love me!—and he really does so. In his mouth the commandment to love is not a strange commandment; it is none other than the voice of love itself.⁷⁵

By “strange commandment,” Rosenzweig implies that the commandment is so deeply ingrained in the individual that it ceases to be an imposed obligation.⁷⁶ God’s primordial command, mediated only by the soul’s reception of divine love, sets into motion a river of love that will ultimately flow into an ocean of limitless interpersonal love. For Rosenzweig, “commandment” (*Gebot*) is not the same as “law” (*Gesetz*). Whereas a law is legislated in the past and implemented in the future, a commandment is revealed through love and is therefore wholly in the present.⁷⁷ Thus one does not “obey” a commandment, *per se*; one effortlessly “fulfills” it in the wake of God’s love.⁷⁸ The divine commandment to love is no more than a “directed freedom.”⁷⁹ In this way, Rosenzweig preserves the element

⁷³ Of course, one notices here the influence of Kant on Rosenzweig. Since the commandment comes from “the voice of love itself,” the human lover who “obeys” the command can nonetheless be said to act autonomously. Rosenzweig explicitly refers to the influence of Kant on modern Jewish philosophies of Law in a letter to Martin Buber. See Franz Rosenzweig, *On Jewish Learning*, ed. Nahum Glatzer (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1955), 77. For discussions of correlations between Rosenzweig and Kant, see Paul Mendes-Flohr, “Rosenzweig and Kant: Two Views of Ritual and Religion,” in *Divided Passions: Jewish Intellectuals and the Experience of Modernity* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 283-310; Mendes-Flohr, “Law and Sacrament: Ritual Observance in Twentieth-Century Jewish Thought,” in *Divided Passions*, 350-359.

⁷⁴ Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, 176. Galli alternatively translates this passage as: “Isn’t love destiny and being deeply touched, and if it is free, isn’t it a free offering?” [Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. Barbara Galli (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 190.]

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁷⁶ See *ibid.*, 214.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 177. Cf. Rosenzweig, *On Jewish Learning*, 109-118.

⁷⁸ Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, 215.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 214.

of freedom in all forms of human love, while also incorporating the element of religious “duty.”

For our purposes, however, what does any of this have to do with romantic love? Does Rosenzweig suggest that there is a divine commandment that can secure romantic love over time? Initially, it seems promising that Rosenzweig, in his discussion of Revelation, directs his readers to a commandment that is prior to “love thy neighbor.” It is the essential content of revelation, “the only pure commandment” and “the highest of all commandments.”⁸⁰ It is God’s primordial utterance: “Love me.”⁸¹ This purely present-tense imperative is the core of revelation, and the seed of the subsequently unbreakable bond between God and the beloved soul. If divine love and human love are homologous, does this imply that a human lover may also similarly communicate the primordial command “Love me” to his beloved? Although the roles of lover/giver and beloved/receiver vacillate back and forth incessantly in human relationships, and thus the “Love me” of the human lover could never have the same eternal gravity as that of God, could there nonetheless be some analogue in human relationships? Rosenzweig suggests that the answer is No. The embodiment of the divine Lover’s primordial commandment is none other than “love thy neighbor.”⁸² Neighborly love, not romantic love, is the interpersonal actualization of Revelation. Although Rosenzweig ensures that religious commandments (not duty, per se) can coexist with all kinds of human love, he nonetheless maintains that neighborly love is the ultimate embodiment of the command to love. And, since it apparently does not flow from divine commandment like neighborly love does, we are left with a sense of mystery as to if/how, according to Rosenzweig’s theology, romantic love may endure over time.

Kierkegaard and Rosenzweig evidently struggle with similar questions: Can romantic love be both spontaneous and enduring? Does the “preferential” aspect of romantic love pose ethical and religious problems? Can romantic love, which thrives on freedom, be reconciled with a sense of duty or obligation? Although Rosenzweig generally appears to affirm the ontological and theological value of romantic love amidst these doubts, he rarely dispels the content of the doubts themselves. Moreover, he hardly provides readers with a sense of how romantic love works in the course of life, or how a robust romantic relationship unfolds over time. It is worthwhile for us, therefore, to attempt to turn to these questions ourselves in the light of Rosenzweig’s works, and this shall constitute Part Two of our study. Krishek has engaged in a similar inquiry concerning the optimum form of romantic love according to Kierkegaard. We shall see that a dialogue between her project and ours reveals even more illuminating correlations between Kierkegaard and Rosenzweig.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 177.

⁸¹ Ibid., 177ff.

⁸² Ibid., 205.

II. Envisioning an enduring romantic love in Rosenzweig and Kierkegaard

Before we begin this second part of our study, we must acknowledge that Rosenzweig does not necessarily believe that a truly enduring form of romantic love is possible.⁸³ This leads me to two points at this juncture: First, the vision of an enduring love that I formulate by drawing upon Rosenzweig's works is not some totally pure, unshakable form of romantic love. As Rosenzweig suggests, romantic love is pre-Redemption—it is imperfect, messy and only a shadow of the ultimate *embodiment* of divine love. Despite this qualification, I wish to construct an image of optimum and robust romantic love, given all of the challenges and difficulties of human relationships. Second, I must acknowledge that while I intend to remain faithful to Rosenzweig's works and to formulate a vision of romantic love with which he might agree, my questions diverge from his. As Krishek explains with regard to her related study of Kierkegaard, “together with Kierkegaard (although not always in agreement with him), and by using his implicit and explicit discussions of love, I shall ask: what does genuine romantic love look like; what is the right way to love romantically?”⁸⁴ In this respect, Krishek's and my projects are similar. Now let us begin with Rosenzweig.

There are two dialectics that emerge in Rosenzweig's works that may inform our vision of an optimum romantic relationship. First, there is the dialectic of faithfulness and faithlessness. In his discussion of Revelation, Rosenzweig generally associates faithfulness with the beloved (soul) and faithlessness with the lover (God). Rosenzweig's reflections on the lover's faithlessness and the beloved's faithfulness are illuminating for our own meditation on romantic love. Although Rosenzweig discusses these modes of loving primarily in terms of the God-soul relation, he does suggest that they are relevant for human relationships as well. In his discussion of the lover's faithlessness (we shall turn to this shortly), Rosenzweig concludes, “So God loves *too*.”⁸⁵ This “too” is crucial, for here Rosenzweig suggests that his comments about the lover do not only apply to God; they also apply to human lovers. Furthermore, after his discussion of the beloved's faithfulness and how it secures her reciprocal love with the lover, Rosenzweig comments (as we already noted earlier):

Indeed, it is only to the soul and the love of God that all this applies *in the strict sense*. Between man and woman the roles of giver and receiver of love pass back and forth....⁸⁶

⁸³ See note 18 above.

⁸⁴ Krishek, *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love*, 8.

⁸⁵ Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, 163. Emphasis added.

⁸⁶ Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, 169. Emphasis added.

The dynamic between divine lover and beloved soul does not apply to man and woman (i.e., human lovers) “in the strict sense,” but this suggests that it may apply in *some* sense. It does not apply in the strict sense because human lovers vacillate between the roles of giver and receiver, and this leads us to explore the *dialectic* between the faithlessness of the giver/lover and the faithfulness of the receiver/beloved. Inasmuch as every romantic partner assumes these opposing roles at times, the dialectic is active both *between* partners and *within* each partner. Just as Rosenzweig drew from the experience of human love in order to portray divine love,⁸⁷ we shall now draw from his portrayal of divine love in order to shed light on human love.

First let us turn to the faithlessness of the lover (which again, applies in some sense to both partners in a human relationship). We have already established that the lover’s love is fundamentally momentary. It has neither past nor future, and even its present is evanescent to the point of virtual non-existence. Therefore,

the love of the lover is rooted in the moment of its origin, and for this reason it has to deny all other moments, deny the whole of life. It is faithless by nature, for its nature is the moment, and thus it must, to be true, renew itself with every moment; each moment must become for it the first sight of love.⁸⁸

The lover’s love is faithless by nature inasmuch as it has nothing to grasp onto for security. It is constantly reborn, and its object of love is constantly reborn. From this perspective, “love is not an attribute, but an event.”⁸⁹ The lover loves—he loves *now*—and that is all that one can say. The lover has no memory and no sense of constancy whatsoever—only the ever-disappearing moment. Yet this groundlessness proves to be fertile for a particular type of growth in love:

Out of abysmal faithlessness it can thus turn into steadfast faith, and only out of this. For it is only the instability of the moment that enables love to experience every moment in turn as a new one, and thus to bear the torch of love through the whole nocturnal realm and twilight zone of created life. It escalates because it ever wants to be new; it wants to be ever new so as to be capable of stability; it can be stable only by living wholly in the Unstable, in the moment....⁹⁰

⁸⁷ As Pollock points out: “God experiences love, Rosenzweig implies, in the same spontaneous, unexpected manner in which we do” (Pollock, *Franz Rosenzweig and the Systematic Test of Philosophy*, 204) This is a verbatim repetition of the quote in n. 30 above. Might be a good idea to delete one of them.

⁸⁸ Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, 162.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 163.

The utter fragility of the lover's flickering love transforms love itself into a precious surprise. Amidst storms of uncertainty and flux, the mere appearance of love is a miracle to be embraced. The lover's love is "present, pure and simple: how should love itself know whether it will love, whether, indeed, it has loved? It is enough that it knows this one thing: it loves."⁹¹ The "abysmal faithlessness" at the heart of the lover's love arises from a piercing sense of instability and the unknown, and it flowers into a profound appreciation of love. As Rosenzweig writes, "disillusionment keeps love in condition."⁹²

Yet faithlessness alone would not be a sufficient condition for an ongoing romantic relationship. Of course, lovers also need to be able to be at ease together sometimes and to find calm in one another's presence. This counterbalance is found in the beloved's faithfulness—and remember, in human relationships each partner is both the lover and the beloved. As discussed earlier in this paper, the beloved's faithfulness emerges from her profound humility as she opens herself to the lover. As the lover's love surges forth in flashes, the composed beloved beholds a love that flows continuously: "The trusting faith of the beloved affirms the momentary love of the lover and consolidates it into something enduring."⁹³ This faithfulness is not mere passivity. Its stillness draws vitality from firm rootedness, from a profound "strength of trust" and the "strength to hold fast ... [to] the love with which it is loved."⁹⁴ It is significant that this faithfulness actually involves a distorted image of love. Although the lover's love is fundamentally momentary and it erupts in discontinuous flashes, the beloved sees it as smooth and cursive. Such (mis)perception requires powerful trust, and this trust enriches both parties in the relationship. The beloved's (mis)perception of the lover's love transforms the lover's own perception of the love that he gives. He is "recreated anew in the trust of the beloved."⁹⁵ In theological language: "because the soul [i.e., the beloved] holds on to him, therefore God [i.e. the lover] allows himself to be held by it."⁹⁶

The beloved's faithfulness is entirely different from the lover's faithlessness. But just as their union forms a potent chemistry between God and the soul, so it may between human lovers and within each human lover. Of course, the dialectic between faithlessness and faithfulness in a human relationship does not result in the unshakable bond that it produces between God and the soul. There is no eternity in romantic love. The shifting roles of giver and receiver inevitably maintain a level of imbalance and instability. What the dialectic suggests,

⁹¹ Ibid., 164.

⁹² Ibid., 215.

⁹³ Ibid., 171.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 170.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 171.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 170.

however, is this: On the one hand, each partner must honestly face the fact that love is fleeting and unpredictable; and on the other hand, both individuals must *trust* the love they share with their partner. Both sides of this dialectic require courage: the courage to acknowledge the fragility of love and thus experience profound vulnerability, and the courage to remain openhearted and committed. With regard to the fearful awareness that human love is finite, Rosenzweig teaches:

The solution to these anxieties and conflicts depends, ... as does the solution to all of love's anxieties and conflicts, on the lover. It depends on his inner strength to say 'even so,' the 'even so' of bearing it, the 'even so' of letting himself be borne.⁹⁷

The steadfast lover must surrender himself to the unsettling reality of love, and nonetheless keep returning for more. When he genuinely internalizes the fact that love is a “narrow plank (*schmalen Planke*)” in its “momentariness (*Augenblicklichkeit*),”⁹⁸ he may gain the courage to open his eyes (*Augen*) and steadily behold his beloved, even as their bond sporadically blinks open and closed, and he may faithfully immerse himself into the vast ocean of their relationship.⁹⁹

The second dialectic that we may discern in Rosenzweig's writings pertains to the apparent conflict between neighborly love and romantic love. I do not wish to suggest that there is not, in fact, a real conflict between these modes of love in Rosenzweig's thought. As we have already noted, neighborly love is indiscriminate and romantic love is preferential—this is a contradiction, to be sure. And yet, true neighborly love is, for Rosenzweig, a vision of eschatological proportions. It simply does not exist (yet) in our world. The “matrimony” that is “infinitely more than love” for which the lovers in the Song of Songs yearn belongs in the “not-yet happened and the *yet-to-happen*”¹⁰⁰ realm of Redemption. But of all the current types of human bonds—“blood kinship, brotherhood, nationhood, marriage, in sum all human relationships”—which one does

⁹⁷ Rosenzweig, *Ninety-Two Poems and Hymns of Yehuda Halevi*, 25.

⁹⁸ Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, 163.

⁹⁹ This dialectic is poetically reflected in traditional Jewish wedding ritual. The couple (and the community as a whole) mourns the fact that this marriage is taking place in a pre-messianic (i.e., pre-Redemption) age. The sixth blessing of the traditionally recited “Seven Blessings” echoes Jeremiah's prophecy that *in the future* the joyful voices of bride and groom will again be heard in Jerusalem, and the groom traditionally breaks a glass as a reminder of the destruction of the Temple (again, a reminder of pre-Redemption existence). One might interpret this emphasis on the lack of Redemption as a call to remember that marriage in our world is fragile, much like the glass itself, and such awareness can ironically expand the lovers' capacities for robust commitment to each another. I thank Rabbi Lizzi Heydemann for this observation.

¹⁰⁰ Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, 250. Emphasis added.

Rosenzweig suggest is closest to the ultimate Matrimony? The penultimate human bond is “the great simile of marriage which is highest redemption among them.”¹⁰¹ Therefore, the optimum form of romantic love, according to Rosenzweig, must incorporate elements of neighborly love. For the purposes of our present inquiry, let us imagine that there is a form of romantic love that incorporates elements of neighborly love.¹⁰² Let us turn to the dialectic between these two modes of love.

One realizes neighborly love when one loves an Other indiscriminately—i.e., not “for his beautiful eyes, but only because he just happens to be standing there.”¹⁰³ For romantic love to attain this quality of neighborly love, a partner must be able to step back, so to speak, and appreciate his beloved for exactly who she is at that moment—not for who he *wants* her to be, or for what she means *to him*, but purely for who she is as she stands in his presence.¹⁰⁴ Of course, romantic love must retain preferential aspects as well, or else it will cease to be romantic. It must include elements of attraction (physical or otherwise), and it is difficult to imagine a romantic partner who does not want to be loved for “who she is,” i.e., for her particular properties. A dialectic between indiscriminate neighborly love and passionate, preferential love is necessary in order to build a truly sustainable and robust romantic relationship. The lover must develop an ability to vacillate between moments of seeing his beloved as a “neighbor” and moments of seeing his beloved as his one and only. In this way, the lovers can see each other through wholly open eyes and let that awareness continually nourish their romantic relationship.

Rosenzweig actually illustrates this dynamic quite clearly in his portrayal of the couple on the verge of marriage in *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy*. When the philosophical lover sees his beloved only in terms of what she will be *for him*—through the prism of his concerns about how he will be able to love an Other who is perpetually changing—he loses sight of her. Only when he recovers an awareness of her “name”—her basic identity that any new “neighbor” may readily grasp—he regains the capacity to commit to her romantically. Only when he can re-behold his fiancée through “neighborly” eyes, she is once again visible to him as a substantial lover. In order to remain lovingly committed over time to a romantic partner, it is apparently helpful to occasionally behold her as if she were simply any Other in your midst—to see her as if for the first time.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 241.

¹⁰² This is not an unprecedented approach to Rosenzweig’s work. Yudit Kornberg Greenberg comments: “[R]evelation can be seen as the experience of new love, and redemption as the sealing of love in matrimony” (Greenberg, 104).

¹⁰³ Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, 218.

¹⁰⁴ In Rosenzweig’s words, one must love the neighbor “regardless of what he may have been before or will be afterward” (Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, 218).

We have drawn attention to two dialectics in Rosenzweig's works that may nourish romantic relationships: the dialectic between faithfulness and faithlessness, and the dialectic between neighborly love and romantic love. The first, which emerges in Rosenzweig's discussion of Revelation and the human-divine encounter, is rooted in Rosenzweig's understanding of faith. In the double movement between faithlessness and faithfulness, one paradoxically enhances one's capacity to love an Other over time through an open awareness of love's instability and fleetingness. The dialectic between neighborly and romantic love involves dynamics of distance and nearness, of letting go and grasping. As we shall now see, there are remarkable parallels between these dialectics and Krishek's understanding of genuine romantic love as it is portrayed in Kierkegaard's writings.

At first glance, Krishek's project may seem highly optimistic. Haven't we already seen that Kierkegaard rejects romantic love and replaces it with neighborly love? Yet Krishek persuasively argues that Kierkegaard's most vociferous critiques of romantic love are actually directed against a specific form of romantic love: *aesthetic love*.¹⁰⁵ This is the form of "love" that the Seducer embodies and that the Judge denounces in *Either/Or*, and it is the form of love that Kierkegaard criticizes in *Works of Love*. Furthermore, Krishek claims that Kierkegaard's total rejection of preferential love (a category of which aesthetic love is only one manifestation) in *Works of Love* actually amounts to a "confused and inconsistent view" that contradicts his views elsewhere in his corpus.¹⁰⁶ While Kierkegaard clearly rejects the moral value and viability of aesthetic love, Krishek suggests that his works as a whole, and particularly *Fear and Trembling*, indicate that authentic faith—embodied by the "knight of faith"—represents the possibility of a robust, enduring romantic love that Kierkegaard might embrace.¹⁰⁷ According to her interpretation of Kierkegaard, romantic love is analogous to faith. In terms of Kierkegaard's conception of faith, this would mean that love is based on a double movement of *resignation* and *repetition*, as

¹⁰⁵ Krishek identifies three types of romantic love in Kierkegaard's writings: aesthetic, ethical, and religious (which correspond to the three voices in *Either/Or*), and she claims that Kierkegaard also denounces ethical love in addition to aesthetic love. However, Rosenzweig's reflections on romantic love relate mostly to aesthetic and religious love, so I only focus on these two in this paper.

¹⁰⁶ "On the one hand it [*Works of Love*] contains some of Kierkegaard's fiercest denunciations of romantic love (due to its preferentiality which, he claims, contradicts the nature of true, neighbourly love). On the other, it presents a powerful affirmation of the need (and even the duty) to maintain a love of this kind" (Krishek, *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love*, 15). Cf. *ibid.*, chapters 4-5.

¹⁰⁷ Although Krishek bases her conception of romantic love on the writings of Kierkegaard, she openly acknowledges that he would not *necessarily* agree with all her assertions. See *ibid.*, 8.

opposed to an attachment to *recollection*, the inferior stage of faith.¹⁰⁸ Let us examine Kierkegaard's vision of "correct" romantic love, as Krishek understands it, and consider ways in which it is remarkably similar to Rosenzweig's vision of romantic love.

As we have already seen, Kierkegaard repeatedly draws attention to the ephemeral nature of romantic love. There is absolutely no way to avoid the tragic finitude: love often dissipates, beloveds are lost, and hearts get broken. Kierkegaard's writings brim with stories of failed loves and yearnings for restored love, and Krishek observes that all of these unhappy lovers, stuck in their own ways at the rudimentary stage of "recollection," react to the "essential loss" inherent in love:

Those who love by way of recollection try to avoid the loss inherent in love—they try to secure their love. And indeed they all manage to hold on safely and securely to *something*—but *not* to what they had originally intended. They all end up without genuinely relating to the actual object of their love. Instead, they all relate to some substitute for it, some representation of it, some *recollection* of it—which exists in the 'inner sphere' of their mind and is therefore unthreatened by external contingencies ... [W]e attain an indirect, representational, *inner* connection to the thing—and leave the thing itself behind.¹⁰⁹

The individual who loves by way of recollection is not actually able to love the Other, for his love remains attached to some internal projection or representation. In trying to protect himself from the pains of loss, his attention is directed inwardly as opposed to outwardly towards the Other. As a result, he fails to intimately encounter her, let alone *love* her.

Krishek argues that the stages of resignation and repetition must be incorporated into romantic love in order for it to reach its optimum form. The double movement between these stages is exemplified by Kierkegaard's knight of faith, who figures most prominently in *Fear and Trembling*. What is characteristic of the knight of faith is that he renounces the finite yet continues to live in it.¹¹⁰ Through *resignation*—detachment from the empty finitude of worldly existence—he receives the eternal love of God, and through *repetition*—the subsequent return to finitude despite its emptiness—he embraces existence

¹⁰⁸ Recollection, resignation, and repetition are the three stages of love that Krishek infers from Kierkegaard's "stages of life" philosophy. According to Krishek, "Those who love by way of recollection try to avoid the loss inherent in love—they try to secure their love" (Ibid., 13). Resignation, in contrast, is a "wholehearted acceptance of loss," and repetition is "the affirmation of a possible renewal ... of the thing lost (through faith)" (Ibid., 14).

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 13. Emphasis in original.

¹¹⁰ See Kierkegaard, "Fear and Trembling," in *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, 116-129. It is helpful to contrast the knight of faith with the "knight of resignation," who also renounces the finite but then lives perpetually in the infinite.

without sacrificing his faith or wisdom. Krishek deploys this image of the knight of faith when she addresses the question concerning how one ought to love:¹¹¹

This religious knight is a lover whose wholehearted acceptance of loss (through resignation) is paradoxically coupled with the affirmation of a possible renewal, or *repetition*, of the thing lost (through faith). He who loves by way of faith, then, initiates a renewed relationship with his essentially lost romantic beloved.¹¹²

This “knight of love” faces the loss that inevitably plagues romantic relationships, but nonetheless stands resolutely in the presence of his beloved. This dialectic is very similar to the dialectic of faithlessness and faithfulness that we discerned in Rosenzweig’s works. In both cases, one paradoxically gains the capacity to sustain love over time through an awareness of love’s unpredictability. For Rosenzweig, it is the unpredictability inherent in love’s fundamental momentariness. For Kierkegaard, it is the unpredictability stemming from the essential loss that all human relationships involve. Both thinkers suggest that romantic partners ought to be mindful of these realities in order to love more fully.

Krishek also perceives the dynamic of resignation and repetition in Kierkegaard’s portrayal of neighborly love.¹¹³ In the presence of the neighbor, it is necessary to renounce oneself in order to fully encounter the Other: “We are obliged to deny ourselves, to empty ourselves, to clear our sight and widen our horizon so that we can truly see the neighbour: see him as an equal, as a human being just like ourselves, as infinitely valuable.”¹¹⁴ At the same time, however, Krishek notes that one must also affirm one’s concrete existence in order “to feel and to be emotionally involved,”¹¹⁵ to empathize and engage personally with the neighbor—in order to *love*.¹¹⁶ This simultaneous self-renunciation and self-affirmation in neighborly love corresponds to the double movement between resignation and repetition in faith and romantic love. According to Krishek, this correspondence is extremely significant for understanding the relationship between preferential and neighborly love in Kierkegaard’s writings:

When we understand that a paradoxical combination between denial and affirmation is not only possible but *desirable*—namely, that it is an existential attitude that we should aspire to attain—then we can also see the legitimacy of preferential love, and unequivocally allow room for its significant role in our lives.¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ See Krishek, *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love*, chapter 3.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 14.

¹¹³ See *ibid.*, 152-153.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 152.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*.

¹¹⁶ See *ibid.*, 152-153.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 153.

Not only does the parallel structure enable the two types of love—preferential and neighborly—to justifiably coexist in the world in general, but it also makes it possible for the two types of love to coexist simultaneously in one relationship.¹¹⁸ Krishek suggests that the ideal romantic relationship, for Kierkegaard, incorporates both neighborly and preferential elements: “Therefore, when we love our romantic beloveds correctly, we always love them in a neighbourly way as well (but not vice versa of course).”¹¹⁹ This resembles the dialectic between neighborly love and romantic love that we discerned in Rosenzweig’s writings. It appears that, for both Kierkegaard and Rosenzweig, these two modes of love may be mutually enriching in romantic relationships. For Rosenzweig, neighborly love can infuse romantic love with a quality of intimacy that ironically arises out of detachment and distance. For Kierkegaard, the dynamic in neighborly love of self-renunciation and self-affirmation creates mutual nourishment between preferential and non-preferential forms of love.

One should not conclude based on these correlations between Rosenzweig and Kierkegaard that the two thinkers essentially promote the same concepts of romantic love. Indeed, we ought to remember our original observation that Kierkegaard tends to dismiss romantic love as meaningless and immoral, while Rosenzweig affirms it as the foundation of Revelation. However, upon closer examination, we do see that Rosenzweig is less optimistic about the possibility of romantic love than one might expect him to be, and Krishek alerts us to the possibility that the reverse is true for Kierkegaard. Rosenzweig and Kierkegaard not only wrestle with some of the same questions and doubts about romantic love; they may also harbor similar hopes and longings. Perhaps these common struggles and visions hint that Rosenzweig consciously responded to Kierkegaard’s positions. Or perhaps in their own lives, these two men independently perceived some of the same perils and possibilities in the realm of romance.

¹¹⁸ It is this crucial aspect of the dynamic between preferential love and neighborly love that, according to Krishek, Kierkegaard suggested in *Fear and Trembling* yet somehow “forgot” when he juxtaposed them as contradictory relationships in *Works of Love*. See *ibid.*, chapters 4-5.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 153.

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