

## Can Academics Learn from a Mere Clinical Psychologist?

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*The Art of Living Consciously: The Power of Awareness to  
Transform Everyday Life*

Nathaniel Branden

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255 pp., index

I am about to do something not normally done in polite company; not, at least, when the company consists of academic psychologists. I am going to talk about a how-to book written by a practicing clinician. The customs of my discipline permit me such reading in the privacy of my home, but this kind of activity, it is strictly understood, is of no more significance to my professional life than entertaining myself with a detective novel at the beach. I hope my colleagues will be able to live down the shock. For I am convinced that *The Art of Living Consciously* deserves a response in the books and the journals that academic psychologists read—indeed, that it is at least as relevant to psychological theory as it is to everyday life.

*The Art of Living Consciously* is the fourteenth psychology book that Nathaniel Branden has published since 1969. Like the others, it remains largely unknown to my colleagues. Branden's books are rarely cited in academic publications. None has been reviewed in *Contemporary Psychology* (the major journal of book reviews in American psychology, known for its tilt toward clinical topics) since 1981, when social psychologist Ellen Berscheid made fun of *The Psychology of Romantic Love*; her loudest guffaw was reserved for Branden's view that a successful romantic relationship must have a foundation of realism.

Granted, two of Branden's fourteen have been therapeutic workbooks, consisting mostly of exercises using the sentence-completion technique that he has long favored. But the others have sought to explain self-esteem, which has been known to attract the interest of academic researchers, and romantic love, which greatly intrigues a few (e.g., Sternberg 1998), though the vast majority would just as soon find another topic.

What has kept these books a secret in academic circles is their intended readership (an intelligent general audience); their style (eloquent but non-technical); and, most importantly, their source (a practicing clinical psychologist).

### **Fracture Lines in Psychology**

Self-esteem is recognized as a topic in contemporary research, but there is uncertainty as to where it belongs in the field. Within academic psychology, deep fracture lines separate "cognitive" questions (how we perceive, think, remember, and solve problems) from "social" questions (how we feel, what we strive for, and how we relate to one another). Different specialized research groups have formed to study "cognitive" and "social" issues. Few messages pass across the divide: social psychologists studying helping behavior rarely have occasion to talk to cognitive psychologists studying biases in decision making, and vice versa. Moreover, theories that are regarded as adequate on one side of the divide may be taken for deeply problematic on the other side, when not rejected as flatly inconsistent with what is known over there.

How we evaluate ourselves pertains to motivation, and to personality; academic psychologists normally relegate these to the social side of the chasm, where cognitive psychologists are disinclined to pay them any mind. (There are no information-processing theories of self-esteem; no neural-net models of it; no Piagetian explanations of its development.) Branden won't keep to one side of the divide. From his earliest writings (Branden 1969), he has maintained that self-esteem is motivational (indeed, that it is a felt experience). He has always maintained that it is cognitive (that it constitutes a "judgment"

that we make about ourselves, and that our level of self-esteem depends on how rational we usually are). Self-esteem, he argues, affects each person's manner of relating to others as well as his or her mood and personal habits. Moreover, according to Branden, an individual's level of self-esteem reciprocally influences the nature and quality of that person's thinking. For Branden, self-esteem is simultaneously cognitive and social.

The diremption between "cognitive" and "social" psychology is extensive. But those on both sides of the gulf are academics who normally manage to dwell together in departments of psychology. An even wider chasm has opened up between academic research and clinical practice. During the 1970s, the tension between graduate students who wanted to work with clients and professors who wanted to train academic personality researchers grew so acute that some clinical programs closed down and others lost their accreditation from the American Psychological Association. Toward the end of the 1980s, there was a notable exodus from the APA, which academic researchers had come to view as a lobby for clinicians, into the American Psychological Society and other rival organizations.

Even though every psychotherapist is still trained by professors, the relationship between academia and the clinic is terribly strained. Some academics have hung on to the ideal of the "scientist-practitioner," trained in academic research and dedicated to applying the results of empirical research in actual consultation or therapy. By and large, though, practitioners distrust academic ideas as inapplicable to the everyday problems that they and their clients face, while academics write off clinicians' ideas as lightweight or bizarre.

For instance, attribution theory (Ross and Nisbett 1991) maintains a loyal following among academic social psychologists. This theory essentially denies the existence of personality or character. There is no such dimension or attribute as honesty, only concrete honest or dishonest acts that are largely "under the control of the situation" (along with differential tendencies to acknowledge that is so: we attribute our own behavior to circumstances, while blaming other people's behavior on their enduring propensities). Clinicians sometimes speak of "attributions," but for them the term normally

refers to unwarranted self-blame on their clients' part, not a propensity to credit or exonerate oneself and lay blame on others. Few subscribe to undiluted attribution theory or regard it as useful in their work.

By contrast, practicing clinicians may subscribe enthusiastically to ideas that academics distrust as empirically untested or reject outright. A little while ago, Neurolinguistic Programming (Bandler and Grinder 1975) had many adepts among clinicians; some of them are still active. I doubt that any academic psychologist of language ever defended NLP's wide-ranging assertions about the power of language to direct people's behavior without their knowing it, or the specific formulas by which NLPers claimed that these results are accomplished. Nor is a formal theory of language necessary to ground the valid insights of NLP: for instance, that getting a client to express responsibility—"I made these mistakes"—is preferable to letting the client duck it—"Mistakes were made." Neurolinguistic Programming would have us believe that the first sentence is superior to the second because its surface structure expresses more of its deep structure. Surface structure? Deep structure? The originator of that distinction, Noam Chomsky, left it behind many years ago (compare Chomsky 1981 with Chomsky 1965). Few linguists or psychologists of language subscribe to the distinction any more. And NLP is a good deal less foreign, from an academic standpoint, than some other orientations with adherents among practitioners, such as Primal Therapy or Transpersonal Psychology.

### **Self-Esteem and Morality**

While nearly every academic looks down on clinical practice as scientifically weak, some don't care for its moral implications either (a prejudice easily predictable from historical trends in such areas of study as moral development; Campbell and Christopher 1996a; 1996b). A vocal minority distrusts self-esteem-oriented psychotherapy as immoral. Such therapy, they complain, is shot through with anti-communitarian goals and values. It is infected with "expressive individualism" (Bellah, et al. 1985). It grants its clients license to

renege on their commitments and to behave selfishly (Wallach and Wallach 1983; Midgley 1991). It encourages them to embrace pride and reject guilt, which may feather the individual's nest, but only to the detriment of the social order, promoting crime and violence (Baumeister 1991; 1997; Baumeister, Smart, and Boden 1996). More temperate voices warn us that the development of the self and the development of morality are entirely different, and that the incorporation of moral ideals into the self, when it manages to happen, must be a late and rare achievement (Damon and Hart 1988).

Faced with writings presumed unscientific as well as immoral, academics may feel no obligation to read before indicting. Over the last decade, social psychologist Roy Baumeister has become well known for his insistence that high self-esteem is scarcely discernible from arrogance, conceit, or lust for power. Branden's theory of self-esteem has always sharply differentiated between high self-esteem and pseudo-self-esteem, defensiveness, or power-lust; so we might expect Baumeister to come up with arguments against views such as Branden's. No such luck. Baumeister's sole reference to Branden (1969) shoots past in the preface to an edited volume: "interest in self-esteem is not confined to academic research laboratories. Beginning, perhaps, with Nathaniel Branden, . . . a flood of popular psychologists have exploited the general public's large and growing interest in self-esteem as a promising key to health and happiness" (1993, vii). Baumeister goes on, altogether inaccurately, to allege a link between Branden and the much-lampooned California Commission on Self-Esteem.

## Rational Living

Many academics can begin to wear down these prejudices easily enough—by picking up a book like *The Art of Living Consciously* and reading it. Authors who haven't thought carefully about what they are writing don't produce Branden's taut, sonorous prose; authors most comfortable in proximity to loose and flimsy ideas don't generate Branden's tightly signposted arguments.

Chapter 1 ("Living Consciously: First Principles") is about living

rationally. *The Art of Living Consciously* moves immediately in a different direction from most clinical literature. A condensed treatment of what it means to be rational doesn't live in the same neighborhood as "feel-goodism" and "affective education" (the regions to which every skeptic relegates treatments of self-esteem). Branden (1997, 172) responds to the "feel-goodist" charge later on:

one of the most depressing aspects of so many discussions of self-esteem today is the absence of any reference to the importance of thinking or respect for reality. Too often, consciousness and rationality are not judged to be relevant, since they are not raised as considerations. The notion seems to be that *any* positive feeling about the self, however arrived at and regardless of its grounds, equals "self-esteem."

Meanwhile, back at the university, psychologists' treatments of rationality get regularly shoved into corners of the cognitive research literature—for instance, studies of how untrained adults handle categorical syllogisms or estimate probabilities. For those accustomed to localize cognition and personality on opposite sides of a chasm, the attention given to rationality in Chapter 1 of a clinical book might already stimulate some rethinking.

In emphasizing that living rationally is living well (and living morally), Branden is firmly in the tradition of Aristotle, who regarded individual human flourishing as the goal of a moral life and practical wisdom as a virtue. As the details of his account of rationality make plain, Branden is even more firmly in the tradition of his mentor, Ayn Rand (1957; 1963). (Well, to a first approximation: as discussed in Campbell 1999, Branden himself was responsible for a good deal of the psychological content in Rand's epistemology.) Over the years, Branden has sanded some sharp edges off the rhetoric, and he has changed his views on some substantive matters. Still, the informed reader will notice that *The Art of Living Consciously* is philosophically Objectivist—indeed, will be hard pressed to mistake it for anything else.

## Free Will and Metacognition

Chapter 2 (“Choice and Responsibility”) unambiguously affirms that we are responsible for our decisions because we have free will. Chapters 3 and 4 (“A Conscious Life”) seek to apply the idea that we have control over how conscious we are to many aspects of human life: our conduct as parents, our decisions as managers or employees, our behavior toward husbands, wives, and relationship partners, our response to ideas whose truth we may have taken for granted.

In his earlier writings, Branden (1963; 1969) took an attentional view of free will: he saw our free choice to think or not to think as a matter of “focus” or lack of focus. Ayn Rand, in her non-fiction writings (e.g., 1990), employed the same focus metaphor, as have subsequent treatments in the Objectivist literature.

*The Art of Living Consciously* still makes use of the focus idea: “We are free to focus our minds, or not to bother, or to actively avoid focusing” (Branden 1997, 48). At times a metaphor of raising or lowering the level of illumination takes its place: “our ‘I’—our deepest identity—is neither our social roles nor our beliefs nor our feelings nor our attachments nor our defenses nor our possessions, but that inner searchlight we brighten or dim *by choice*” (75).

But as the book proceeds, Branden relies to a great extent on a somewhat different understanding of free will. He describes free will in terms of metacognition (thinking about thinking) or reflective consciousness, casting the ultimate choice as the choice to move to a higher level of reflection or not. Indeed, from the first chapter, he declares:

One of the unique characteristics of our form of consciousness is that it is *self-reflexive*—meaning that mind can examine its own processes. We can ask, how did I arrive at that conclusion? Do I really know my reasons? Am I being influenced by prejudice? Do I have grounds to believe this is true, or do I merely *want* it to be true? Am I being logical right now? Do my conclusions follow from my premises? We can monitor not only our mental operations but virtually

any aspect of our existence. We can ask: Who am I? What do I want? Where am I going? For what purpose should I live? Are my actions in alignment with that purpose? Am I proud of my choices and decisions? . . . A less evolved consciousness does not and cannot question its operations. A dog does not wonder if it is being swayed by inappropriate considerations. A chimpanzee does not ask itself if its goals are rational. (36)

Chapter 3 is, in fact, subtitled “Knowing What We Are Doing While We Are Doing It,” and “the simplest application of mindfulness” is said to be “being present to what I am doing while I am doing it” (66). Many other statements in these two chapters have a clear metacognitive thrust. Some pertain to knowing that we need to know more, and acting on this knowledge: “To the extent I operate consciously, I continually reach out for information relevant to my purposes. To the extent I don’t, I assume knowledge is unnecessary, that I know all I need to know, or that what I don’t know won’t hurt me” (81). Others raise the vital need for self-awareness, which is necessarily a reflective form of knowledge: “Observe that self-awareness keeps coming up in every issue we discuss. Learning to recognize our avoidance impulses and not be controlled by them is only one instance” (92). Still others stress the importance of asking ourselves why we believe what we believe: “One of the characteristics of living consciously is that we seek to understand the reasons for our beliefs—and are not resentful or defensive if someone asks us to name them” (125).

The metacognitive content of mindfulness, or bringing more consciousness to one’s activities, promises a link between Branden’s account of free will and some recent developments in psychological theory, particularly the theory of hierarchical levels of knowing and their role in human development (Campbell and Bickhard 1986; Moshman 1995). The theory of knowing levels has already proved useful in dealing with some outstanding problems in distinguishing explicit from implicit knowledge (Campbell 2000a). Working out the connection with free will requires an article of its own, of course, but



the compatibility between Branden's "clinical" musings and some deep theory in contemporary academic psychology should be clear.

Branden lucidly displays the connections between failure to examine one's own thinking and feeling, acting irresponsibly, and suffering a loss of self-esteem.

One of the ways we avoid taking responsibility for our actions when doing something we are not proud of or will be ashamed of later is *to blank out in the moment of action that it is we who are doing what we are doing.*

We "find" ourselves striking our spouse. We "find" ourselves in bed with a stranger. We "find" we have emptied the bottle of scotch. We "find" we have broken our promise.

And too often, when we suffer the consequences of our unconsciousness, we do not ask, "How can I learn to be more conscious?" Instead we ask, "Why is life so difficult? Why do unhappy things always happen to me?"

To remain stuck in this predicament is humiliating. It is offensive to one's dignity. It deprives one of the experience of personal power. . . . There is no better beginning for self-esteem than a determination to choose and act consciously—and take responsibility. (78)

Chapter 5 ("Self-Awareness: Examining Our Inner World") is also quite compatible with the theme of reflective consciousness. Since his split with Rand in 1968, Branden has placed increasing emphasis on the importance of inner experience as well as outer experience: on being in touch with one's own feelings, as well as with the external world. Consistent with this message, Chapter 5 stresses the importance of consciousness of our bodies and of our feelings, and illustrates how unconscious of them some people become.

Chapter 6 ("Consciousness and Self-Esteem") ties living consciously back to self-esteem. The connections are netted out as the

six pillars of self-esteem (Branden 1994): living consciously, self-acceptance, self-responsibility, self-assertiveness, living purposefully, and personal integrity. All of these ultimately depend on a commitment to rationality, and a healthy respect for reality. A key passage in the chapter (171–75) responds to recent attacks on self-esteem, specifically the contention by Baumeister et al. (1996) that persons with high self-esteem are prone to violence when their high opinion of themselves is threatened. How a clinician can effectively respond to claims like Baumeister's (and make sure that Baumeister's fellow academics have heard the response) are important matters that I revisit at the end of this review.

Chapter 7 (“Consciousness and Spirituality”) takes on several important challenges to the view of human life that Branden is putting forward. Branden argues that living consciously, particularly insofar as it expresses a passionate commitment to clarity and understanding, is a profoundly spiritual thing to do. And he seeks to unhook spirituality from mysticism. The reappraisal of mysticism (181–211) is of major significance, because in the past Branden followed Rand in conflating mysticism with a wide array of non-mystical religious beliefs and practices; here he is clearly cognizant of the differences. Moreover, the defense of mysticism that he takes seriously is derived from his colleague Ken Wilber (e.g., 1981), and Wilber has written about mysticism with rare brilliance and systematic thinking. (If other advocates of Eastern spiritual practices wrote like Ken Wilber, I would long since have become a scholar of their literature.)

Branden's willingness to take mysticism seriously should not be confused with willingness to accept the claims made on its behalf. Branden sharply questions the epistemic status of mystical illumination. He does not think that the alleged superior expertise of a mystic deserves the same response from us as the superior expertise of a doctor or a lawyer. While accepting Wilber's premise (drawn from Jean Piaget, among others), that in the course of human evolution new, higher stages of psychological development may come into being, Branden wants to know why functioning at a higher stage of development would lead us, not merely to transcend certain errors, or to examine assumptions wrongly taken for granted, but to toss out the

entire “mental-egoic” understanding of the world as an illusion. The hardest-hitting portion of the chapter (211–26) is aimed at the moral claims so regularly made by mystics—that true enlightenment must lead to selflessness and renunciation of individuality. Branden rejects Wilber’s claim that when we truly understand ourselves and the universe, we see that all is Atman or Geist or cosmic spirit, and come to spurn individuality as an illusion. He indicts the ability of mystics to respond adaptively to conditions in this world, using language that would not look the slightest bit out of place in Rand’s essays:

Notice, even today, with the worldwide collapse of collectivist economies, how grudgingly the Vatican acknowledges the achievements of free minds and semi-free markets in raising the quality of our lives. Notice the resentment that still attaches to the word *profit* by glowering, cassocked Rip van Winkles who still think they are living in the year 1200 and have not yet discovered the industrial age, let alone the information age. (222)

Clearly, then, Branden has not wavered from his long-held view that human beings ought to exercise their reason in order to discern what is really good for them as individuals, and that morality ultimately consists in living a humanly good life—not in giving it up for others.

## **Ontological Nuances**

Branden’s interest in sorting out spirituality from mysticism seems to have led him to venture a few speculations about the nature of mind. Obviously these were not meant as a primary theme of the book, but I find them interesting and valuable all the same. Rand’s contribution to this subject consisted primarily of defending certain unavoidable aspects of what our minds do (acquiring knowledge through observation and inference, and exercising free will). And Rand famously denied any diremption, metaphysically or morally, between mind and body (Sciabarra 1995; Machan 1999). She made

fundamental points of critical importance; as the history of Western thought amply indicates, we all need to be reminded of them from time to time. But they leave open most questions of psychological ontology: What do minds consist of? What does knowledge consist of? Just what is the relationship between mind and body? Not only are there significant gaps in Rand's epistemology—for instance, no worked out philosophy of science—there are unanswered questions concerning the epistemological theories that she did put forward, most notably her theory of concepts (e.g., Campbell 2000b; 2000c; Machan 1999; Register 2000). Branden suggests:

There is a sense in which our entire body can be viewed as part of our brain—that is, it contains and processes information, stores shocks and traumas to which the conscious mind is oblivious, and influences our emotions and thoughts. Notice how something as simple as a bad cold can affect our feelings and emotions. A long-forgotten childhood trauma—say, a physical beating or an act of sexual molestation—whose imprint is left not only in the subconscious but also in the body itself can affect an adult's ability to handle intimacy: he or she may experience a disabling fear that the body has been carrying for decades. (133)

I have no difficulty with the idea that a person's usual posture, or habitual pattern of muscular tension in different parts of the body, can be an enduring response to past psychological harms. How we understand this passage, however, depends on what we think it means for anything to contain or process information, or to store it, or to bear an imprint. Clearly, Branden is attributing epistemic meanings to these words. He is not saying that the imprint left on a human being from being sexually molested is quite like the imprint left on a piece of paper by a Xerox machine; he is not saying that the shocks stored in a person's body are quite like the tension stored in a spring or the electrical charge stored in a battery. Whether knowledge is in any sense an imprint or whether a feeling could in any sense be a stored shock are deep questions of psychological ontology. Neither

Rand's writings nor Branden's provide answers to such questions.

Later on, in direct response to the mystical traditions that treat reality as fundamentally consisting of mind, Branden notes:

We are not compelled to seek to “reduce” consciousness to matter or matter to consciousness. We can justifiably maintain that neither matter nor consciousness is reducible to the other. There are powerful intellectual arguments against such reductionism and no good reason to make the attempt. Metaphysically, mind and matter are *different*. But if they are different in every respect, the problem of explaining their interaction appears insuperable. . . .

There is nothing inherently illogical—nothing that contradicts the rest of our knowledge—in positing some underlying reality of which both matter and consciousness are manifestations. . . . If [mind and physical reality] have a common source, then they do have a point of commonality that makes their ability to interact less puzzling. (201–2)

Difficult questions open up here. Branden is quite right to object to eliminative reductionism—the idea that minds are nothing but arrangements of matter, and that the laws of psychology can be eliminated in favor of the laws of physiology, once these are known in sufficient detail. But there are also treatments of mind as emergent from organizations of matter; on these accounts, minds may have properties that are qualitatively different from those of inanimate matter (Bickhard 2000). Meanwhile, if there is a common something of which mind and matter are manifestations, that something and the laws of its functioning need to be specified, and their compatibility with what is known about physics (as well as what is known about psychology) needs to be assessed. After all, Spinoza (1996) thought that mind and matter were both attributes of the same underlying reality—and concluded from his model of this underlying reality that they cannot truly interact. I do not mean to attribute Spinoza's ontology to Branden, who may have some kind of “neutral monism”

in mind—or a position substantially different from either of these. Nor am I going to pretend that no significant difficulties lie in the path of emergentism. To satisfy Branden's requirements, emergentism doesn't "just" have to explain how knowledge came into being in entities that were previously incapable of knowing. It also has to explain how free will came into being among organisms whose choices, up to that time, were entirely determined by antecedent factors.

### **Bringing Conscious Living and Self-Esteem into Academic Discourse**

We could debate at some length whether Branden is making the right suggestions about these ontological matters. The important thing is that it's just now becoming possible to talk about them in academic circles. For the past century, American psychologists avoided such questions. Positivists scorned them because they were metaphysical. Behaviorists went farther, rejecting any claims about mental processes as outside the realm of science. Even after the cognitive revolution that overthrew behaviorism in the 1950s, research psychologists remained, for the most part, uncomfortable talking about consciousness or conscious experience (Baars 1986); the taboo has gradually lifted over the past fifteen years. The prohibition against talk of free will (almost universally viewed as dangerous speculation that could get psychology's scientific credentials revoked) is just now being challenged, at the turn of the twenty-first century. A full issue of the *Journal of Consciousness Studies* (Libet, Freeman, and Sunderland 1999) has been devoted to conceptions of free will, and explicit discussions of free will and determinism are beginning to show up in the leading journals of mainstream academic psychology (Bargh and Ferguson, in press). These discussions are still quite elementary. Bargh and Ferguson, for instance, tend to mix up information-processing theories with eighteenth century associationism. They spend most of their article pointing to evidence that some apparently conscious mental processes have non-conscious determinants; in the final section they hasten to add that "of course" when

mental processes are fully conscious, they also have determinants.

Bargh and Ferguson actually attribute to their colleagues the belief that any fully conscious mental process must be an instance of free will. I doubt that the profession harbors so many covert believers in free will, but I do think we have reached the point where the prominent emphasis on free choice in Branden's conceptions of consciousness and self-esteem will no longer trigger an automatic disqualification from academic discussions. Of course, there is a long way to go. The quality of the present-day academic attempts to come to grips with free will and self-esteem usually seems little advanced over the struggles that William James (1890) had with these issues. It's hard to make progress toward a solution if you spend one hundred years avoiding the problem (Baars 1986).

Given the openings that are beginning to appear, the question naturally arises how Branden could get academics to heed his counters to commonplace misunderstandings of self-esteem. In a brief reply to Roy Baumeister, Branden points out how Baumeister runs right over elementary distinctions. "Nothing in [Baumeister's] idea of self-esteem would allow one to distinguish between an individual whose self-esteem is rooted in the practices of living consciously, self-responsibility, and personal integrity—that is, one whose self-esteem is rooted in *reality*—and one whose 'self-esteem' consists of grandiosity, exaggerated notions of one's accomplishments, megalomania, and 'favorable global self-evaluations' induced by drugs and alcohol" (174–75).

But a lot more could be said, and needs to be said, to the academic audience. Another theoretical question we could ask would be whether anyone needs self-esteem, if Baumeister is right. Given Baumeister's assumptions, this is the same as asking whether it is actually good for anybody to be vain, conceited, or overbearing. For Baumeister, as for Thomas Hobbes (1968), the propensity to vanity is a brute fact of human nature; everyone automatically strives to satisfy its demands. In fact, Baumeister referred in the title of one of his books to "the puzzle of low self-regard": if each of us is a Hobbesian untamed ego, eager to go and grab at everyone else's expense, aren't we automatically going to regard ourselves as the

greatest thing since sliced bread? Whether gratifying vanity is actually good for the individual is not a meaningful question. It's something that the individual can't help wanting.

There are also issues of empirical method that need to be brought out for the academic audience. The standard procedure for assessing self-esteem in academic research is self-report questionnaires. Answers to such questionnaires, as any clinician knows, can be untruthful, even deluded; it is fair to say that no practicing clinician would accept the client's say-so as a sufficient indication of his or her level of self-esteem. Moreover, in contemporary American culture, it has become socially desirable to report a high level of self-esteem—whether one really feels it or not. Other, less direct methods than those employed by Baumeister et al. will have to be worked out if we are to get a handle on people's levels of self-esteem. One of the new approaches that shows promise, in fact, has been adapted from the sentence-completion exercises that Branden uses in various of his books, including *The Art of Living Consciously* (Foddis 1999; Farrell 2000).

In sum, there is no reason why *The Art of Living Consciously*, and the theories of consciousness and self-esteem that it puts forward, cannot take center stage in some of the critical debates currently going on in academic psychology. Branden's work merely needs a few more advocates and bridge-builders in academia. Recently, I reviewed a book by Susan Blackmore (1999), an advocate of memetics who, partly under the influence of memetics and partly under the influence of Buddhist teachings, denies that human beings have a self (or by implication, any reflective or metacognitive capacities whatsoever). Rather, Blackmore maintains, we have been colonized by a "memplex"—a system of mind-parasitic units of knowledge or imitative behavior—that makes us think that we have a self and that we are in control of what we do. In my review (Campbell, 2000d), I cited *The Art of Living Consciously* (194) on the unavoidability of the individual self, even in the midst of efforts to transcend selfhood. Blackmore dismissively retorted, "a clinical psychologist' . . . commented (as though it was an obvious fact) that as long as there is awareness there is self. This may be a common view but [it] is not



one that stands much scrutiny” (2000, 255).

Very few academic psychologists actually buy into an extreme anti-self position like Blackmore’s. The day may not be far off when the walls of the chasm begin to draw closer together and other academics also find themselves citing a “clinical psychologist” in support of human individuality, metacognition, and the reality of the self (all of which will take a lot more scrutiny than Blackmore imagines). Should this come to pass, I predict that Nathaniel Branden’s books will be among the first to get promoted from beach to office reading.

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