

Commentary

ACIM[®] Text (CE)

T-2.IV, The Reinterpretation of Defenses

Explanation of underlining, italics and footnote formats can be found at the end of the commentary. See also the note there on the effects of switching from the FIP edition to the Complete and Annotated Edition. Please note that the FIP and CE versions may differ in where paragraph breaks occur.

Section Overview

As we read this section, we have to bear in mind that it is discussing “Freud’s identification of defense mechanisms,” which Jesus asserts were “quite correct” (1:1). He’ll explain what Freud identified as defense mechanisms as we go along. While the discussion will elicit strong interest among students of Freud’s psychology, you may be thinking that the topic isn’t of much interest to you. However, he adds that Freud’s “recognition of their creative ability” was also correct. The word “creative” should clearly interest any student of the Course. The title of the section makes it clear that it will *reinterpret* the defense mechanisms that Freud identified and make them consistent with the Course. The key value in discussing defense mechanisms is that they “can...produce your perception, both of yourself and your surroundings” (1:2). See Footnote 1 for more information.

Overall, the message of this section is focused and quite clear. It does not require a lot of explanation on my part.

Paragraph 1

Freud's identification of defense mechanisms was quite correct, as was his recognition of their creative ability. ²They can indeed produce your perception, both of yourself and your surroundings. ³But Freud's limitations induced inevitable limits on his own perception. ⁴He made two kinds of errors. ⁵The first was that he saw only how the mechanisms worked in the mentally ill. ⁶The second was his own denial of the mechanism of the Atonement. ⁷Let us take up the first, because a clear understanding of the second depends on it.¹

Jesus approves of Freud's list of defense mechanisms that he will discuss in this short section (1:1). He says that Freud correctly recognized the creative ability of these defenses. These defense mechanisms play a part in the formation of all our perceptions, internal as well as external (1:2). But Freud's inherent limitations produced two kinds of errors concerning these defenses (1:3–4). First, he saw them as applying only to the mentally ill (1:5). By implication, then, we can expect Jesus to show us how they apply to the mentally *healthy*. Second, Freud denied “the mechanism of the Atonement” (1:6). This second failing of Freud will be discussed in the next Section.

Each defense mechanism is listed in *italics* at the start of each paragraph that follows.

Paragraph 2

² *Denial* should be directed only to error, and *projection* should be limited to truth. ²You should truly give as you have truly received.² ³The Golden Rule can work effectively only on this basis.

The first defense mechanism is denial. As we saw in the discussion of true denial, denial should be used only to deny *error*, never to deny something true. Likewise, we should never project or extend our errors and misperceptions, but only extend the truth (2:1). All that we have received from God we can and should extend to others, giving as we have received (2:2). This is the real meaning of the Golden Rule (2:3).

¹ With the following list of how the defense mechanisms can work in the mentally healthy, Jesus is trying to correct Freud's first error of seeing “only how the mechanisms worked in the mentally ill.” The mechanism of the Atonement, the denial of which was Freud's second error, will be dealt with in the next section.

² Matthew 10:8 (KJV): “Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.”

Paragraph 3

3 *Intellectualization* is a poor word, which stems from the brain-mind confusion.³ ²“Right-mindedness” is better. ³This device defends the *right* mind and gives it control over the body. ⁴“Intellectualization” implies a split, whereas “right-mindedness” involves healing.⁴

Here is an example of intellectualization, created by AI. This is the first time I’ve ever used AI to do anything other than checking for grammatical and spelling errors. I think it is quite good!

An example of intellectualization could be a person who receives negative feedback on a project and instead of acknowledging their emotions and taking responsibility for their mistakes, they start analyzing the situation from a purely rational perspective, focusing on the technical aspects of the feedback and ignoring their emotions. This can be an attempt to distance themselves from the situation and protect their ego.

Here’s another example from the magazine, *Psychology Today*:

For example, if a woman's roommate announced that she was moving out, the woman might conduct a detailed financial analysis of her new budget rather than confront her emotions of sadness, loneliness, or anger.

Jesus is saying that this is a misuse of our powers of reason. Right-mindedness is better. You don’t use reason to *suppress* or deny your fearful emotions. Instead, you use reason to *heal* them. There are many examples of this in the Course itself. One example that comes to mind is Workbook Lesson 160, “I am at home. Fear is the stranger here.”

Paragraph 4

4 *Withdrawal* is properly employed in the service of withdrawing from the desert. ²It is not a device for escape, but for consolidation. ³There is only one Mind.⁵

Since AI worked so well in creating the previous example, I tried it again for *withdrawal*. It came up with this:

“An example of withdrawal could be when a person decides to remove money from their bank account. They might visit an ATM or go to a bank teller to withdraw the desired amount of cash.”

³ “Intellectualization”: unconsciously protecting yourself from the emotional stress of personal problems or fears by reasoning them away, rather than facing them.

⁴ To say that right-mindedness is a reinterpretation of intellectualization is to imply that there is a healthy way to reason away one’s fears, a way that doesn’t split you off from them, but heals them instead.

⁵ In other words, you should withdraw from the desert of the world, not to escape from difficulties and from others, but to consolidate yourself *with* others and thus with the one Mind of which we are all part.

The “I” in “AI” isn’t always so intelligent! My understanding of psychological withdrawal is that it can take the form of depression, anxiety, or apathy. Instead of confronting a problem, your mind is avoiding it.

The “proper use” is to withdraw “from the desert” (4:1), which Jesus earlier referred to as the desert of this world (see T-1.43.12:2–5). In this kind of withdrawal, you are not trying to *escape* the world or anyone in it. Rather, you withdraw from separation and re-affirm the Oneness of One Mind instead of the world of separation.

Paragraph 5

5 *Dissociation* is quite similar.⁶ ²You should split yourself off from error, but only in defense of integration.⁷

Again, here’s the example AI came up:

Dissociation refers to a mental state in which a person feels disconnected from their surroundings, thoughts, feelings, and even their own identity. An example of dissociation could be a person feeling as if they are in a dreamlike state and are unable to fully engage with their environment or the people around them.

Again, Jesus makes the proper use similar to what he said about withdrawal (5:1). It is proper to split off from error to defend *integration* or joining (5:2).

Paragraph 6

6 *Detachment* is essentially a weaker form of dissociation. ²This is one of the major areas of withholding that many engage in.

Detachment is just a weaker form of dissociation and withdrawal, but for many of us, more common than the more severe forms. The same corrected view would apply. We must detach from the world and from error. When we find ourselves feeling depressed, anxious, apathetic, disconnected, or detached from a person or situation, we should become aware that we are pulling away from the persons or situations involved, and try instead to detach from our fears and judgments, and allow ourselves to recognize our loving unity with all of creation. We affirm our identity as God’s creations.

⁶ “Dissociation”: a defense mechanism in which anxiety-provoking thoughts, emotions, or sensations are split off from the rest of the psyche or personality.

⁷ “Integration” here apparently means both integration with others and integration within one’s own mind.

Paragraph 7

7 *Flight* can be undertaken in whatever direction you choose, but note that the concept itself implies flight *from* something.⁸ ²Flight from error is perfectly appropriate.

The term *flight* needs no definition, and once again is much like the preceding three mechanisms. If you find yourself fleeing (maybe deciding you need to change your job or break off from a relationship), you need to look at what you are fleeing *from*. Again, “flight from error is perfectly appropriate” (7:2). As the footnote suggests, flight may be part of the fight-or-flight reaction to something or someone.

Paragraph 8

8 *Distantiation* is a way of putting distance between yourself and what you *should* fly from.⁹

See the footnote for a simple definition. Here are examples from AI:

For example, a person who has experienced a traumatic event may distance themselves from the memory and the associated emotions to avoid re-experiencing the trauma. Another example can be seen in a relationship where one partner emotionally withdraws from the other, creating distance and a lack of intimacy.

Once again, this seems much like the earlier terms about various forms of withdrawal. So, again, we should be aware of *what* we are fleeing from: fears, error, and separateness.

Paragraph 9

9 *Regression* is a real effort to return to your own original state.¹⁰ ²In this sense, it is utilized to restore, not to go back to the less mature.

This is a rather unique understanding of *regression*, which often means an inappropriate attempt to return to childhood or some early stage of physical existence. Jesus says it ought to be “a real effort to return to your own original state” (9:1), as God created us, perfect, innocent, wholly loving and wholly lovable, at one with all creation. True regression is a restoration to our True Self rather than going back to a less mature stage of life.

⁸. This seems to refer to the “fight or flight” reaction.

⁹. “Distantiation”: keeping something at a mental or emotional distance.

¹⁰. “Original state” here means our original state in Heaven, rather than as infants in this world.

Paragraph 10

10 *Sublimation* should be associated with the *sublime*.¹¹

As Robert points out in his footnote, “we should rechannel unacceptable impulses in a sublime direction, rather than in a merely more socially acceptable direction.” Sublime implies “heavenly.” Can we perhaps learn to channel the energy of our anger into an energy of love?

Paragraph 11

11 There are many other so-called “dynamic” concepts which are profound errors, due essentially to the misuse of defenses.¹² ²Among them is the concept of different levels of aspiration, which results from real level confusion.¹³ ³However, the main point to be understood from these notes is that you can defend truth as well as error, and in fact much better.

All of these defenses suffer from misuse in less-than-heavenly directions (11:1). One major contributor to misuse is our confusion of levels, resulting in the concept of differing levels of aspiration. When we confuse the levels of spirit, mind, and body we get caught up in attempts to defend “higher” desires against “lower” desires. There is some truth in these attempts, but our efforts ought to be channelled entirely in the only sublime direction: reality, or Heaven. All defenses work much better when we do so (11:2–3).

Paragraph 12

12 So far we have concentrated on ends rather than means, because unless you regard an end as worth achieving, you will not devote yourself to the means by which it can *be* achieved. ²Your question (“How can I incorporate this material?”) enables me to shift the emphasis from end to means. ³It means you are accepting the end as valuable, thus signifying your willingness to use defenses to ensure it.

What are you hoping to achieve in your study of the Course? It is important to clarify this, and that’s why Jesus has been so focused on “ends.” Once our goal is clear, and

¹¹ “Sublimation”: acting out socially unacceptable impulses by rechanneling their energy into a more socially acceptable form. For instance, rage can be channeled into artistic expression. The point here is that we should rechannel unacceptable impulses in a sublime direction, rather than in a merely socially acceptable direction.

¹² Psychodynamics (the “dynamic” concepts” referred to here) posits that behavior is the result of flows, distributions, and transformations of “psychic energy” within the person.

¹³ “Levels of aspiration” refers to the degree or quality of performance a person aspires to attain. The implication here appears to be that there is only one level to which we truly aspire: reality (i.e., Heaven).

viewed as worth achieving, we will automatically seek to acquire and develop the means to achieving that goal (12:1).

Apparently, Helen has asked Jesus, "How can I incorporate this material?" That indicated that she saw the goal of the Course and wanted to reach it. I hope that is true of all of us or will be very soon. If we are not clear about the real goal of our study, we won't recognize the means toward that goal even if they are staring us in the face.

Many people who attend New Thought churches or ACIM study groups have not yet identified with the real goal. Do we really want to forgive the world? Or would we rather hold on to one or more of our judgments? Do we really want to perceive *everyone* as innocent, or are there some we won't even consider that way? Do we truly want our every decision to be directed by God, or do we want to hold onto the reins in certain areas? Do we want to stop playing the victim in every circumstance? Any hesitation in these areas will delay the goal of our final awakening.

When we have accepted the end presented by the Course as the only one we have, the means will become obvious, and we will use all these defenses as Jesus intends they be used.

Paragraph 13

13 The means are easier to clarify after the true worth of the goal itself is firmly established. ²Everyone defends his own treasure. ³You do not have to tell him to do this, because he will do so automatically. ⁴The real question still remains, *What* do you treasure and *how much* do you treasure it? ⁵Once you learn to consider these two points and bring them into all your actions as the true criteria for behavior, I will have little difficulty in clarifying the means. ⁶You have not learned to be consistent about this as yet. ⁷I have therefore concentrated on showing you that the means are available whenever you *do* ask. ⁸We can save a lot of time, however, if you do not need to extend this step unduly.¹⁴ ⁹The correct focus will shorten it immeasurably.

The way to spiritual awakening is easier for us to see once we have firmly established the true goal (13:1). Any unclarity we experience is likely due to our failure to establish that one and only goal (see the Workbook Lesson that follows). What we value, we defend. Of course, we do. We don't need to be told to do it; it's automatic (13:2–3). So the real question is not, "What are the means by which I can become spiritually enlightened?", but rather, "*What* do you treasure and *how much* do you treasure it?" (13:4).

Listen carefully to the next two sentences. Take them *personally*, as if Jesus were speaking them directly to *you*, because he *is*: "Once you learn to consider these two points and bring them into all your actions as the true criteria for behavior, I will have little difficulty in clarifying the means. You have not learned to be consistent about this as

¹⁴ "This step" appears to be that of learning to consistently bring into all your actions the two questions mentioned previously: "*What* do you treasure and *how much* do you treasure it?"

yet.” (13:5–6). The two points are, “*What* do you treasure and *how much* do you treasure it?” Bring those two points “into *all* your actions as the true criteria for behavior.” Jesus sets a high bar here. Let’s face it. The path of *A Course in Miracles* is simple, but not easy for us, locked into our madness for so very long. In the end it *is* easy, since once the true worth of the Course’s goal has become clear and fully accepted, using the means toward the goal is automatic:

When you have learned how to decide with God, all decisions become as easy and as right as breathing. There is no effort, and you will be led as gently as if you were being carried along a quiet path in summer. Only your own volition seems to make deciding hard. (T-14.V.7:1-3 (CE), T-14.IV.6:1-3 (FIP))

While we remain conflicted, the best Jesus can do is show us that the means are available whenever we remember to ask (13:7). We can save a lot of time by not dragging our feet. We can achieve our goal much faster by focusing on what we treasure and how much. (13:8–9).

LESSON 287

You are my goal, my Father. Only You.

Where would I go but Heaven? ²What could be a substitute for happiness? ³What gift could I prefer before the peace of God? ⁴What treasure would I seek and find and keep that can compare with my identity? ⁵And would I rather live with fear than love?

2 *You are my goal, my Father. ³What but You could I desire to have? ³What way but that which leads to You could I desire to walk? ⁴And what except the memory of You could signify to me the end of dreams and futile substitutions for the truth? ⁵You are my only goal. ⁶Your Son would be as You created him. ⁷What way but this could I expect to recognize my Self, and be at one with my identity?*

Legend:

Light underscoring indicates emphasis that appears in the Urtext or shorthand notes.

The Text is taken from the Circle of Atonement's Complete and Annotated Edition (which I refer to as the "CE" for "Complete Edition" or "Circle Edition").

Footnotes by the commentary author are shown in this font and size. Other footnotes come from the Complete Edition itself.

References in Different Editions of the Course

Please be aware that, even when the wording is identical to the FIP version, the division into paragraphs is often entirely different in the CE, which restores the paragraph breaks found in the original notes. This results in different reference numbering as well. When possible, I will indicate the corresponding sentences in the Foundation for Inner Peace (FIP) edition for each paragraph. You should be able to locate specific sentences in that edition if you need to, with a minimum of visual clutter in the commentary. The differences in the early chapters of the Text are so profound that cross-referencing is extremely difficult and often impossible. References to quotations are from the CE unless another version is being quoted, in which case that version is indicated. I have attempted to add a separate FIP reference for any references where the passage exists in FIP with a reference that differs from the CE reference, but I may have missed some. If so, I apologize. Please let me know if you have any referencing problems.