

Friendship after Freud: Reflections on the Death of a Friend and the End of a Friendship

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Is there a difference, philosophically, between a friendship that ends due to a death and a friendship that ends because of something other than death? Is it worthwhile to talk about death, divorce, and loss in ethical or moral terms? I provide affirmative answers to both of these questions. I do so by defending the strange thesis statement that Sigmund Freud offers moral, normative, and wise judgments in his 1917 essay “Mourning and Melancholia” about how to respond to the end of a friendship. Freud’s moral, normative, and wise judgments lead to a Freudian corrective to Seneca’s Stoicism. Freud’s articulation of melancholia becomes a moral claim when understood in relation to Immanuel Kant’s reflections on what is required, deontologically, after a friendship ends. I read Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia” as contributing to the tradition of Kant’s deontological reasoning.

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1. Introduction

In the conclusion to *Humanism: A Very Short Introduction*, the University of London philosopher Stephen Law decides to leave his readers with thoughts about funerals. Some readers might find it strange to end a book defending secular humanism with reflections on funerals; personally, I found the conclusion wonderful as well as problematic. In order to defend the notion of a secular humanist funeral against their religious counterparts, Law outlines what the attributes or qualities of funerals ought to be. He seems of two minds about the advantages of humanist-style funerals over that of religious-based funerals. On the one hand, he affirms that funerals provide a place and time for celebrating “a life with honesty, dignity, and both sadness and joy.”¹ On the other hand, his final conclusion

involves the claim that humanist “funerals are ... joyous, uplifting, and ... even spiritual occasions.”²

When we examine philosophical accounts about the death of family and friends, we find the Roman Stoic philosopher Seneca defending a version of Stephen Law’s conclusion about funerals: the proper way to respond to the death of a friend or loved one requires one to be “joyous” and “uplifting”—neither grieving nor mournful. Is this the position that secular humanists must defend when it comes to the death of a friend or a loved one? Might there be another way to think through the death of a friend or a loved one? Seneca’s position becomes the blueprint for Western religious traditions, which tend to tell their followers to celebrate both the life and the death of their friend or loved one.³ Although Stephen Law does not follow religious traditions in terms of encouraging his readers to celebrate the death of friends and loved ones, because—as he says—secular humanists do not make “any questionable promises of meeting up again beyond the grave,”⁴ he concludes without leaving any room for grieving, mourning, or even sadness.⁵ In my judgment, this means that secular humanism—and anyone seeking wisdom about the death of a friend or a loved one—needs an alternative account to that of Seneca’s and Stephen Law’s.

I wish to defend the strange thesis statement that Sigmund Freud offers moral, normative, and wise judgments in his famous essay, “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917).⁶ Further, these judgments lead to the recognition of a Freudian corrective to Seneca’s Stoicism and a surprising addition to an insight found in Immanuel Kant’s lecture on friendship. Freud thinks, or so I will argue, that the natural process of mourning—after the death of a friend or a loved one—ought to be considered as a proper response to that death.⁷ I demonstrate how Freud’s articulation of mourning becomes a moral argument when understood as a correction to Seneca’s Stoic argument about/against grief after the death of a friend.

Freud also thinks, I will argue, that the tendency toward melancholia—which takes place after the end of a friendship or the loss of a friend due to factors other than death—ought to be considered a faulty response to failed friendship or a lost friend. I explain how Freud’s articulation of melancholia becomes a moral claim when understood in relation to Kant’s reflections on what is required, deontologically, after a friendship ends. In this sense, I read Freud’s essay as contributing to the tradition of Kant’s deontological reasoning.

I intend for this essay to make at least three scholarly contributions. First, to offer a modern corrective to religious and Stoic ideas about death, grief, and mourning—ideas that discourage grief and mourning after the death of a friend or a loved one. Second, to reflect upon what might serve as wisdom for knowing how to move on after the end of a friendship and the loss of a friend. Third, to show how Freud’s thinking lends itself to normative ethical positions.

2. The Work of Mourning?

Freud leads his readers to believe that mourning and melancholia have more in common than not,⁸ but a rational reconstruction of his argument proves otherwise. As they apply to

friendship: mourning applies to the process that takes place after the death of a friend—“Mourning is commonly the reaction to the loss of a beloved person,” Freud writes—whereas melancholia occurs after the end of a friendship occupies us in unhealthy ways. More on mourning now; melancholia later.

A bizarre yet compelling question, “So what is the work that mourning performs?” represents Freud’s transition to thinking through “mourning.”⁹ Why does Freud choose the verb, ‘work’? This wording is striking given the unfamiliar classification of an emotional process as a type of work. As a way to refer to this question, Freud uses the phrase “mourning-work” on two occasions, making the additional claim that he remains uncertain if “the work of mourning” relates to “the work of melancholia.”¹⁰ Freud writes, “In fact, the ego is left free and uninhibited once again the mourning-work is completed.”¹¹ Two paragraphs later: “In the case of mourning, we found that inhibition and apathy were fully explained by the absorption of the ego in the mourning-work.”¹² Ten pages later, he displays his uncertainty about the relation between the work of mourning and melancholia: “It is tempting to try to proceed from conjecture about the work of mourning to an account of the work of melancholia. Here ... we encounter an uncertainty.”¹³ So the word “work” applies to mourning but not to melancholia.¹⁴ This makes Freud’s use of the word, in the first place, quite bizarre.

Mourning understood in terms of work becomes compelling because it gives readers a sense that Freud might be thinking in terms of normativity—in the moral and philosophical sense. The use of the word, ‘work’, suggests that one can have proper or improper mourning. The back of the published version of Freud’s essay that I use says that, in “Mourning and Melancholia,” Freud “considers man’s ambivalent attitude toward death.”¹⁵ The word, ‘work’, suggests otherwise. For mourning to do ‘work’ means not ambivalence but a working on, working through, working toward. On my interpretation, “the work of mourning” involves normative judgments about how one works *through* the death of “a beloved person” and what one works *toward* in the grieving process. The reason “the work of mourning” cannot be easily transferred to “the work of melancholia” is that Freud treats the natural process of mourning as normatively correct while the natural tendencies found in melancholia are problematic—the ‘work’ of mourning stands for the natural process of mourning. Melancholia helps us neither work through the end of a friendship nor work toward anything but narcissism, which I explain later.¹⁶

What are the natural characteristics of mourning, and why does Freud find them acceptable as part of the ‘work’ of mourning? We can begin with Freud’s own words and then make some additional inferences. Freud writes:

Serious mourning ... contains ... the loss of interest in the outside world—except as it recalls the deceased—the loss of ability to choose any new love object ... [and] turning away from any task that is not related to the memory of the deceased.¹⁷

There are several aspects to highlight here. First, losing “interest in the outside world” is identified as one of the significant characteristics of mourning in contrast to melancholia. Freud clarifies this later in his essay by saying that, in mourning, the world becomes

empty and poor.¹⁸ Second, this loss of “interest in the outside world” results from living with the memory of the friend who died; this memory brings about the only relation to “the outside world” during the ‘work’ of mourning. Third, making an inference from Freud’s words, losing the “ability to choose any new love object” serves as a Freudian correction to Seneca’s Stoicism.

Inferences that can be made from Freud’s reflections on mourning concern the ego and memory. Freud claims that mourning must be “carried out piecemeal” while the loss of the friend persists in our memory. Based on this claim, we can infer that the ‘work’ of mourning is not linear but, rather, might be more intense at certain times than other times. This intensity comes about through the faculty of memory. In some ways, this remains out of our control. What we do control, perhaps, concerns whether we allow such intensity to contribute to the ‘work’ of mourning. It is this point in particular that constitutes part of Freud’s normative judgments in this essay. Freud talks about how “normal mourning” does not impact the ego because of the recognition that the loss within the world—“[i]n mourning the world ... become[s] poor and empty” because of the death of *this* friend—remains independent of one’s own actions. He uses the phrase, “normal mourning,” at least thrice in this essay.¹⁹ Since the ego stays in check during the “work” of mourning, the natural process of mourning seems to be judged as morally good—or, at the least, not primitively problematic. Unlike melancholia, mourning gets us out of our egos and helps one “work on one’s self.”²⁰

How does Freud’s view of mourning relate to Seneca’s Stoicism? Found in his account of friendship, Seneca argues that the proper response to the death of a friend is not grief but the acceptance of death and openness to another friendship. Seneca thinks that grief signals too much dependence on another person, and the best way to handle the death of a friend involves finding another friend. Seneca’s argument has made its way into religious traditions—which tell their members that grief or mourning, after the loss of a friend or loved one, displays a lack of faith in God and God’s power over the souls of the deceased. Therefore, the proper response to the death of a friend or a loved one involves “celebration” of their life—neither grief nor mourning in relation to their death.

In Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia,” I find the conceptual tools for a powerful critique of this way of thinking about death, grief, and mourning. Freud might call Seneca’s Stoic position on death and grief—and its religious adaptations—abnormal, narcissistic, and unnatural.²¹ Two points are worthy of mention. First, failing to engage in the work of mourning after the death of a friend or loved one leads one on a course to narcissism. In particular, a Freudian critique of Seneca’s Stoicism would be that refusing the grieving process means repression; repression inevitably leads to mental unhealthiness. In this case, mental unhealthiness means risking narcissism because one’s ego goes unchecked.²² Second, part of the significance of the adjectives “normal” and “serious”—in describing mourning—concerns the difficulty of “moving on” to another friendship: “the loss of ability to choose any new love object.”²³ To “move on” too quickly fails to take into account the “normal” and “serious” demands of the natural mourning process.²⁴ From a Freudian perspective, trust neither philosophers nor religious authorities who contend that one ought to “move on” by investing oneself in another relationship after the death of a friend or loved one. Again, repression becomes the risk.

“Moving on,” in this Stoic sense, risks repressing the memory of the deceased friend or loved one. Freudian wisdom, on this front, involves the insight that *allowing one’s memory to fully function—in relation to remembering as much content as possible about the deceased friend—will actually allow one to have healthier friendships and romantic relationships in the future*. My own recommendation to both humanists and religious believers is to adopt this Freudian wisdom over Stoicism for what the process of grief and mourning looks like after the death of a friend and loved one.²⁵

3. The Problem of Melancholia

Most commentators on Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia” see the categories of melancholia and mourning as morally neutral.²⁶ However, Freud seems to think that mourning remains an acceptable natural process whereas melancholia ought to be considered problematic because it leads to narcissism—and, possibly, even suicide.²⁷ My reconstruction of Freud’s reflections on melancholia involves addressing five questions. First, what becomes empty and poor within melancholia? Second, how does one think of oneself during the process of melancholia? Third, how does one express his/her melancholia to others? Fourth, what happens if a friendship ends yet the two people cannot avoid one another? Fifth, how and why does melancholia lead to narcissism?²⁸

What becomes empty and poor within melancholia? In mourning, the world becomes empty and poor. In melancholia, however, the ego becomes empty and poor: “in melancholia it is the ego that has become so [poor and empty].”²⁹ What does this mean? Most basically, I think it means that—after the end of a friendship or the loss of a friend to causes other than death—melancholia invites or tempts one toward low self-esteem, pitying one’s self, and using sadness to get the attention of others. In short, melancholia leads to a “woe is me” mentality.

How does one think of oneself during the process of melancholia? When a friendship comes to an end, according to Freud, a person tends to think of himself/herself in the following ways: (a) becomes full of self-reproach, (b) deserving of self-deprecation, (c) expecting ostracism and punishment, (d) feels sorry for those who remain close to him/her, (e) might happen to be incapable of functioning (what psycho-therapists today call “low functioning clients”), (f) thinks of himself/herself as morally reprehensible, and (g) worthless and unworthy of other friendships and relationships. According to Alexander Nehemas, Freud thinks of melancholia as “a radical lowering of self-regard leading to ‘self-reproaches and self-revilings’.”³⁰ In addition to a friendship ending, melancholia occurs when a romantic relationship ends and when a marriage ends in divorce. According to Nehemas, “the assurance ‘I can change’ ... is proof of self-reproach or even revulsion: it reveals that we ourselves believe that, being as we presently are, we are unworthy of love.”³¹

Sometimes, the ways in which these characteristics manifest themselves involves the use of contradictory speech. We might falsely claim, for instance, ‘I’ve never been better!’ This answers not only the question of how one express his/her melancholia to others; it also leads to an answer for the fourth question: what happens if a friendship ends yet the two people cannot avoid one another? Answering both of these questions

simultaneously, Freud observes, “The woman who loudly pities her husband for being bound to such a useless woman is actually seeking to accuse her husband of uselessness.”³² In short, melancholia makes our words mean and/or refer to something other than that to which they ostensibly refer.

How and why does melancholia lead to narcissism? Melancholia involves both *loving* and *hating* the former friend, and these dual feelings invite us deeper into the emptiness and poverty of the ego—and, eventually, to narcissism. Freud argues,

[M]elancholia derives some of its characteristics ... from the process of regression from the narcissistic object-choice to narcissism If the love of the object, which cannot be abandoned while the object itself is abandoned, has fled into narcissistic identification, hatred goes to work on this substitute object, insulting it, humiliating it, making it suffer and deriving a sadistic satisfaction from that suffering.³³

From these premises, Freud draws this conclusion:

Thus the melancholic’s love-investment in his object has undergone a second fate; in part it has regressed into identification, but it has also been moved back, under the influence of the conflict of ambivalence, to the sadistic stage to which it is closer. It is this sadism that solves the mystery of the inclination to suicide[,] which makes melancholia both so interesting and so dangerous.³⁴

Freud calls melancholia “dangerous” because it potentially leads to suicide. The process of melancholia—and, remember, Freud refuses to label the process of melancholia as “work”—involves the characteristics mentioned above, which lead to narcissism and possibly suicide. Narcissism appears as a guaranteed consequence of melancholia whereas suicide remains only a potential result of melancholia.

Freud seems to think of narcissism and suicide in terms resembling that of Kant’s dignity test: “the ego can only kill itself when it is able to treat itself as an object.”³⁵ In other words, one of the problems of melancholia is that it allows and invites the treatment of oneself as an object—which we can compare to Kant’s so-called dignity test: “So act as to treat humanity, whether in thine *own person* or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal, never as a means only.” According to Freud, the problem with melancholia is that it leads one to treat himself/herself as an object—which puts Freud’s “Melancholia and Mourning” in the Kantian deontological tradition.³⁶

4. Freud and Kant on the End of a Friendship

In his lecture on friendship, Kant says the following with much eloquence and insight:

The name of friendship should inspire respect; and if by any chance a friend should turn into an enemy, we must still [show] reverence [toward] the old friendship and never show that we are capable of hate. To speak ill of our friends

is not merely wrong in itself, because it proves that we have no respect for [the Idea of] friendship, that we have chosen our friends badly and that we are ungrateful to them; it is also wrong because it is contrary to the rule of prudence; for it leads those who hear us to wonder whether, if ever they became our friends and we subsequently became estranged, they would not be spoken of in the same strain, and so they turn from our friendship.³⁷

Kant's words, unsurprisingly, represent a deontological view of the end of a friendship and the loss of a friend. Each of us has an obligation to the idea of friendship, and this obligation means that we display respect and reverence toward our former friends. The obligation we owe to the idea of friendship remains so intense that it prevents us from speaking ill even of our enemies—those who used to be our friends—and those who we feel hatred toward. In addition to our obligations, it also seems prudent—Kant tells us—to not speak poorly of our former friends to our current friends because our current friends might develop a reasonable skepticism concerning what we might say of them in future conversations.

Although I agree with Kant that this last point seems prudent, my claim in this particular essay is that Freud's reflections on melancholia further Kant's deontological reasoning about the end of a friendship and the loss of a friend.³⁸ Melancholia becomes morally problematic because it violates our obligations toward the idea of friendship. It tempts us to speak ill of friendship, as well as our former friends, because it leads us to think that we are unworthy of other friendships and relationships. When we say aloud that we are unworthy of friendship, on Freud's observations, it really means that we judge our current friends unworthy of us.³⁹ We judge our current friends unworthy of us because we remain in the state of melancholia about our former friendships coming to an end. Melancholia makes us think that all friendships inevitably will end. Melancholia means that the emptiness and poverty of the ego results in the mistaken thought that the idea of friendship, itself, becomes empty and poor. Melancholia leads to degrading the idea of friendship, which prevents the person in the state of melancholia from cultivating further friendships.

What is the Kantian-Freudian way forward after the end of a friendship and the loss of a friend? First, both Kant and Freud warn against objectifying one's self. Narcissism, as a guaranteed result of melancholia, invites us to objectify ourselves. Therefore, we should avoid melancholia for the sake of steering clear of objectifying ourselves. Second, Kant says not to speak ill of our former friends; Freud tells us that when we speak ill of ourselves, we are really referring to our former friend—which suggests that we should not speak ill of ourselves since the real referent is the former friend. Third, both Kant and Freud want us to “move on” from our previous relationships and not spend conversational time with our current friends talking about our former friendships. Of course, with his famous insight that every sexual partner we had in the past joins us in bed with our current sexual partner, Freud has more of a recognition that we never truly ‘move on’. However, if I am right that his reflections on melancholia offer normative judgments against such a state, then it is reasonable to infer that Freud thinks we can at least act *as if* we have ‘moved on’ from our failed friendships and lost friends.

Both Freud and Kant agree that it ought to be considered a poor decision to speak poorly about one's lost friends, even if Freud's way of expressing this concerns how we talk about ourselves as a substitute for what we mean about our former friends.⁴⁰

5. Melancholia, Mourning, and Repression

In his essay, "Mourning and Moral Psychology," Jonathan Lear—Professor of Philosophy at the University of Chicago—takes Freud's essay in a different yet helpful way than I have here. Instead of contrasting Freud's view of mourning with Seneca's Stoicism, he relates Freud's view of mourning with a Heideggerian understanding of death and time. I spell out Lear's argument in order to bring my own interpretation of Freud and friendship to a clearer and stronger conclusion.

Lear argues that mourning offers "one way we recreate our past by making it present."⁴¹ Lear's argument invokes a Heideggerian view of time, where human beings both live within time yet maintain power over the past and the future. Either through "memory" or "psychic structure," we make the past present to us. Lear properly grasps what Freud means by how mourning turns us "away from any task that is not related to the memory of the deceased."⁴² Instead of a passive process of mourning, however, Lear's interpretation helps us understand how the process of mourning might be quite active: we make the past present to us.

Attempting to re-interpret Heidegger's use of *Dasein*, Lear argues that the mourning that takes place after death is a mourning that permeates all of modern life. Lear writes, "An individual human being is at best an *instance* or *case* of Dasein—who in authenticity may stand witness to the vibrancy or the morbidity of that way of life." He continues, "The death of Dasein is ... the breakdown in the intelligibility of the concepts internal to that way of life."⁴³ Lear's point is that anyone who recognizes the loss of intelligibility, within the modern world, might be mourning because of this "breakdown." Religion remains within modernity, according to Lear, because it helps certain people make sense of "death" in this sense of cultural death: "religion ... provide[s]—through rituals, myths, customs, and concepts—a structure of meanings that will help mourners through their grief and confusion."⁴⁴ Lear shifts mourning from the personal to the cultural and social, and death no longer means actual physical deaths—the death of a friend or a loved one—but the "death" of "the intelligibility of ... concepts."

For my purposes, the last pertinent point concerns Lear's connections between happiness, mourning, and ordinary life. With his usual eloquence, Lear writes:

So, the death of a loved one is expected to stir up powerful emotions and fantasies, and mourning is structured as a period of withdrawal from ordinary demands of life If the death of a loved one is an occasion for unconscious fantasy, the rituals of mourning—prayers, chants, wakes—help shape fantasy in the direction of integration.⁴⁵

A page later, Lear clarifies what he means by shaping "in the direction of integration": "Mourning is an occasion of psychic integration precisely because its task is to facilitate

it.”⁴⁶ The process of mourning pulls us out of ordinary life, but it also helps us achieve “psychic integration.” Lear calls this “the *practical* significance of the introduction of mourning,” and he claims that Freudian psycho-analysis achieves a certain quest since Plato’s writing: “From at least the time of Plato, we have understood that human happiness depends on psychic integration; but it took the painstaking work of psychoanalysis to show how such integration depends on passing successfully through mourning.”⁴⁷ After the experience of the death of a loved one, mourning removes us from ordinary life. This removal from ordinary life is good, however, because the mourning leads to happiness. In other words, repressing grief will have its negative consequences. In Lear’s words, “Mourning may be evaded or denied, but even as such it lies at the center of our being.”⁴⁸ Lear emphasizes how deeply Freud appreciated and understood the process of mourning and its relationship to achieving happiness through “psychic integration.”

I have three responses to Lear’s interpretation of Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia,” and each of my responses relate to (though do not perfectly corresponds with) the three stated goals mentioned in the Introduction of this essay. First, I agree with Lear that Freud seems to have figured out a problem lingering within Western civilization since “the time of Plato”: that mourning ought to be judged as “good” insofar as we understand mourning as a particular process that takes place after the death of a friend or loved one. Lear fails to mention Seneca’s Stoicism as another attempt to solve this problem, and I side with Freud against Seneca on the goodness of grief and mourning. In short, grief and mourning are good after the death of a friend or a loved one.

Second, it remains unclear to me what Lear thinks he accomplishes by shifting death and mourning to cultural and social levels but then returning again to the personal level. The more helpful and interesting Heideggerian point would be this: while we each possess being-toward-death (Heidegger), our own being-toward-death is not a substitute for the need for mourning after the death of a friend or a loved one (Freud). Mourning becomes part and parcel of our own being-toward-death because it re-orient us toward our own death. This point forges an agreement between Freud and Seneca. According to Seneca, in addition to “not mourn[ing] at all,” there are three proper responses to the death of a friend: the death of a friend invites us to show a “steadfastness of soul”; the death of a friend allows us to cry but to show that we can control the amount that we cry (Seneca applies the virtue of temperance to crying after the death of a friend: one can cry but not too much); and the death of a friend encourages us to reflect upon our own mortality and the way(s) that we wish to die.⁴⁹ This final response seems to me to align with a Freudian-Heideggerian approach to mourning and our own being-toward-death. Within the process of mourning, we naturally reflect upon our own mortality—our own being-toward-death. To repress mourning, as Seneca wants us to do, means that we also repress reflections on our own death. In this sense, from a Freudian-Heideggerian perspective, Seneca cannot have it both ways: recommend that we “not mourn at all” *and* recommend that we use the death of a friend to reflect upon our own mortality.⁵⁰

Third, and finally, I find that a temporal approach to Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia” also provides clarity concerning the problem of melancholia. From a temporal perspective, *avoiding* melancholia works (and I use this verb deliberately) in the reverse of working through the mourning process. Instead of making the past present to

us—as mourning requires—one way to avoid melancholia is to make the past un-present to us. In ordinary language, we would say to leave the past in the past. Our ordinary language, however, goes against Heidegger’s theory of time where the past does not “exist”: “Time is not a thing, thus nothing which is, and yet it remains constant in its passing away without being something temporal like the beings in time.”⁵¹ To avoid melancholia, one needs to let the former friend and the friendship “pass ... away without being something” that exist. The best way to move on from a former friendship is to act and think *as if* the friendship never existed—never happened. If this can be accomplished, then it aids us in following Kant’s advice as well: to never “speak ill of our friends.” If we act and think as if the friendship never existed, then we will not be tempted toward speaking ill of that particular friend.⁵² If this can be accomplished, then it also aids us in conquering what Freud seems the most worried about concerning melancholia: making our words mean and/or refer to something other than what the words seem to mean/refer to. If we forget about the former friend, then we will speak ill of ourselves as a way to speak ill of the former friend. Freud observes that self-deprecation usually happens as a way to cope with the loss of a friendship and critique the former friend, and we would avoid this false self-deprecation if we act and think as if the friendship never happened.

One objection to this interpretation of Freud on melancholia might be that it encourages repression.⁵³ My response to this objection is that it does not require repression but, rather, offers a strategic way of remembering where one selects—in Heideggerian fashion—what one remembers about so-called past relationships. I am not suggesting that we repress our feelings from the past; instead, by acting as if the friendship never happened we give ourselves the ability to fully embrace our past “self” without being beholden to that former self. We might put it in these psycho-analytic terms: ‘Yes, who I was back then was the person I was supposed to be—even with all the relationships that I developed and endured. Who I am now, however, does not need to be defined and determined by those past relationships. By moving on, I affirm a seeming contradiction about myself: the person I was had this particular relationship, *and* my present self refuses to remember that former friend’.⁵⁴

The way to arrive at this position in relation to Freud’s theories involves either (a) interpreting Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia” as a normative theory concerning the ethics of friendship, or (b) reading Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia” through the lens of Heidegger’s theory of time. In his “Mourning and Psychoanalysis,” Lear gives us the groundwork to do the latter; I have borrowed that framework and applied it to the avoidance of melancholia. The point of the present essay, however, is to tease out how far we can go in interpreting Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia” as a normative theory concerning the ethics of friendship.

6. Conclusion: A Freudian-Style Funeral?

Circling back to the opening paragraph of this essay, I owe readers an answer to the following question: what does a Freudian funeral look like?⁵⁵ In relation to both religious-minded and Stoic-inspired funerals—which tell their followers to celebrate both the life and the death of their friend or loved one—I say that a Freudian-style funeral would allow

for several stories to be told about the deceased friend or loved one for the purpose of maximizing as much content as possible about that deceased friend or loved one but would not necessarily be a celebration of their life. Rather, being deliberate about remembering as much as possible about the deceased friend or loved one deepens and enhances one's grieving process. This grieving process represents the 'work' of mourning. Turning specifically to Stephen Law's account of funerals: *against* Law's description of a secular humanist funeral, a Freudian-style funeral would allow for as much grieving, mourning, and sadness as needed; *with* Law's description of a secular humanist funeral, a Freudian-style funeral would not allow for "any questionable promises of meeting up again beyond the grave."⁵⁶

From a Freudian perspective, thinking that one will be with or see the deceased friend or loved one again—in some kind of after-life—turns the 'work' of mourning into the temptations of melancholia because it fails to distinguish between a friendship ending because of death and a friendship ending due to other factors. A friendship that ends because of death means that the surviving friends can and should go through the grieving process; if we turn death into a promise of 'see you later', then the grieving process is not the 'work' of mourning but becomes the problem of melancholia. Funerals that use language promising that the deceased will be seen again make the funeral about melancholia and not mourning.

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Notes

1. Stephen Law, *Humanism: A Very Short Introduction*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 139.
2. Law, *Humanism*, p. 141.
3. In some ways, this essay is an indirect and lengthy response to Augustine's *Confessions*—which wholeheartedly accepts this Stoic, if not Senecan, argument against grief and mourning. About his mother Monica's death, Augustine writes: "On the ninth

day of her illness, when she was aged 56, and I was 33, this religious and devout soul was released from the body. I closed her eyes and an overwhelming grief welled into my heart and was about to flow forth in floods of tears. But at the same time under a powerful act of mental control my eyes held back the flood and dried it up. The inward struggle put me into great agony. Then when she breathed her last ... the child in me, which had slipped towards weeping, was checked and silenced by ... voice of my heart. We did not think it right to celebrate the funeral with tearful dirges and lamentations, since in most cases it is customary to use such mourning to imply sorrow for the miserable state of those who die, or even their complete extinction. We were confident of this because of the evidence of her virtuous life ... and reasons of which we felt certain" (Augustine, *Confessions*, Book IX, 28 & 29). I am grateful to Stanley Hauerwas for pointing out how my essay provides a response to Augustine's *Confessions*, and he thinks it more applicable to Augustine's claim that he *regrets* being mournful after the death of his friend Nebridius (see Augustine, *Confessions*, Book IV). I quote Augustine's reflections about his mother's death because in it, he more clearly and concisely uses the term "mourning."

4. Law, *Humanism*, p. 139.

5. His final sentence about funerals reads: "Humanist funerals, with their personalized human-centered focus—are a celebration of this life, rather than some mythic life to come" (Law, *Humanism*, p. 141).

6. I started writing this essay in 2017, which was the centennial anniversary of the publication of Sigmund Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia." Freud's essay has impacted me personally as much as it has professionally. In this essay, I refer to Penguin's published version of Freud's essay: Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *On Murder, Mourning, and Melancholia*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), pp. 201-218.

7. I do not intend here to beg the question, and I intend to establish the meaning of calling mourning a natural process. (Thank you to Morgan Elbot for pointing out the potential fallaciousness in this sentence.)

8. See Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," pp. 203 & 204.

9. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," p. 204.

10. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," p. 205.

11. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," p. 205.

12. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," p. 205.

13. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," p. 215.

14. In correspondence, Daniel Reffner offers an alternative interpretation of Freud's application of "work" to melancholia: "Does this quotation really mean that 'work' does not apply to melancholia? Or could it mean that the work of mourning and the work of melancholia are so distinct that one cannot assume the nature of one (melancholia) by knowing the nature of the other (mourning)?" (Reffner to the author, November 29, 2018).
15. See the back cover of *On Murder, Mourning, and Melancholia*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (New York: Penguin Books, 2005).
16. Daniel Reffner clarifies my point in this way: "mourning ought to be normative because it is *productive* whereas melancholia is problematic because it is neither helpful nor productive" (Reffner to the author, November 29, 2018).
17. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," p. 204.
18. See Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," pp. 205-206.
19. See Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," pp. 210, 214, 216.
20. I am thinking here of Ludwig Wittgenstein's strange phrase, "work on oneself," in *Philosophical Occasions* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), p. 161.
21. I actually think that Stoicism prevents narcissism, but I am teasing out what a Freudian critique of Seneca's Stoicism looks like.
22. In correspondence, Morgan Elbot writes: "On the surface, it is quite counter-intuitive: mourning as working on oneself while simultaneously providing a check on the ego. It becomes a non-egoistic process of turning towards oneself, away from others and the outside world" (Elbot to the author, January 3, 2019).
23. It seems that Freud interchanges the adjectives "normal" and "serious" for describing "mourning," but I cannot determine how significant this is.
24. In other words, "this is how mourning can be normative because it is a natural, normal, and demanding process that, if ignored, leads to repression and mental unhealthiness" (Reffner to the author, November 29, 2018).
25. For readers who wish to continue reading on mourning, go directly to the conclusion of this essay.
26. Jonathan Lear serves as the most recent exception to this rule; see Lear's "Mourning and Moral Psychology," in *Wisdom from Won From Illness: Essays in Philosophy and Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), chapter 11. I engage with Lear's interpretation of "Mourning and Melancholia" later in this essay.

27. In terms of philosophical naturalism, my interpretation of Freud seems committed to saying that mourning ought to be considered acceptable because it is natural whereas melancholia unacceptable because it is unnatural. I am grateful to Morgan Elbot for clarifying this to me.
28. Unfortunately, I am unable in this essay to address Pleshette DeArmitt's fascinating defense of narcissism. See DeArmitt, *The Right to Narcissism: A Case for an Impossible Self-Love* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014). For her clarifying and helpful analysis of Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia," see pp. 107-109.
29. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," p. 206.
30. Alexander Nehemas, *On Friendship* (New York, Basic Books, 2016), p. 277.
31. Nehemas, *On Friendship*, p. 277.
32. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," p. 208.
33. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," pp. 210-211.
34. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," p. 211.
35. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," p. 212.
36. Freud's (1930/1961) theory of morality was based on the centrality of parent-child relationships in early life. Freud wrote about the necessity of understanding the reciprocity inherent in the "categorical imperative," which refers to the Kantian notion of the Golden Rule. Freud's developmental theory did not include an explanation of how individuals come to subscribe to the categorical imperative from the internalization of parental norms. Likewise, although Freud's theory of moral development was based on the social-emotional aspects of parent-child relationships, he did not provide a basis for the acquisition of a general set of moral principles, because the values that are incorporated into the superego were left unspecified." Melanie Killen and Judith G. Smetana, "Origins and Development of Morality," in *Handbook of Child Psychology and Developmental Science*, ed. Richard M. Lerner (Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), p. 704.
37. Immanuel Kant, "On Friendship," in *Other Selves: Philosophers on Friendship*, ed. Michael Pakaluk (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), pp. 216-217.
38. On how to read Freud as a thoroughgoing Kantian, see Elizabeth Rottenberg's *Inheriting the Future* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2005), pp. 1-87.
39. See Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," pp. 208-209.

40. Freud's theory of psychological projection or the transference of reference has its roots, of course, in the Talmud: "And he who continually declares others unfit is unfit [herself or himself] and never tends to speak in praise of other people. As Samuel said: 'All who defame others with their own blemish, they stigmatize other people'." *Babylonian Talmud. pp. Baba Metsiya 59b, Kiddushin 70a.*
41. Lear, "Mourning and Moral Psychology," p. 196.
42. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," p. 204.
43. Lear, "Mourning and Moral Psychology," p. 197.
44. Lear, "Mourning and Moral Psychology," p. 197.
45. Lear, "Mourning and Moral Psychology," p. 200.
46. Lear, "Mourning and Moral Psychology," p. 201.
47. Lear, "Mourning and Moral Psychology," p. 201.
48. Lear, "Mourning and Moral Psychology," p. 201.
49. See Seneca, "On Grief for Lost Friends," in *Other Selves: Philosophers on Friendship*, ed. Michael Pakaluk (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), p. 125.
50. Instead of asserting "Lear should have talked about Seneca!"—which is a typical academic practice when voicing a critique of one's argument—this paragraph attempts to say what Seneca's Stoicism would have added to Lear's discussion on Freud and Heidegger on death and mourning.
51. Martin Heidegger, "Time and Being," in *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 3.
52. We can achieve this without violating Kant's standards: Kant's argument requires respect for the idea of friendship but not necessarily respect toward our former friends.
53. Theodore Adorno makes a distinction that serves my purposes well: "It is worthy of note that Freud, who started out as a critic of the so-called process of repression, that is, as the critic of this renunciation of instinct, subsequently became its advocate [H]e came to the view that without a certain measure of instinctual renunciation, that is, without any restrictions on the pure gratification of instinct—he was thinking here above all of sex—something like civilization, an orderly community of human beings, was simply inconceivable. The distinction that he made was between two kinds of renunciation of instinct. On the one hand there is repression—this is a behavior that refuses to look this

renunciation in the eye, but instead shifts the instincts into the unconscious and produces in their place some kind of surrogate gratification of a precarious and problematic sort. Alternatively, there is the conscious renunciation of instinct, so that even man's instinctual behavior is placed under the supervision of reason." Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 137.

54. Through correspondence, Shayla Jordan claims that this paragraph seems to be where the practical reasoning of readers becomes required: "I assume that 'moving on' is up to the individual, and it doesn't seem like any philosopher gives an adequate answer for each and every case. You have said what it should not include (growing the ego, narcissism, etc.), and you have left your readers pondering what 'moving on' looks like for them" (Jordan to the author, January 2, 2019). I think her insight is exactly right.

55. Certain Southwestern College (Winfield, KS) students—who are enrolled in PHIL 101: Introduction to Philosophy in Fall 2019—suggested and requested this as the final paragraph, and I am grateful to them for encouraging me to think through what a Freudian-style funeral might look like. Those students are Sabrina Arzate, Ousman Betts, Octavius Ford, Stone Hageman, Tyler Morehead, Carly Redding, and Taylor Rodriguez.

56. Law, *Humanism*, p. 139.

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