

Study Guide and Commentary ACIM® Text, Chapter 4, Section II

The Ego and False Autonomy

Overview of the Section

This section is similar to “Error and the Ego” (T-3.IV) in that it deals with the origins of the ego. We should also keep in mind that Jesus has just told us that one of his primary teaching objectives is showing us how the ego’s thought system arose: “I will never attack your ego, but I am trying to teach you how its thought system arose” (T-4.I.3:5). Section II is clearly carrying out that objective.

Paragraph 1

1. ¹It is reasonable to ask how the mind could ever have made the ego. [Ur: Bill has asked lately how the mind could ever have made the ego.] ²[Ur: This is a perfectly reasonable question] In fact, it is the best question you could ask. ³There is, however, no point in giving an answer in terms of the past [Ur: an historical answer] because the past does not matter [Ur: in human terms], and history would not exist if the same errors were not being repeated in the present. [B. has often told you that your thinking is too abstract at times, and he is right.] ⁴Abstract thought applies [Ur: Abstraction *does* apply] to knowledge because knowledge is completely impersonal, and examples are irrelevant to its understanding. ⁵Perception, however, is always specific, and therefore quite concrete.

• Study Question •

1. *Can you think of some other forms in which you, or others you know of, have asked, “How could the mind ever have made the ego?”*

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The most frequently asked question about *A Course in Miracles* is, “How could the mind of God’s perfect Son ever have made the ego?” Notice that, in the Urtext version, the first person to ask the question was one of the scribes of the Course! Nearly everyone has come up with some version of this question.

The first two sentences of the section tell us that this question is reasonable, and the best question we could ask (1:1–2). The Course says our *false* belief about our origins is the root of our problems. The Course makes our *true* origin the foundation of its solution to our problems. It says that the ego’s root thought (that we are separate from God and one another) is inconceivable (T-3.VI.7:4-5). If it *is* inconceivable, how could our mind have conceived it? It’s a logical question.

The Course does not give the sort of answer we are looking for, which is some kind of explanation of the past events that led up to the ego. Instead, it tells us that there is no point in giving us that kind of answer, “because the past does not matter, and history would not exist if the same errors were not being repeated in the present” (1:3). In other words, *the mind is making the ego now*. That present making is a perfect example of how the ego occurred in the past. In fact, as the Course says elsewhere, “The present is the only time there is” (W-pI.164.1:2), and without this making of the ego in the present, there would be no past to ask about (1:3).

The way we conceive of time shows more clearly than anything else how radically our thinking differs from the Course’s thinking. To us, the past is real. It caused the present. To the Course, only the present is real, and the present causes the past (1:3)! If our mind (the one mind we all share) is making the ego *now*, that making is, in some way we don’t really understand, also making the illusion of the past in which the ego came into being. If our mind ceased making the ego in the present, the past (in which the ego appears to have occurred) would no longer exist. If we try to explain why the mind made the choices it did in the past, we will be trying to explain an illusion!

Jesus has made it abundantly clear that time does not actually exist (T-1.II.4:1), that it is meaningless (T-1.VI.3:5), that a belief in time only came about after the separation (T2.II.4:4 and T-2.V.9:2), and that it involves intervals that do not exist (T-2.VII.5:12). Later, he will tell us that it is the ego that believes that the past determines the future (T-13.IV.4). If all of this is true, then plainly our concern with “how the mind could ever have made the ego” in the past is quite meaningless. The past has nothing to do with the apparent existence of the ego; the ego is being generated by the mind *right now*. As regards the past, then, “How was the ego made?” is an irrelevant question, but as regards the present, it is the best question we could ask.

We do not need an abstract answer about how the Son of God could have made the ego, because abstraction applies only to knowledge, not to perception. Perception is always specific (1:4–5); abstraction is always general. Therefore, since in knowledge there is no ego, there *is* no abstract answer to our question. We live in a world of perception, which is always specific. What will be meaningful for us, therefore, is to look at *specific examples* of ego-making as they occur in our own minds. This section leads us to do just that.

Paragraph 2

2. [Ur: Perceptual distortions are not abstractions. They are merely confusions.] ¹Everyone makes an ego or a self for himself [Ur: one ego for himself], which is subject to enormous variation because of its instability. ²He also makes an ego [Ur: one] for everyone else he perceives, which is equally variable. ³Their interaction is [is] a process that [Ur: literally] alters both, because they were not made [either] by [by] or with [with] the Unalterable. ⁴It is [Ur: particularly] important to realize that this alteration can and does occur as

readily when the interaction takes place in the mind [*in the mind*] as when it involves physical proximity. ⁵Thinking [*Thinking*] about another ego is as effective in changing relative perception as is [Ur: their] physical interaction. ⁶There could be no better example that the ego is only an idea and not a fact [Ur: an idea, though not a reality-based thought].

• **Study Question** •

2. *Consider how your perception of other persons can change by thinking about them just as much as by physically interacting with them. Think of some specific instances where this has occurred for you.*

Each of us makes our own ego (2:1), or perhaps more accurately, *makes it up*. Our self-concept varies widely with time and circumstances (2:1). Today we may think of ourselves in quite exalted terms, and tomorrow we may look on ourselves with disgust.

We make an ego for everyone else we perceive (2:2), although we may not realize it. We form a mental impression of each person we interact with, and we will interpret their actions in conformity with that impression. If they don't look at us when they speak to us, we feel our impression of them as unfriendly is confirmed. The egos that we make for others are just as variable as our own, however. Our conception of another person can switch from "friend" to "enemy" and back to "friend" again in the space of mere minutes or even seconds. We throw out the old concept of their ego and form a new one to replace it. When two egos interact, they are *both* altered (2:3). Sometimes, this alteration occurs just in *thinking about* someone; no physical interaction is required (2:4–5). You can probably recall more than one time when your perception of yourself changed in reaction to your perception of another person. Perhaps you thought of someone in a very dark and destructive way, and found yourself wondering what kind of person you must be to have such thoughts!

The way the ego can so easily change proves that it is "only an idea and not a fact" (2:6). The ego isn't an actual *thing*; it is nothing more than an idea, a thought we have about ourselves—and not a "reality based thought," thank goodness! It may seem to have taken on a life of its own, and we may have completely confused the ego with our self, but despite that, it has no real existence.

The variability of our egos demonstrates how they *appear to* come into existence. We are thinking them in each present moment. They have no past. They are never more than present-tense illusions.

Paragraph 3

3. ¹Your own state of mind [Ur: present state] is a good example of how the ego was made [Ur: the best concrete example B. could have of how the mind could have made the ego]. ²When you threw knowledge away it is as if you never had it. [Ur: You {Helen} *do* have real knowledge at times, but when you

throw it away it is as if you never had it.] ³This [Ur: willfulness] is so apparent that one need only recognize it [Ur: B. need only perceive it] to see that it does happen. ⁴If this occurs in the present, why is it surprising [Ur: why should he be surprised] that it occurred in the past? [Ur: All psychology rests on the principle of continuity of behavior.] ⁵Surprise is a reasonable response to the unfamiliar, though hardly to something that occurs [Ur: has occurred] with such persistence. ⁶But do not forget that the mind need not work that way, even though it does work that way now. [Ur: An extreme example is a good teaching aid, not because it is typical, but because it is clear. The more complex the material, the clearer the examples should be for teaching purposes....I would therefore like to use your present state as an example of how the mind can work, provided you both fully recognize that it need not work that way. I *never* forget this myself, and a good teacher shares his own ideas, which he himself believes....With full recognition of its transitory nature, (a recognition which I hope you both share), H. offers a very good teaching example of alternations between Soul and ego, with concomitant variation between peace and frenzy. In answer to B's question, it is perfectly apparent that when she is ego-dominated, she *does not know* her Soul.]

• Study Question •

3. *See if you can recall some time in your life where you blocked certain knowledge out of your conscious awareness. Think about it as an example of how the ego was made.*



The opening lines of this paragraph originally referred to specific circumstances in the life of Helen Schucman (*Absence from Felicity*, p. 280), when she deliberately banished certain knowledge from her mind. He calls Helen “an extreme example” of the principle he is teaching here. As you can see, the Urtext had a lot more to say on this subject by way of personal application to Helen and Bill. Jesus said to her that she *did* have real knowledge at times, but at other times she just threw it away and acted as if she did not know it. These lines, no doubt highly significant to Helen and Bill, also apply to every one of us, because all of us have, from time to time, purposefully put something out of our minds. At the very least, all of us have rejected the knowledge of our True Self.

Our minds are capable of blocking out things we do not want to know; their power to do this is astonishing at times. We've read about victims of child abuse who have completely forgotten the abuse until it is brought out in therapy, or accident victims who cannot remember anything about the accident. The mind can completely block things out of consciousness, and yet those things are not gone. They show up in nightmares. They act as hidden motivators or germinate as phobias.

We have all had the experience of doing something when we “knew better.” This sort of thing is common, obvious and persistent. If it can happen in our minds *now*, and

psychology depends on the continuity of behavior, why should we find it surprising that it happened in the past, in the origin of the ego (3:3–4)? Our surprise is not reasonable (3:5).

We put our best knowledge out of our minds, and when we do, “It is as if you never had it” (3:2). In our “higher moments” we know a great deal, but in much of our lives, we just push “higher” knowledge out of awareness and act from our “lower” motives. That state of mind is “a good example of how the ego was made” (3:1). In making the ego, we have thrown away the knowledge of who we really are and Who our Father is. We have blocked our Christ Self from our consciousness. The author then reminds us that our minds do not have to work like that (blocking out aspects of knowledge), although they do work that way now (3:6). We can choose to use them differently, in a way that invites knowledge rather than blocks it.

The added material from the Urtext at the end of the paragraph serves to remind us that, although our minds may be working this way, blocking knowledge, this is *a transitory state*. It *will not* be permanent and does not indicate anything permanently wrong with us.

Paragraph 4

4. [Ur: Why are you surprised that something happened in the dim past, when it is so clearly happening right now?] ¹Think of the love of animals [Ur: the love that even animals have] for their offspring, and the need they feel to protect them. ²That is because they regard them as part of themselves. ³No one dismisses [Ur: disowns] something he considers [Ur: regards as a very real] part of himself. ⁴You react to your ego much as God does to His creations, [Ur: Man reacts to his ego much as God does to His Souls] - with love, protection and [Ur: great] charity. ⁵Your reactions to the self you made are not surprising. [Ur: The reaction of man to the self he made is not at all surprising.] ⁶In fact, they resemble in many ways how you will one day react to your real creations, which are as timeless as you are. ⁷The question is not how [how] you respond to the ego, but what you believe you are. ⁸[Ur: Again,] belief is an ego function, and as long as your origin is open to belief [Ur: at all,] you are regarding it from an ego viewpoint. [Ur: That is why the Bible quotes me as saying, “Ye believe in God, believe also in me.” Belief *does* apply to me, because I am the teacher of the ego.] ⁹When teaching is no longer necessary you will merely know God. ¹⁰Belief that there is another way of ~~perceiving~~ is the loftiest idea of which ego thinking is capable. ¹¹That is because it contains a hint of recognition that the ego is not the Self.

• Study Question •

4. *Why is believing in your true Self not necessarily a sign that you have transcended the ego?*

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Even animals love and protect their offspring (4:1); we've seen it in nature films. We all protect our children or anything we regard as part of ourselves (4:2–3), so, it is not surprising that we feel protective of our egos! In a certain sense, our protectiveness toward the ego reflects God's own care for His creations. We love, protect and show charity to our egos (4:4–5), just as one day we will do toward our real creations (4:6).

Being protective of our egos isn't the issue, however (4:7). It isn't something to be ashamed of. How you *react* to what you believe you are isn't the issue. The *real* issue is "what you believe you are" (4:7). Do you believe you are an ego in a body? Or do you believe that you are an unlimited spirit? What we believe is important, although belief is only a transitional phase. A shift in our belief about our self will help us to disengage from the ego, and to identify with the spirit. But, "Belief is an ego function," therefore, a change in belief is a change *within the ego framework* (4:8, compare with C-In.3:1–2). This is one sense in which the ego can learn (T-4.I.2:13). Even while we are identified with the ego, we can come to believe that "there is another way of perceiving"; that's about as high as ego thinking can get (4:10). That realization contains at least "a hint of recognition that the ego is not the Self" (4:11).

When we have moved beyond teaching, we won't believe; we will *know* (4:9). But as we start out, we need to work on our belief. We need to open a crack in our fixed thought system, a crack that lets in the idea that perhaps "the ego is not the Self" (4:11). What a radical idea! Psychology and even most Western spiritual teaching *assumes* that the ego is the Self, that you are simply "you," as you think of yourself, and that spiritual growth means somehow improving that individual self or ego. Perhaps the teaching tries to produce a *nice* ego or a loving ego, but it still leaves you as an ego. For the Course, however, (and for many Eastern forms of spirituality as well,) shaking us loose from that fixed identification with our egos, and transcending our separated consciousness, is the pivotal point in ending our imprisonment.

Paragraph 5

5. ¹Undermining [Ur: the foundation of] the ego's thought system must [Ur: *must*] be perceived as painful, even though this is anything but true. ²Babies scream in rage if you take away a knife or scissors, although they may well harm themselves if you do not. [The speedup has placed you both in the same position. You are *not* by any means prepared, and] ³In this sense you are still a baby [Ur: you *are* babies]. ⁴You have no sense of real self-preservation, and are likely to decide that you need precisely what would hurt you most. ⁵Yet whether or not you recognize it now, you have agreed to cooperate in the effort [Ur: a concerted and very commendable effort] to become both harmless and helpful,

attributes that must go together. ⁶Your attitudes even toward this are necessarily conflicted, because all attitudes are ego-based. ⁷This will not last. ⁸Be patient a while and remember [Ur: what we have said once before;] that the outcome is as certain as God.

• **Study Question** •

5. *List any ways in which, for you, undermining the ego's thought system seems painful; ways in which you seem to think you need things that will harm you (including your own ego); or ways in which your attitudes toward learning to be harmless and helpful are conflicted. If you can't think of any, that's okay, too.*

Shaking us loose from our egos “must be perceived as painful” (5:1). The key word here is “perceived,” because it really is not painful; we just see it like that. If our egos are really being challenged, they won't take it lying down. This does not necessarily mean that we are making progress only if we are perceiving pain or feeling fear. It just means that at some point along the way, when the ego is seriously challenged, it is going to use fear and pain as defenses. We can depend on it.

We can also, however, depend on what Jesus tells us here: the process is “anything but” painful. We react to the withdrawal of our egos like a baby who screams when a parent takes away a knife (5:2–3). The baby wants the very thing that can hurt it, and in that sense, in wanting our egos, we are babies too (5:3–4).

Then comes one of those enigmatic statements: “Whether or not you recognize it now, you have agreed to cooperate in the effort to become both harmless and helpful” (5:5). How can we have agreed to something, yet not recognize we have done so? In a number of ways, the Course and the story around it suggest an existence prior to this one on earth. I get a picture of myself sitting with some friends in the spirit world and planning out a program for myself here on earth. Or, at some point, God, in some guise, asked me if I wanted to go through the Divine Training Program, and I said, “Yes.” In taking on a body, perhaps, I have forgotten about my agreement. Maybe forgetting about my agreement is even an essential ingredient of the training program.

Helen Schucman obviously made a firm commitment to let the Course come through her. Consciously, she often fought it, but in dreams and visions she saw herself as having chosen this role in ages past. The same is true for all of us. We may have conflicting attitudes about learning the Course (5:6), but we would not be here, reading this book, if we had not already agreed on some deeper level to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in His training program. Nearly everyone experiences conflicting attitudes toward the Course as their learning progresses. Jesus assures us that this inner conflict will not last, and asks us to be patient with ourselves, remembering that “the outcome is as certain as God” (5:8), as he told us once before in T-2.III.3:10.

It can be helpful to make this personal, saying to myself, for instance: "I know I have agreed to cooperate in the effort to become both harmless and helpful. I have agreed to transcend my ego, even though it seems painful at times. My conflicted attitude will not last. I know that the outcome is as certain as God."

Paragraph 6

6. [Helen used to perceive the quotation "To him that hath shall be given" as a paradox that bordered on the ironic. She also had a similar reaction to another related one: "Faith is the gift of God." We have reinterpreted both of these statements before, but perhaps we can make them even clearer now.] ¹Only those who have a real and lasting sense of abundance can be truly charitable. ²This is obvious when you consider what is involved. ³To the ego, to give anything implies that you will have to do without it. [Ur: To be able to give anything implies that you can do without it.] ⁴When you associate giving with sacrifice [Ur: Even if you associate giving with sacrifice], you [Ur: still] give only because you believe that you are somehow getting something better, and can therefore do without the thing you give. ⁵"Giving to get" is an inescapable law of the ego, which always evaluates itself in relation to other egos. ⁶It is therefore continually preoccupied with the belief in scarcity [Ur: scarcity principle] that gave rise to it. [Ur: This *is* the meaning of Freud's "pleasure principle." Freud was the most accurate "ego psychologist" we ever had, although he would not have preferred this description himself. His ego {his concept of the ego} was a very weak and deprived concept, which could function *only* as a thing in need. The "reality principle" of the ego is not real at all. It is forced to perceive the "reality" of other egos, because it *cannot* establish the reality of itself. In fact,] ⁷Its whole perception of other egos as real is only an attempt to convince itself that *it* is real. ⁸"Self-esteem" in ego terms means nothing more than that the ego has deluded itself into accepting its reality, and is therefore temporarily less predatory. ⁹This "self-esteem" is always vulnerable to stress, a term which refers to any perceived threat to the ego's existence [Ur: a term which really means that a condition has arisen in which the delusion of reality of the ego is threatened. This produces either ego-deflation or ego-inflation, resulting in either withdrawal or attack.]

• Study Question •

6. *Try to visualize yourself as God created you, lacking nothing. Try to feel "a real and lasting sense of abundance," and then imagine how this would affect your ability to give.*

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This paragraph gives a clear definition of the ego's law about "giving to get" (6:5). "Giving to get" means that the ego gives only in order to get something better (6:4).

Obviously, then, the ego will resist a program designed to make us harmless and helpful. It will not value devotion to a brother, because giving to a brother *increases* that brother, and the ego constantly evaluates itself in relation to other egos (6:5). The ego can't afford to be charitable (6:1); it is continually preoccupied with the belief in scarcity it grew out of (as was explained in T-1.VI.1, T-2.I.1 and T-3.V.2). It constantly perceives threats to its existence, which makes it predatory (6:8–9); that is, it *takes* from others.

When the Course asks us to become more giving, our identification with the ego causes us to associate giving with sacrifice. Giving, to the ego, means doing without (6:3–4). One way, then, we can observe the ego in action is to watch our resistance to giving in specific situations.

The Course manifests an unusual stance toward the concept of “self-esteem” (6:7–9). We usually think of self-esteem as a good thing; the Course sees it in an extremely unflattering light. The ego is continually matching itself up against other egos, comparing, and trying to prove its own reality. When it seems to succeed, that is what the ego calls “self-esteem.” For the time being, until some threat shakes its fragile confidence, the ego is willing to abstain from attacking and preying on others, but such seeming benevolence on its part is purely temporary.

The Urtext of this paragraph begins with references to two Bible verses, which read, in full, as follows (from the New Revised Standard Version):

For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance;
but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.
(Matthew 25:29)

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it
is the gift of God. (Ephesians 2:8)

To be honest, I do not quite see how the following discussion “can make them even clearer now” (Urtext). I do see how the first quotation is explained here. Only when we know, with a real and lasting sense of abundance, that we *have* the gifts of God can we, without any sense of sacrifice, give these gifts freely to others. And as we give, more is given to us. On the other hand, if we are living from a consciousness of scarcity, if we do give anything, it creates a deep sense of loss and sacrifice. But I'm not clear how seeing faith as a gift of God can be seen as “a paradox that bordered on the ironic,” nor how this discussion explains that verse. Maybe you, the reader, can come up with an explanation.

Paragraph 7

7. ¹The ego literally lives by comparisons. ²[Ur: This means that] equality is beyond its grasp, and charity becomes impossible. ³The ego never gives out of abundance, because it was made as a substitute for it. ⁴That is why the concept of “getting” arose in the ego's thought system. ⁵Appetites are “getting” mechanisms, representing the ego's need to confirm itself. ⁶This is as true of body appetites as it is of the so-called “higher ego needs.” ⁷Body appetites are not physical in origin. ⁸[Ur: because] the ego regards the body as its home,

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and tries to satisfy itself through the body. ⁹But the idea that this is possible is a decision of the mind [Ur: ego], which has become completely confused about what is really possible. [Ur: This accounts for its essential erraticness.]

We are continuing the thought of paragraph 6, concerning the ego's version of giving. The ego simply cannot grasp the idea of equality (7:2); its illusory existence depends on comparisons between itself and another, "different" ego (7:1). It is always trying to get more, to be special, or to be "better than." This makes true giving impossible for the ego; how can it give, when having more things is what keeps it going? Furthermore, the ego grew out of a belief in lack; it was, in itself, a substitute for lost abundance. So giving out of abundance is also impossible (7:3).

The ego is married to "getting"; it is a getting machine, a black hole of craving, a bottomless pit of emptiness. Even bodily appetites are reflections of the ego's vain attempts to confirm itself by getting things (7:8). Our appetite for food, for pleasure, for sex, or for the accumulation of wealth all originate, ultimately, in the ego's insatiable need for self-confirmation (7:4-7). These appetites do not have a physical origin; they arise from a decision of the mind that it is possible to be satisfied through the body (7:9).

Your body cannot bring you satisfaction (7:9). You know that. Yet, because you don't really think about it (and don't want to), you continue to try to do it. You *can* change your mind about it. The next time you have a craving for chocolate, a thirst for a drink, an addictive need for a cigarette, or a lust for someone's body, stop and remember that such physical longings arise from the ego's unquenchable hunger for validation, its unattainable ambition to prove itself real. Ask yourself, "Do I really want to validate my ego?" and then make another choice.

Not that I am recommending that you ignore hunger and thirst or abstain from sex entirely. Yet someone long ago observed that there is a vast difference between eating to live and living to eat. In the United States we have a horrendous problem of obesity. Clearly, far too many of us are not just eating to live; we are using food and drink, drugs, and perhaps sex, as the Course says, to validate our egos. We need far more often to stop, step back, and ask ourselves, "What is this for?"

In all these diversionary tactics, however, the one question that is never asked by those who pursue them is, "What for?" This is the question that *you* must learn to ask in connection with everything. What is the purpose? (T-4.V.6:7-9).

I must add, however, that the Course is quite firm in saying that "body appetites are not physical in origin" (7:7), and appears to imply that when a mind is fully enlightened, all physical "needs" become entirely optional. (See Workbook lesson 136, paragraphs 17 and 18.) There are stories of Catholic nuns who lived on nothing but communion wafers, or Buddhist monks who could generate body warmth sufficient to sit naked but unharmed in freezing snow. Modern science has become quite accepting of the idea that the mind affects the body. The Course takes it to the limit of saying that all bodily appetites are a

decision of the mind and nothing more, that, if you will, the body is a projection of the mind. (See T-2.V.1:9, T-6.V.2:2-3, T-18.IX.3:1, W-pI.132.10:3.)

Paragraphs 8 & 9

8. [Ur: Consider the inevitable confusion which *must* arise from a perception of the self which responds: When I was completely on my own I “had no idea what was possible” {a reference to the Sentence Completion Test (SCT), a psychological test in which you complete sentence stems; in this case, the stem “When I was completely on my own...”}. ¹The ego believes [Ur: *does believe*] it is completely on its own, which is merely another way of describing how it thinks it originated. ²This is such a fearful state that it can only turn to other egos and try to unite with them in a feeble attempt at identification, or attack them in an equally feeble show of strength. [Ur: *The ego is free to complete the stem: “When I was completely on my own” in any way it chooses.*] ³It is not free, however, to open the premise to question, because the premise is its foundation. ⁴The ego is [Ur: *is*] the mind’s belief that it is completely on its own. ⁵The ego’s ceaseless attempts to gain the spirit’s [Ur: *Soul’s*] acknowledgment and thus establish its own existence are [Ur: *utterly*] useless. ⁶Spirit in its knowledge is unaware of the ego. ⁷It does not attack it; it merely cannot conceive of it at all. ⁸While the ego is equally unaware of spirit, it does perceive itself as being rejected by something greater than itself. ⁹This is why self-esteem in ego terms must be delusional.

¹⁰The creations of God do not create myths, although creative effort [Ur: *but the creative efforts of man*] can be turned to mythology. ¹¹It can do so, however, only under one condition; what it makes is then no longer creative. ¹²Myths are entirely perceptual [Ur: *perceptions*], and so ambiguous in form and characteristically good-and-evil in nature [Ur: *content*] that the most benevolent of them is not without fearful connotations [Ur: *fearful components, if only in innuendo*].

9. ¹Myths and magic are closely associated, since myths are usually related to ego origins, and magic to the powers the ego ascribes to itself. ²Mythological systems generally include [Ur: *Every mythological system includes*] some account of “the creation,” and associate this with its particular form [Ur: *particular perception*] of magic. ³The so-called “battle for survival” is only the ego’s struggle to preserve itself, and its interpretation of its own beginning. ⁴This beginning is usually [Ur: *always*] associated with physical birth, because it is hard to maintain [Ur: *nobody maintains*] that the ego existed before that point in time. ⁵The more “religiously” ego-oriented may [Ur: *tend to*] believe that the soul existed before, and will continue to exist after a temporary lapse into ego life. ⁶Some even believe that the soul will be punished for this

lapse [Ur: even though in reality it could not possibly know anything about it].
7However, salvation does not apply to spirit [Ur: the Soul], which is not in danger and does not need to be salvaged.

• Study Question •

7. Paragraph 8 gives a very good short definition of the ego; what is it?

The ego is the awful ache of eternal loneliness, the pain of endless isolation. It is alone, all alone. This is how it thinks it originated (creating itself, without God). It can never be anything but alone (8:1). It cannot question the premise of aloneness, because the ego *is* the premise of aloneness (8:3–4). The mind's belief it is “on its own” *is* the ego. The ego *is* that belief; therefore, it cannot ever *stop believing* it. It must always operate from the premise: “I am completely on my own.”

The ego exists in a permanent state of fear, all alone against God and the universe. “Deny your own Identity, and you assail the universe alone, without a friend, a tiny particle of dust against the legions of your enemies” (W-pI.193.3:2). It has only two options to assuage that fear: either attempt to unite with other egos for protection, or else attack other egos before they attack it. Both feeble positions do little to alleviate the fear.

The ego tries—constantly—to “gain the spirit's acknowledgment and thus establish its own existence” (8:5). Spirit, which knows only truth, does not know the ego and therefore cannot acknowledge it (8:6–7). Imagine being plagued by an unshakable doubt of your own existence. But wait! You don't have to *imagine* this; you experience it every day and every moment. Yes, you do. Perhaps you think this discussion is very abstract and has little to do with you. Think again.

Think of most psychological disorders you have heard of. Aren't they mostly various forms of self-doubt? We doubt our worth so we try to prove it by dominating other people. Or, we doubt our worth and so we cringe, cower and live in fear. We get addicted to sex, substances or relationships to try to fill our emptiness. We strive to find happiness in a myriad of ways: in family, in career, in fame, in fortune, in pleasure. As Thoreau observed, “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.” Isn't all of that reflective of what the Course is telling us here? Isn't it all a manifestation of a fundamental *lack of self-identity*?

Spirit does not know the ego, nor does the ego truly know the spirit. Although it craves acknowledgment from *something*, it cannot define exactly what that something is (8:6–8). It feels *rejected* by that something, something greater than itself (8:8).

“This is why self-esteem in ego terms must be delusional” (8:9). “This,” I think, refers not just to the preceding sentence's thought (that the ego perceives itself to be rejected by something greater than itself), but to the whole paragraph and the ego's concept of itself as completely on its own, against God and the universe. Under these circumstances, the ego *cannot* think highly of itself! If it does, that “self-esteem” must be a delusion, because the “facts” it believes in say otherwise.

At this point the discussion seems to switch from self-esteem in general to *myths* of self-esteem. The ego invents myths of creation to glorify itself and its origins (9:1–3). The myths feed the ego's delusion of grandeur. God's creations do not need myths because they have a glorious beginning *in truth* (8:10). Our minds can turn their creative power to myth making, but in doing so, they are not truly creating anything at all (8:10–11).

Consider the myths you know; the Course accurately describes them 8:12 as “ambiguous,” “good-and-evil in nature,” and having “fearful connotations.” The all-too-numerous interpretations of the Genesis story prove the story is “ambiguous.” Most myths are also blatantly “good-and-evil in nature.” Even the kindest interpretation of the Garden of Eden myth, for instance, still has some “fearful connotations.” Creation myths from almost every culture in the world show the same attributes, which is only natural if they arise from the ego's attempts to give itself an origin.

Myths and magic go together. The myths grant the ego an origin; the magic is a picture of the powers the ego wants to give itself (9:1). Most myths conceive of life beginning with physical birth; certainly most Westerners think along those lines. To be specific, *you and I* think that way, don't we? We think we are an ego-in-a-body. Life begins at physical birth; that's a given for most of us (9:4). Some, more “religious,” will believe that a soul existed before birth, and continues after ego life and physical death (9:5). Some even think ego life in a body was a “lapse” that will bring punishment to the lapsed soul (9:6).

The use of the word “soul” here is rare in the Course; it occurs only nine times in four paragraphs, although the Urtext often uses “soul” where the Foundation Edition has substituted “spirit.” The Course itself notes its avoidance of the word, and in the Clarification of Terms section at the back of the *Manual for Teachers*, it says:

The term “soul” is not used except in direct biblical quotations because of its highly controversial nature. It would, however, be an equivalent of “spirit,” with the understanding that, being of God, it is eternal and was never born (C1.3:23).

With *soul* equated to *spirit*, sentence 9:7 makes better sense. Some believe the soul (spirit) will be punished for lapsing into ego life. If that were true, the soul (spirit) would need to be *saved* from punishment. The Course insists, however, that “salvation does not apply to spirit, which is not in danger and does not need to be salvaged” (9:7). In other words, the essential *you*, which is spirit, is not now and never has been threatened in any way. Spirit has not lapsed into ego life. Ego life is nothing more than a belief of the mind that it is on its own; the ego has no real existence. Therefore, there is nothing to be salvaged *from*, and nothing to be punished *for*.

Paragraphs 10 & 11

10. ¹Salvation is nothing more than “right-mindedness,” which is not the One-mindedness of the Holy Spirit [Ur: the Soul], but which must be achieved before One-mindedness is restored. ²Right-mindedness leads to [Ur: dictates] the

next step automatically, because right perception is uniformly without attack, and therefore wrong-mindedness is obliterated. ³The ego cannot survive without judgment, and is laid aside accordingly. ⁴The mind then has only one direction in which it can move. ⁵Its direction is always automatic, because it cannot but be dictated by the thought system to which it adheres. [Ur: Every thought-system has *internal consistency*, and this does provide a basis for the continuity of behavior.]

11. ¹It cannot be emphasized too often that correcting perception is merely a temporary expedient. ²It is necessary only because misperception is a block to knowledge, while accurate perception is a stepping-stone towards it. ³The whole value of right perception lies in the inevitable realization [Ur: judgment] that *all* perception is unnecessary. ⁴This removes the block entirely. ⁵You may ask how this is possible as long as you appear to be living in this world. ⁶That is a reasonable question. [Ur: And since this is a sensible question, it has a sensible answer.] ⁷You must be careful, however, that you really understand it. ⁸Who is the “you” who are living in this world? ⁹Spirit is immortal, and immortality is a constant state. ¹⁰It is as true now as it ever was or ever will be, because it implies no change at all. ¹¹It is not a continuum, nor is it understood by being compared to an opposite. ¹²Knowledge never involves comparisons. ¹³That is its main difference from everything else the mind can grasp.

• Study Question •

8. *If salvation does not refer to saving the spirit from punishment, or saving our soul from hell, then what does it mean?*

It is the mind that “lapses” into ego life, or at least into believing it is on its own—the belief that *is* the ego. The mind, in effect, *makes up* ego life; therefore, it is the mind, not the spirit, which needs salvation. Once again in 10:1–2, we have a triad, as I pointed out in the discussion of T3.IV.4 (Class #20): wrong-mindedness, right-mindedness, and “the One-mindedness of the Holy Spirit” (10:1). Once again, we see that the Course chooses the middle member of the triad as its working goal, and leaves the final goal to God. We must achieve right-mindedness “before One-mindedness is restored” (10:1), something which will happen “automatically” (10:2) because it is God’s responsibility, not ours.

The path of achieving the high goal by aiming for the middle one should be no surprise; it is a theme repeated often since the Introduction to the Text, where we read:

The course does not aim at teaching the meaning of love, for that is beyond what can be taught. It does aim, however, at removing the blocks to the awareness of love's presence, which is your natural inheritance. (T-In.1:6–7)

The Course does not even try to teach the meaning of love. It aims at removing the blocks to our awareness of the presence of love, something that is ours by right of inheritance. When the blocks are removed, we will again become aware of the love that has always been there. Likewise, when wrong-mindedness is corrected and replaced by right-mindedness, this will remove the blocks to our acceptance of the One-mindedness that the Holy Spirit has kept undisturbed for us while we slept.

Love is not learned. Its meaning lies within itself. And learning ends when you have recognized all it is *not*. That is the interference; that is what needs to be undone. Love is not learned, because there never was a time in which you knew it not. (T-18.IX.12:1-5)

Achieving One-mindedness by attaining right-mindedness seems quite natural as the Course explains it. Right-mindedness means a mind without attack and without judgment. The ego *requires* judgment to survive, so when judgment goes, the ego is laid aside as well (10:3). Wrong-mindedness is “obliterated,” not by attacking it, but by giving up attack (10:2). When the mind attains right-mindedness it “has only one direction in which it can move” (10:4). Since its movements are dictated by the thought system it espouses, which is right-minded thinking or love (10:5), the mind naturally moves into One-mindedness.

As is often the case when the Course talks about this “mid-range” goal concept, it emphasizes both the importance of focusing on that mid-range goal and not striving directly for the higher, and also the importance of not mistaking the mid-range goal for the final goal. The mid-range goal is variously described as correcting our perception, moving us from wrong-mindedness to right-mindedness, or from wrong perception to true perception. This “is merely a temporary expedient” (11:1). Wrong perception blocks knowledge (11:2). Correct perception is necessary *as a stepping-stone to knowledge* (11:2), but its “whole value...lies in the inevitable realization that *all* perception is unnecessary” (11:3). In other words, we are *correcting* perception only in order to *let go of* perception, in favor of knowledge. There is no inherent value even in *true* perception; it is of value only because, once achieved, it leads us past perception to knowledge.

It's natural to ask, “How is it possible for us to live in this world without perception?” (11:5-6). There is no real answer, because the question assumes an untruth; it assumes we *are* living in this world! “Who is the ‘you’ who [is] living in this world?” asks Jesus (11:8). The “you” who is living in this world is the ego-in-a-body, and *that isn't really you*, as we have seen earlier in this section. It is only an idea you have about yourself, a false image, and not a fact (2:6). “The ego is not the Self” (4:11). Unquestionably, nothing can live in this world without perception, but what is it that lives and perceives in this world? The ego, and only the ego. When the ego is entirely laid aside, the world of perception is laid aside with it.

You are spirit, and spirit is immortal, existing in a constant state (11:9), unchanging (11:10). Spirit is completely unlike the self we appear to be in this world. That self is not

in a constant state; it changes. That self is most definitely *not* immortal. Therefore, the self which is living in this world is not *spirit*, and therefore, it is not you.

“The ego literally lives by comparisons” (7:1), but spirit is not “understood by being compared to an opposite” (11:11). Spirit is a thing of knowledge, which “never involves comparisons” (11:12). The absence of comparison or contrast speaks of a realm of oneness, or non-duality. To quote the Introduction to the Text again: “What is all-encompassing can have no opposite” (T-In.1:8).

I have a hard time wrapping my mind around such a concept. Truly, this is different “from everything else the mind can grasp” (11:13). Nearly everything I consider to be “understanding” involves comparisons. For instance, a tree is a living thing (not dead); its trunk is brown (not another color), thick (not thin) and hard (not soft), while its leaves (by contrast!) are green, thin and fragile. Everything you think you “know” is inherently dualistic. It consists mostly of comparisons and contrasts to other different or opposite things. Can you conceive of a kind of knowledge that *never involves* anything like that?

Perhaps we can at least begin to understand how, if there is no comparison in knowledge, there is no need for perception, which, like comparison, is also dualistic. We don't understand unitary knowledge, our minds cannot grasp it in our current state, and yet, like knowledge, *what we are* is a unitary, incomparable essence. How utterly different we are from what we think we are!

I was mistaken when I thought I lived apart from God, a separate entity that moved in isolation, unattached, and housed within a body. Now I know my life is God's, I have no other home, and I do not exist apart from Him. He has no thoughts that are not part of me, and I have none but those which are of Him.

(W-pII.223.1.)

• **Study Question** •

9. *Spend five or ten minutes meditating on, or thinking about, the idea that the real you is not living in this world at all. You may want to try reading and meditating on Workbook Lesson 252, “The Son of God is my Identity.”*

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Answer Key

1. Some examples of similar questions:
 - How did the separation occur?
 - How could we ever have chosen to leave Heaven, if Heaven is so perfect?
 - Why did the Son of God want to be separate?
 - Why did the Son of God want more than everything?
 - If I am a perfect creation of God, how can I have imperfect thoughts?
2. No written answer is expected.
3. No written answer is expected.
4. When you believe in anything you must still be regarding yourself from an ego standpoint, since “belief is an ego function” (4:8).
5. Some examples might be: Being afraid that loss of the ego means loss of myself; feeling that I am being asked to sacrifice something; wanting to continue to enjoy the pleasures of the world that I have substituted for the joy of God, to have my cake and eat it too; feeling that becoming harmless means becoming a doormat; craving a special love relationship and feeling I can't be happy without it.
6. No written answer is expected.
7. “The ego is the mind's belief that it is completely on its own” (T-4.II.8:4).
8. Salvation is *right-mindedness*; it is corrected thinking and corrected perception. The mind must be healed of attack thoughts and judgment. The mind is where salvation is needed. Right-mindedness removes the blocks to One-mindedness, and thus opens the way to “the next step,” which is the restoration of One-mindedness.