

break free!

an interview with nathaniel branden

With pleasure *REASON* publishes the first candid, comprehensive interview with Nathaniel Branden. One of the original intellects of the Objectivist movement, he is the founder of a new approach to psychology—which he calls “Biocentric Psychology”—and which was first introduced in his book *THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SELF-ESTEEM*.

Nathaniel Branden was born in Brampton, Ontario, in 1930. He grew up in Toronto and studied psychology at UCLA and NYU. He was initially attracted to the ideas of Ayn Rand through reading *THE FOUNTAINHEAD*. His association with Miss Rand, from their initial meeting in 1951, is well-known. He organized Nathaniel Branden Institute, a lecture organization that offered courses on Miss Rand’s philosophy of Objectivism as well as on his own psychological theories in more than eighty cities throughout the

U.S., Canada, and abroad. He co-founded *THE OBJECTIVIST NEWSLETTER* with Miss Rand in 1962 and was co-editor of this publication (which subsequently became *THE OBJECTIVIST*) until 1968. Through his various lectures, public appearances, and numerous articles, he has been second only to Miss Rand herself in the presentation, clarification, and advancement of the principles of the Objectivist philosophy.

His association with Ayn Rand terminated in the summer of 1968. In the pages of *THE OBJECTIVIST* Miss Rand announced that Mr. Branden was no longer associated with her or with her work. In answer to her various charges against him, Mr. Branden responded with a detailed paper, entitled “In Answer to Ayn Rand,” one section of which was written by him, the other by Barbara Branden. The actual details of the conflict

between Miss Rand and Mr. Branden were and remain a mystery.

But, following the announcement of their break, the small world of students of Objectivism suffered a traumatic shock. Business associates and friends of many years parted ways when they found that they stood on opposite sides in this conflict—some favoring Miss Rand, others favoring Mr. Branden. Those who took Miss Rand’s “side” evidently accepted her position without reservation or question, committing themselves to the view that it was morally wrong to grant any credibility to Mr. Branden’s answer to Miss Rand’s charges. Those who acknowledged the possibility that there could be any justice on Mr. Branden’s side were held in contempt by Miss Rand’s partisans and were repudiated as “betrayers of Objectivism.”



Subsequent to the break, Mr. Branden moved to Los Angeles, opened a therapeutic practice, and established the Institute of Biocentric Psychology. His first major theoretical work in psychology, *THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SELF-ESTEEM*, was published by Nash Publishing Company in the fall of 1969 and issued in paper back by Bantam Books in the spring of 1971. His next book, *BREAKING FREE*—which deals with the childhood origins of negative self-concepts—was published by Nash in the fall of 1970. He has also had articles published in the *SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA LAW REVIEW* and in *THE PERSONALIST*; he presented a paper on the psychology of romantic love at the 1970 Annual Conference of The American Psychological Association. He has lectured on the philosophical foundations of the biological and psychological sciences at the University of Southern

California and is presently on the faculty of the California Graduate Institute. Through the Institute of Biocentric Psychology he offers training to psychologists, marriage counselors, and psychiatrists in his theories and methods and, in addition, conducts Personal Growth Workshops open to the general public.

His office, an attractive three-room suite on the fourth floor of a modern building on Sunset Boulevard, at the edge of Beverly Hills, is appropriately decorated with a poster, entitled "Break Free," of a chick escaping from an egg shell. The poster was given to him by a client.

Quite unlike his New York days, when one could hardly approach him without extensive preparation—when he struck many observers as smug, remote, and almost always preoccupied—today Nathaniel Branden may frequently be

found lunching with visitors who express interest in his work, his manner relaxed, enthusiastic, and friendly.

The *REASON* staff (complete with tape recorders, camera, and note pads) descended on the Brandens' Greek-modern home on a hot Sunday afternoon in August. The house rests on top of a mountain and offers a beautiful view of the city. Seated around the spacious, glass-walled living room, the staff—led by interviewer Michael Etchison—questioned Mr. Branden for over five hours, delving into a wide variety of topics. Also present were Nathaniel's wife, actress Patrecia Wynand, and their Schnauzer, a dog named "Pussy Cat." After the tapes of the session were transcribed and the 30,000 word text was edited, Mr. Branden reviewed the manuscript and gave it his approval.

We at *REASON* found it fascinating. Here is what was said:

REASON: What motivates a person to become a psychologist?

BRANDEN: Well, I suppose you're asking what motivated *me* to become a psychologist? The answer won't be the same for every psychologist.

Not a great deal is known about the factors in childhood that doubtless underlie a person's choice of career—I'm talking now about a career to which one is passionately committed, in contradistinction to a career chosen merely as a means of earning a living.

I cannot remember a time when the question of why people behave as they do was not intensely interesting to me. The desire to understand was very important. When I was young I was aware of the fact that much of the time the reasons a person gave for his actions were not the actual reasons. When I was a child I felt at times that I had been born into an insane asylum, that much of human life appeared to be an insane asylum. It was bewildering.

I was fourteen years old when I decided to go into psychology. A book dealing with psychology somehow fell into my hands—I don't remember how—but, anyway, I remember looking through the book and slowly grasping the kind of questions with which psychology deals, the kind of problems to which psychology addresses itself. It immediately excited me. I felt a strong emotional pull. These were the kinds of problems, the kinds of challenges, the kinds of intellectual questions that I wanted to work on. That's how it felt.

REASON: Was it always your intention to practice therapy?

BRANDEN: No. I did not make that decision until my twenties. Earlier I thought I would earn my living teaching psychology at some university. I thought of myself primarily as a theorist; I still do. But then, in my twenties, I began to work with a few people, doing therapy, and discovered that this was the way to learn the things I wanted to learn; this was my best means of doing research.

REASON: What was your reaction to academic psychology when you entered college?

BRANDEN: It was very disappointing, very boring, very frustrating. I had a sense that almost everything I was taught was irrelevant. I decided that the science of psychology did not yet exist, that it was a science waiting to be born.

REASON: You were never sympathetic to Freudianism?

BRANDEN: Never. Between the ages of 24 and 27 I read Freud's complete works, everything that had been translated into English. It was very stimulating intellectually. But I did not accept his view of neurosis or of human nature.

REASON: What about behaviorism?

BRANDEN: I have always regarded behaviorism as a farce. I give my reasons for this view in Chapter I of *THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SELF-ESTEEM*.

The attempt to study man and to understand his behavior—while treating as irrelevant the fact that he is conscious, that he is able to be aware of reality—is so irrational, so preposterous, that I continue to be amazed at the popularity of behaviorism in this country. It is philosophically naive. It reflects the metaphysics of crude, 19th century materialism, a position that most philosophers properly have rejected and repudiated long ago. Behaviorists, of course, tend to be very disdainful of philosophy. But when a person chooses to be ignorant of philosophy, to turn his back on philosophy, something no scientist can afford to do, the sole result is that he ends up espousing philosophical nonsense. Which is precisely what has happened with behaviorism.

REASON: Are there psychologists whose work you admire?

BRANDEN: Well, I read constantly in the field of psychology and I have learned from many writers. You don't have to agree with a person's total position to learn from him.

REASON: What are your views of, say, Abraham Maslow?

BRANDEN: I like his opposition to psychoanalysis and behaviorism. But I don't think he was very profound as a theoretician. I think his most valuable and important idea is that human needs exist in a hierarchy; that is, that needs of a certain level must be satisfied before the next levels of higher needs assert themselves, and *they* must be satisfied before the next levels of higher needs assert themselves, and so on. I don't necessarily agree with his view of what *are* man's needs, in all cases, but that's another question. Also, I admire Maslow for the fact that he chose to study healthy people, superior people, what he called the "self-actualizing personality," in contrast to the majority of psychologists who seem to be interested only in neurosis and deficiency.

REASON: Frederick Perls?

BRANDEN: I think Perls' development of Gestalt Therapy was a major achievement. While I have my disagreements with his position, his approach to therapy is more compatible with my own theoretical views concerning human nature than any other approach of which I have knowledge. I have incorporated a number of the techniques of Gestalt Therapy into my own way of doing therapy. Many of Perls' techniques for developing self-awareness are stunningly effective. And his method of dream interpretation—if you're going to go in for dream interpretation at all—makes everything else written on the subject obsolete. If you're familiar with Gestalt Therapy, and if you have read *THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SELF-ESTEEM*, I think you would know why I would find much of the Gestalt approach congenial to my own way of thinking.

REASON: What do you think of Albert Ellis?

BRANDEN: I don't admire Ellis. I think his approach to psychology and therapy is superficial. His idea that emotions proceed from our thoughts is right, of course, in a very general sense. But his theoretical understanding of emotions is weak. He's very weak on theory in almost all respects. And, as a therapist, his approach implicitly denies the client's responsibility for his own existence; he denies the client's autonomy. All this business about "pressuring" the client, "cajoling" him, "propagandizing" him implies an utter lack of respect for the client's mind. Ellis would deny this, but I believe his approach is basically authoritarian. It's funny that he calls his system "rational-emotive therapy," because he doesn't seem to be very interested in reason *or* emotions; I think he really practices a type of behavior-modification therapy.

REASON: B. F. Skinner?

BRANDEN: Well, Skinner is, of course, America's leading neo-behaviorist. And I've already said what I think of behaviorism. Skinner has made it clear that he believes in a political élite of psychologists—in effect, a dictatorship of psychological "experts"—running the country and controlling people's lives for the purpose of "preserving and perpetuating the culture." I do not believe in "benevolent" dictatorships. But, make no mistake about it, many psychologists do, and Skinner represents a wish-fulfillment for many of them.

REASON: Thomas Szasz?

BRANDEN: Szasz's chief contribution, in my opinion, is to have drawn attention to the appalling victimization of mental patients in our psychiatric hospitals, to

have emphasized the evil of confining people to mental hospitals involuntarily, and to have warned of the dangerous political implications of "community psychiatry." On this subject, I agree with him completely. I do not, however, agree with his view that mental illness is a "myth," and I discuss my reasons in *THE DISOWNED SELF*.

REASON: What about Arthur Janov, author of *THE PRIMAL SCREAM*?

BRANDEN: The major virtue of Janov's *THE PRIMAL SCREAM* is his emphasis on the distortions of personality development that can result from the repression of childhood pain. He is not the first psychologist to draw attention to this issue, but he describes the process very effectively. However, contrary to what he claims, there is much more to therapy than derepressing and reexperiencing childhood pain and much more to mental health than being able to experience one's feelings. Janov has taken one small part of therapy and blown it up into a whole system. I think his work owes an enormous debt to Wilhelm Reich, incidentally, which Janov does not acknowledge. And Janov is appallingly anti-intellectual and anti-rational, and I have heard the products of his therapy described as often inclined to be rather self-indulgent vegetables, which I surmised as a very real danger when I read the book. I don't say that no one has benefited from his type of therapy because people apparently have benefited from every kind of therapy known—including having a brick fall on their head or taking an ocean voyage. Almost any kind of experience can sometimes be therapeutic for a given individual. From reading his publicity, one gathers that Janov is group of the fact that professors who have been through his therapy happily give up their careers and become milkmen; I would think it a more laudable achievement to help milkmen to become professors, but that may be a difference in our standard of value.

I think that whatever is valuable in his message is obscured by his grandiosity. He makes the most extravagant and grandiose claims for his therapy method that have ever been made by anyone to my knowledge in the history of the science. This is going to lead to a very negative after effect for him because people are going to go to him with very high hopes and in the end they will be disappointed and he will, I suspect, have an awful lot of people very mad at him. It will take a few years because as a colleague of mine pointed out, when you spend that much money as his method of therapy requires, you're not going to be in a hurry to decide that perhaps you didn't get what you were promised but after a while that thought begins to sink in.

REASON: What do you regard as your most important contributions in psychology to date?

BRANDEN: The theory of self-esteem and its role in human motivation—I would mention that first. Also, the theory of "Social Metaphysics," the explanation of dependency and conformity and so forth. I would include my identification of the principle of "psychological visibility" and its application to human relationships in general and romantic love in particular. Certain things I have defined about the psychology of sex. My analysis of the nature and meaning of mental health. My work in placing volition and psychological freedom of choice on a biological foundation. It was Ayn Rand, of course, who identified free will as the choice to think or not to think, to focus the mind or to avoid the responsibility of doing so. But she never sought to defend her position; she merely announced it. What I provided was the theoretical elaboration and the biological foundation. Finally, I attach considerable importance to my treatment of the relationship of reason and emotion, as presented in *THE DISOWNED SELF*.

REASON: When will *THE DISOWNED SELF* be published?

BRANDEN: It is scheduled for publication in November, 1971.

REASON: Can you say anything about your practice as a therapist?

BRANDEN: A good deal of what I do as a therapist is presented in *THE DISOWNED SELF*, although it is not a book on therapy and it does not cover everything I do. My approach to therapy is in a continual process of evolution. I work with many different techniques. I am an experimentalist. Some of my techniques were originated by myself, others were borrowed or adapted from the work of others. I am interested in some of the things being done not only in Gestalt Therapy but also in Bioenergetic Therapy, such as the work being done by Alexander Lowen. One doesn't have to agree with all of the theoretical presuppositions behind the therapeutic approaches of these schools to recognize and admire the effectiveness of some of their techniques. So, as I say, sometimes I incorporate some of their methods into my own approach to therapy.

REASON: Do you find that your present work continues to support and confirm your earlier theories?

BRANDEN: In most cases, yes. What I am chiefly aware of, so far, is omissions in my earlier work that need to be filled in. Then there is the matter of shifts of

emphasis. The transition from the *PSYCHOLOGY OF SELF-ESTEEM* to *THE DISOWNED SELF* is a case in point.

You know, some time ago, I held two all-day workshops devoted to the problem of psychological dependency—the problem that I have described as "social metaphysics." While I did not tell this to the participants, one of my private purposes, aside from helping the people involved, was to see if I could test, or even refute, my own theories on the subject, as presented in *THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SELF-ESTEEM*, or perhaps find some significant errors. It was the kind of intellectual exercise I like to do whenever I can. In that case, I failed. The basic theory stands. I think I know a good deal more on this subject than I did when I wrote that chapter but nothing that contradicts it.

It is so easy to look at reality through the spectacles of yesterday's theories and insights and thereby to miss important facts. Obviously, one cannot jump outside one's own head, nor would one really want to. But I try to be as open to the novel and the unexpected as I can. That's what makes life interesting.

REASON: What are your views on homosexuality?

BRANDEN: I am inclined to regard homosexuality as a problem of developmental adaptation—by which I mean that at a certain point of growing up the sexual component of an individual's maturation became diverted.

I do not think the available evidence supports the claim, made by some, that homosexuality is a genetically determined condition.

I want to say that I regard the legal and social persecution of homosexuals as barbaric. I have known a good many male and female homosexuals and do not regard them, apart from their sexual problem, as being any more disturbed than anyone else who comes into therapy, or, for that matter, any average person walking down the street. I think that some of the above obvious neurotic symptoms that some homosexuals display are a result of the pressure under which they exist in our culture.

I am aware, of course, that there are many who regard homosexuality as an entirely valid optional alternative to heterosexuality. Within the context of my

present understanding of the psychology of sex, I cannot agree with them. I have certain hypotheses on this subject, that I hope I will have the chance to test at some future date. But I don't wish to say more at this time.

REASON: Is much of your time taken up with therapy?

BRANDEN: At present I conduct seven therapy groups a week and I'll soon be starting an eighth; each is two hours in length. Except for interviewing new clients, the rest of my time is free for studying, research, and writing. Oh yes, in addition I offer all-day workshops approximately once a month—workshops devoted to cultivating self-awareness and personal growth—which are open not only to my regular clients but to other interested persons as well.

REASON: Why did you choose to specialize in group therapy?

BRANDEN: For several reasons. First, for most of the cases that come to me I consider it the most effective way to work, the most efficient and productive, far more so than individual therapy. If someone comes in who I do not think is suitable for group therapy, I refer him to another therapist. Second, I enjoy group therapy enormously; I find it very demanding, challenging, and exciting. The kind of group therapy I practice is much harder than individual therapy, in my experience. But also much more rewarding. Third, it has the value of being less costly to the client. And fourth, it allows me to work with a great many

people—I see more than a hundred people a week—and, from a research point of view, this is very valuable.

REASON: What do you enjoy most about doing therapy?

BRANDEN: I enjoy the challenge of having to devise means to help solve personal problems—sometimes, to have to improvise new techniques and methods. I enjoy the process of learning more and more about human psychology. And I enjoy the drama of watching human beings struggle to grow, to break free, to fulfill their potentialities; sometimes that can be very inspiring.

REASON: What do you see as the chief goal of therapy?

BRANDEN: Stated very abstractly, I would say: to remove obstructions to awareness. To assist the client in being in better contact with himself and with the world. Above all, to assist him in achieving better self-awareness. When he is self-aware, then he is free to choose how he wants to function, to choose what he wants to do with his life.

The three cardinal values of mental health, as I continually tell my clients, are *self-awareness, self-responsibility* and *self-assertiveness*. To be aware, to take responsibility for what one does, and to assert one's own thoughts, needs, feelings, values, and goals.

REASON: Going back to your reference about the relationship of reason and emotions, is there a shift of viewpoint in

THE DISOWNED SELF relative to your earlier book, *THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SELF-ESTEEM*?

BRANDEN: There is certainly a shift in emphasis, and there is a growth of understanding on my part. I really regard *THE DISOWNED SELF* as, in effect, a sequel to *THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SELF-ESTEEM*. What is not made sufficiently clear in *THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SELF-ESTEEM*, because at the time of writing it this issue was not sufficiently clear to me, but what is stressed again and again in *THE DISOWNED SELF* is that if we are not in good touch with what we feel, we cannot think clearly in the areas where we are emotionally blocked. If we attempt to cut off our intellect from the rest of our person, we produce intellectual distortions. Reason and emotion must function in integrated harmony, or distortions result in both spheres. I work with a great many intellectuals who mistakenly imagine that in order to think clearly the first thing they must do is sacrifice any awareness of their emotions; the result is disaster for their thinking. When it comes to dealing with problems in their personal lives, they become like helpless children—they make themselves into helpless children.

In any issue where values are involved, if we do not know what we feel, if we do not know what we need, want, are frustrated by or long for, we cannot perceive reality clearly, we cannot function effectively in the intellectual sphere. The operations of our consciousness are sabotaged.

REASON: What is the relationship between self-esteem, on the one hand, and, on the other, self-awareness, self-responsibility, and self-assertiveness?

BRANDEN: Self-esteem is the consequence, the consequence of practicing and accepting self-awareness, self-responsibility, and self-assertiveness.

Of course, the relationship tends to be reciprocal. The more one is self-aware, self-responsible, and self-assertive, the more one has self-esteem. And the more one has self-esteem, the easier it is to be self-aware, self-responsible and self-assertive.

REASON: From what source do you chiefly draw your clients?

BRANDEN: When I first moved to Los Angeles, my first clients were former students of Nathaniel Branden Institute (N.B.I.). Today, the chief source of clients is either readers of my books and/or referrals from other clients who worked with me or are still working with me.

REASON: Do you feel that it is possible to derive much therapeutic value from reading your books?



BRANDEN: I can't speak with certainty. I have received many letters from readers of *THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SELF-ESTEEM* and *BREAKING FREE* who declare that they have received immense value from reading the books and they say that the books changed their lives. Sometimes they describe at great length how and in what way the books helped them, and some of the letters sound very convincing. I don't think there is any question but that books can be immensely helpful to a person's psychological development, depending on the quality of the books, of course. I'm not suggesting that books can be a substitute for psychotherapy in all cases, because they can't; but I do believe they can be very helpful and, perhaps, when there are enough of the right kind of books available to the general public, fewer people will need psychotherapy. I hope so.

REASON: How many therapists are there at present practicing your kind of therapy?

BRANDEN: No one works exactly as I do. I have not yet written a book on therapy, as you know, but I suspect that one day I will. There are psychologists and psychiatrists who profess agreement with my books and who use the ideas in their own practice; but each works in his own individual style. I am training a few psychotherapists at present, but they are not yet in independent practice.

My publisher tells me that an increasing number of book orders are coming in from colleges and universities, suggesting that the books are finding their way into psychology classes. So what will happen in the future, I do not know.

REASON: It is known that you sometimes permit other professionals to sit in on your groups as observers, to study your methods. What has been the general reaction?

BRANDEN: On the whole, the response has been positive—quite enthusiastic, in some cases.

REASON: At what point do you regard a person as ready to terminate therapy?

BRANDEN: That depends on the purpose for which a person sought therapy in the first place. For example, suppose a person comes in because of migraine headaches. When he no longer has the headaches, he may wish to leave therapy. Or, if a person comes in because of a potency problem, and he solves it, again he may wish to leave therapy. Often, however, a person comes into therapy, solves some or all of the problems for which he initially sought help, but then decides to remain to work on other aspects of personality development. From my standpoint, a person is ready to leave therapy when he has

achieved relative competence at self-awareness, is able to acknowledge responsibility for his own life, and is not afraid of self-assertiveness *and* when he is able to function effectively in the key areas of life: productive work, human relationships, and romantic love.

REASON: What are your thoughts concerning the use of hypnosis in therapy?

BRANDEN: Sometimes it can be very effective. Especially, perhaps, in the treatment of psychosomatic ailments. I think that every therapist should be trained in the uses of hypnosis. Most therapists are appallingly ignorant of its uses and potentialities. At present, I don't work with it, because it is better suited to individual therapy than group therapy. But even in group it can occasionally be very effective.

REASON: What are your thoughts about the use of marijuana?

BRANDEN: Anti-marijuana legislation should be repealed; there is no question about that. It is not the government's business, one way or the other, if people choose to use marijuana. From what I have read on the subject, it does not appear to be particularly harmful to people—no more so, at any rate, than alcohol. And perhaps, as is sometimes claimed, it is less harmful than alcohol can be. Obviously, if a person needs marijuana as a psychological crutch, he has a problem, just as he would have a problem if he needed alcohol as a psychological crutch.

REASON: LSD?

BRANDEN: LSD is a different matter entirely. Here, again, I do not think the government should intervene and make it illegal. But it is a very dangerous drug and for people to take it "for kicks" is the height of irrationality. Under its influence, persons have killed themselves or others. Sometimes, psychotic breakdowns have been precipitated. I think one has to be a fool to play with dynamite of that kind. Some people, of course, claim that taking LSD helps them psychologically. I have met more than one such person. And in my opinion they are crazy as hell. If LSD helped them, I shudder to think what they were like before they took it.

REASON: Do many of your clients come to you because of drug addiction?

BRANDEN: No, that's not the kind of work I specialize in. Occasionally such a person has come to me, but it's rare.

REASON: Are there any distinguishing characteristics among your clients that you've noticed?

BRANDEN: No. They come from every socio-economic background and every occupational background. They probably tend to be a bit more intelligent than the average person on the street, although not necessarily.

REASON: How do you deal with guilt in therapy?

BRANDEN: To begin with, a lot of guilt is phony. It is resentment against others which one does not wish to acknowledge, so one turns it against oneself as a defense. Dealing with it consists of helping the client to be aware of this fact.

Sometimes guilt is a way of getting oneself off the hook. "I'm worthless—so don't expect anything of me." There again, the job is to help the client become aware of what he is doing.

Sometimes the way to deal with guilt is for the client to stop engaging in the activity that's making him feel guilty. That's obvious, of course, but often it doesn't occur to people.

Sometimes one has to challenge the values by which the person is condemning himself—and expose their irrationality.

What is very important, however, is that the therapist do nothing to deepen the client's guilt, which many therapists do all too readily. I have known psychotherapists who managed to teach guilt every time they opened their mouth. I think that some of the things I have to say about self-acceptance in *THE DISOWNED SELF* will be helpful to people who are troubled with questions concerning guilt.

REASON: What is your position in therapy if your clients go on doing things you consider morally wrong?

BRANDEN: It's their lives, not mine, and they will have to live with the consequences. All I can hope to accomplish is to make them aware of what they are doing and how it is affecting them. But beyond that, they are responsible for themselves, as every human being is. I am not their father nor their priest nor their

moral guardian, and when and if any client tries to manipulate me into assuming that role, I refuse to do so.

REASON: Is it common for clients to attempt to manipulate you in that manner?

BRANDEN: It happens all the time. I don't mean only with me, but with every therapist. Many clients seek to manipulate their therapist into being a moral authority, and some therapists are all too eager to accept the role. I am not. I have moral convictions and I don't make a secret of them. I can respect and respond to a client's honest effort to resolve some moral confusion. But often the client who wants you to tell him what's right and wrong is seeking to maneuver you into taking responsibility for his life, and that I refuse to do.

REASON: Do you never introduce questions of morality into therapy?

BRANDEN: I don't give moral lectures, if that's what you mean, and I don't sermonize to clients on their misbehavior. They are all too expert at reproaching themselves; they don't need me to help them.

The chief moral issue that I am concerned with in therapy is *awareness*—the importance of awareness, of knowing what you are experiencing, of acknowledging what you are doing—and taking responsibility for it. The essence of morality is to be aware and to act in accordance with one's awareness. That's what I try to communicate in therapy, not so much by lengthy lectures on the subject but more by the way I work, by the way I approach problems. Of course, I should add that my clients usually read my books, so they know a good deal about my philosophical and moral convictions without my having to discuss those matters in therapy. My philosophical frame of reference is known to them, which doesn't mean they have to agree in all respects.

REASON: Let's talk about love. What's the biggest obstacle to two people who are in love being happy together?

BRANDEN: That's a big subject. Well, let's see.

Two issues immediately come to mind. The first is that most people harbor a deep-seated feeling or belief that no one can really love them, no one can really attach personal importance to them, no one can really regard them as a value. So they wait for this feeling to be confirmed; they wait for the evidence that the other party is losing interest, or doesn't really care, or whatever. They approach a love relationship with this basic fear and this basic expectation of rejection. And the fear drives them to act self-destructively,

to precipitate the very disaster they dread. Sometimes they reject the other person before the other person can reject them. Sometimes they behave disagreeably in order to "test" the other person's devotion.

Deeper than that, however, I would name another issue. The inability of most people to be fully real, fully authentic, fully genuine in their responses. Most people are self-alienated. They are cut off from themselves, cut off from their own feelings, needs, wants, desires, frustrations, longings, and so forth. They are dissociated. In that state, one cannot sustain an effective love relationship. All of this will be in my next book, the book that is to follow *THE DISOWNED SELF*. It will deal with the psychology of man/woman relationships.

REASON: Does the book have a title yet?

BRANDEN: No.

REASON: When will it be published?

BRANDEN: Hopefully, in the fall of 1972, although I'm not yet certain of that.

REASON: Do you think that it's possible for there to be deep love between a man and a woman without a sexual component?

BRANDEN: If you're talking about romantic love—certainly not. Not under normal circumstances, anyway. I mean, if one or another of the parties involved is physically incapacitated, so that sexual intercourse is impossible, there would still be love. And there will be sexual feelings, even if they cannot be fully implemented. So the sexual component is still there, and it would still be central and important, even if frustrated. And if it were frustrated over a long period of time, I suspect that the love, too, would suffer.

Perhaps if there were a great difference of age between the man and the woman, there could be a love that was not sexual. But then it would be a different sense of love entirely. Not what I think you are talking about.

One final point. A man and a woman might be happily in love with his or her own partner, and then meet, become friends, actually love each other, yet there might be no burning desire to consummate the relationship sexually. That might happen if each was fully happy, sexually and romantically, in his or her other relationship. And yet between them there would still be a sexual component, even if not expressed or felt passionately or acted on.

REASON: What about sex without love?

BRANDEN: What about it?

REASON: Do you approve of that?

BRANDEN: What am I, your mother? Are you asking my permission? Of course there can be sex without love. And sometimes it can be an immensely valuable experience for the persons involved. I'm not sure I like your use of the word "approval" in this context.

From a psychological point of view, from the standpoint of a person's psychological well-being, the question is not: sex with or without love?—but rather: sex with or without personal involvement? Sex without personal involvement, sex between two people who do not relate to each other as persons and do not care for each other as persons and are not interested in each other as persons, is degrading to both participants. However, it happens between people who are married all the time.

REASON: What are your thoughts about group sex?

BRANDEN: Americans have always loved to join groups—to do things together. We seem to be a nation of joiners. So now the doctrine of "togetherness" has found another form of expression: group sex.

I don't doubt that some people who are troubled by deep-seated inhibitions might find the experience liberating. Maybe. Until boredom or revulsion sets in.

Often, of course, a good deal of unacknowledged—or, for that matter, acknowledged—homosexuality gets gratified in group sex.

I'm not scandalized by the idea of group sex. I think it's pathetic. And stupid. Sex without individuality. Sex without spontaneity. My impression is that group sex is for people who don't know how to be real in bed.

REASON: If there is a stable relationship between two people in love, can there be such a thing as healthy adultery?

BRANDEN: Let's begin by clarifying what you mean by "adultery." Adultery usually involves deceit, that is, having a sexual relationship outside of marriage and without the knowledge of one's partner. Deceit is a very dangerous element to introduce into marriage. The catastrophe is often not the sexual adventure as such, but the deceit, the lies, the leading of a hidden life. That's poisonous.

REASON: But suppose the other partner in the marriage knows about it and consents?



BRANDEN: I hesitate to make any generalizations that will apply to the whole human race—I mean, on this subject. I know of cases where one partner in a marriage had an outside relationship with the knowledge and consent of his or her partner, and it was claimed that the marriage benefited from this. I am not prepared to say that this is impossible. On the other hand, in the great majority of cases I am convinced that such outside adventures undermine the primary relationship. This is what I have observed in my professional experience.

A great deal depends on the psychology and context of the individual couple, of course.

We have to acknowledge the fact that sexual monogamy can and often does pose immense problems for an individual. To the best of my knowledge, men and women have never been monogamous in any culture or society—not fully. There always has been sex outside of marriage. Not for everyone, of course, but for a great many people, at all times and in all places. That fact bears thinking about.

The issue is being faced today and dealt with more honestly than in the past, perhaps. People are less inclined to lie about it. And that is to the good. If people are going to seek sexual relationships outside of marriage, it's better to do so honestly, to recognize that risks are involved, serious risks, and to be willing to bear the consequences. It's better to act without self-deception or deception of one's partner. But anyone who avoids or minimizes the risks is kidding himself.

I realize that I am not giving you a clear-cut answer to your question. The subject is immensely complex, and there is more that I could say, but I don't feel prepared

to say it at this time. I prefer to wait until I can express my views in more detail in my book on man-woman relationships.

REASON: Further on the subject of love, many people who are caught up in Objectivist theorizing often get discouraged because they realize that, however splendid they may be, their chances of finding an equally splendid person of the opposite sex in appropriate circumstances is remote and, therefore, they conclude that there's no chance that they can have a serious affectionate relationship with anybody else. Is that a realistic response? Is it inherent in the Objectivist doctrines?

BRANDEN: No. Of course it's not. We fall in love with a person on the basis of very deep-seated psychological affinities. The fact that the person agrees with you on certain broad abstract philosophical questions, such as Objectivism is concerned with, doesn't begin to guarantee that that person will be a suitable romantic partner for you or even an interesting friend. I don't think that a happy romantic relationship can be sustained between two people who have really important and deep-seated philosophical differences. But that doesn't mean that philosophical agreement is enough to guarantee the validity of a relationship.

If you met somebody that you really do have a good personality affinity with—a good psychological affinity—I would be surprised if you would remain permanently at odds over philosophical questions. Many people begin by asking what a person's ideas are, when they should begin by asking, do I like the person? If you like the person, then you might get interested in learning more about his ideas or seeking to change his mind if you think he's mistaken on

certain issues.

REASON: Is it possible for a lover to be a teacher?

BRANDEN: Of his loved one? It is possible, especially if you're in a hurry to have a divorce. I think that teaching is a very dangerous element to introduce in a marriage except insofar as two people teach each other. Teaching that is mutual and that is not experienced as *teaching* but as *learning* together or growing or exchanging ideas is very fruitful. But when one party in a relationship sets himself up as some kind of intellectual leader over the other disaster lies ahead.

One of the things which is most important to a good relationship is knowing how to let your partner be himself. Your partner does not have to be like you in every conceivable respect. Very often a person falls in love with somebody else because that person *is* different and then spends the rest of the relationship trying to make that other person the same.

And very often, fear of differences is a sign of insecurity. If you're constantly afraid of what can take your partner away from you—so if you have the smallest difference in your responses to movies or books or whatever, *that* could be the first crack in the split between you, you are overly cautious. I've seen that pattern many times when there's an awful lot of anxiety behind the desire to make a girlfriend exactly like oneself ideologically; and it's got so *little* to do with an authentic interest in philosophy that it's not even funny.

What we have to appreciate is the fact that another person does not *belong* to us. We don't, can't, *own* anybody. No one owes it to us to be just exactly the way we are or exactly the way we would like them to be. Remember that we would not appreciate it if we had a partner who was always at *us*, wanting us to be different, who made us feel that we never were O.K. as we were, that we always had to be something else to be "acceptable." We wouldn't enjoy that role. Don't put somebody you love in it . . . that's my advice.

REASON: Turning to a different subject, have you read Ayn Rand's article in *THE OBJECTIVIST* on "psychologizing"?

BRANDEN: Yes.

REASON: What was your reaction to it?

BRANDEN: I laughed when I read it because I don't know anyone who is more prone to practice the very "psychologizing" she denounces than Ayn

Rand herself. I mean the policy of informing people what their motives are,



what their mental state is, and so forth, and doing so in an intimidating manner. I can scarcely disagree with Miss Rand's criticism of this policy, but it sounds a bit strange coming from her.

As to the other side of what she calls "psychologizing," that is, using alleged "psychological" explanations to justify or excuse some form of irrational behavior, Miss Rand does not do that—not about herself—since it is not her policy to acknowledge that she ever acts irrationally.

So far as the article in general goes, there is a good deal in it that's sound; but in certain respects it is naive psychologically. Judging from her remarks, Miss Rand evidently believes that conscious mental processes can be kept entirely separate from and independent of subconscious mental processes—which is not true.

I did not realize this, or did not realize it fully, during the years of our association, but Miss Rand is very ignorant of human psychology. On certain occasions, she admitted that to me. It was not unusual for her to declare, "Nathan, I don't really understand anything about human psychology." But I never appreciated the full implications of what she was acknowledging.

In *WHO IS AYN RAND?*, I compliment her psychological acumen. I was wrong to do so. That was my own naiveté or blindness. I think Miss Rand's lack of psychological understanding is a great liability to her, not only as a person but also as a philosopher. The point at which her ignorance becomes most apparent is when she attempts to moralize about psychological processes, as she does constantly.

REASON: What are your feelings about *WHO IS AYN RAND?* today?

BRANDEN: I wish that the book had never been written. If it were possible to prevent its further distribution, I would do so.

I speak for Barbara Branden as well as for myself in saying that we repudiate that book. I am glad to have the opportunity to do so publicly and in print.

Our repudiation applies, primarily, to Barbara Branden's biographical essay on Miss Rand. The portrait of Miss Rand's character it presents is false, not through any dishonest intention on Barbara Branden's part—the essay was certainly written in good faith at the time—but because of what the essay omits, because of what it neglects to tell about Miss Rand's behavior and personality. Too much was left out of that essay, although Barbara did not realize this at the time and neither did I.

I do not enjoy making this statement. It saddens me. But the truth is the truth.

REASON: What sort of things are left out of Barbara Branden's portrait of Miss Rand?

BRANDEN: Miss Rand's penchant for extravagant self-compliments. Her fits of temper over trivia. Her obsession with absolute personal loyalty on the part of her friends.

Her deadly, eternal moralizing.

Her anger and defensiveness, when challenged about her ideas. Her bitterness and suspiciousness and resentment.

Her idea of encouraging a person to be independent is to tell him, in effect, "Go and think it over—until you see things my way."

During one argument years ago, I forget what it was about, she told me in no uncertain terms that in any conflict within me between her and Barbara—who was then my wife—she expected me to remain loyal to her; and that she held the same expectation with regard to any of her friends if and when she came into conflict with some other value in their lives.

If I would be talking with her—and I observed this same phenomenon when she was talking with other friends—and if I did not understand her, or she did not understand me, or we couldn't reach an agreement, it would be quite typical for her to declare, "What's the matter with you? Are you mentally out of focus tonight?"

To attack a person's mental processes, or their motives, in the case of disagreements, was one of her favorite strategies. She taught her whole circle to do it. And sometimes it seems to me that today three quarters of the students of Objectivism are doing it.

All of her friends, all of the circle of which I was a member, were in terror of her—and no one would admit it, because to admit it would be to open the door to the wider implications of her behavior.

REASON: You paint a rather dark picture.

BRANDEN: What makes the story so tragic is that there is a whole other side of Ayn Rand which is benevolent, generous, innocent, magnanimous. That is the side which Barbara Branden stressed in her essay. And that is the picture her friends present to the world. It's true enough; but it's not the whole story.

I am aware that many of her admirers will hate me for saying these things. Not because they necessarily believe them to be false, but because it upsets them to be told that the Ayn Rand mystique is just that—a mystique. If they need an idol and have chosen Ayn Rand for that role, they won't appreciate what I am saying.

I want to acknowledge that for many years I would not permit myself to face these facts. I played a major role in perpetuating the Ayn Rand mystique.

REASON: Would you say you evaded on this issue?

BRANDEN: Yes. Many other factors were also involved, however, including confusion, emotional repression, and hero

worship. But evasion was certainly involved.

During the years of our association, when I saw behavior that would have disturbed or appalled me if exhibited by anyone else, I twisted my mind to find excuses, explanations, justifications, telling myself that this behavior could not mean, in the case of Ayn Rand, what it would mean in the case of anyone else.

And if others saw these things and dared to criticize her, I was the first person to defend her and to reproach the person doing the criticizing.

I feel I owe an apology to every reader of *WHO IS AYN RAND?* and every student of Objectivism who ever heard me lecture at N.B.I.—not only for perpetuating the Ayn Rand mystique but also for contributing to that dreadful atmosphere of intellectual repressiveness that pervades the Objectivist movement.

It's such a tragedy. Here is a philosophy that should be nothing but a source of liberation and happiness to people. It has so much to offer. And yet so many of its advocates and supporters are filled with fear and self-doubt, endlessly worrying about whether or not they are being "good Objectivists," endlessly watching others for signs of "deviation." Ayn Rand has done a great deal to encourage these attitudes. But I did, too; I know it, I regret it, and, as I say, I feel that I owe all my readers and students an apology.

REASON: Has your view of Ayn Rand's philosophical and literary genius changed?

BRANDEN: No. I consider her one of the greatest minds in history—and the greatest novelist I have ever read.

REASON: Greater than Hugo and Dostoevsky, for example?

BRANDEN: Yes, although I admire Hugo and Dostoevsky enormously and perhaps without them Ayn Rand would not be the novelist she is.

REASON: Is it your impression that she has changed across the years since you first met her?

BRANDEN: I suspect that her bitterness, suspiciousness, and hostility have grown worse.

REASON: Has the failure of Objectivism to achieve a greater following culturally contributed to her bitterness? Or does she regard the Objectivist movement as a success?

BRANDEN: The failure of Ayn Rand and her books to receive the recognition they deserve has certainly contributed to her bitterness. Contributed to it enormously. There can be no question about that.

I saw the manifestations of that bitterness on countless occasions. I tried to feel sympathetic. But I could not really admire her attitude.

As to how she evaluates the progress of the Objectivist movement at present, I cannot say. Her books have always sold very well and, to the best of my knowledge, continue to sell well. Objectivism certainly has a large body of adherents. The exact number, of course, is not known to me—nor, I suspect, to anyone else.

REASON: Was she ever concerned with building a movement as such?

BRANDEN: Not really.

REASON: Was that your job primarily?

BRANDEN: I think I was the one who first saw the possibility of generating a philosophical movement. She told me many times that I was responsible for the existence of what the press was to call "the Objectivist movement"—which I accomplished through Nathaniel Branden Institute.

So I guess I can say that I was the "practical" man in the situation, so far as the cultural spread of Objectivism was concerned.

REASON: Do you think that anyone will replace you in that capacity?

BRANDEN: No.

REASON: Because of the lack of anyone qualified to do it or because of the lack of anyone interested in doing it?

BRANDEN: I cannot answer that.

REASON: You've seen no signs of it?

BRANDEN: No.

REASON: How was N.B.I. [Nathaniel Branden Institute] doing at the time of your break with Miss Rand?

BRANDEN: N.B.I. was enormously successful. Student enrollments in our lecture courses across the country kept rising. And we were moving into more and more cities.

REASON: Do you consider yourself an Objectivist?

BRANDEN: You have to realize that Miss Rand would answer that question, if she were asked it about me, with an emphatic "No!"

REASON: That's clear.

BRANDEN: If you mean, do I agree with the broad fundamentals of the philosophy of Objectivism, I would answer "Yes."

But if you mean, as Miss Rand might very well wish you to mean, do I agree with every position that Miss Rand has taken and do I regard the sum total of Miss Rand's intellectual pronouncements as being equal to what is meant by "the philosophy of Objectivism," then I am not an Objectivist. Is that distinction clear?

REASON: Yes. Miss Rand has declared, has she not, that Objectivism is a thoroughly integrated, self-consistent system, and that one must accept all of its tenets or none of them?

BRANDEN: It's true that Miss Rand has claimed that, many times. But think about what it means.

Anyone can claim that about his intellectual system. To claim it means nothing.

All that sentence translates to in English is that Miss Rand holds that she has been infallible in working out her philosophical system, that she has never made an error of inference or application, and that everything she says is absolutely true. If she thinks so, fine.

But the suggestion that if one disagrees with her about some tenet of her philosophy, one must repudiate the total of her philosophy, is nonsense. It's worse than nonsense. It's pretentious nonsense. It's grandiose nonsense.

REASON: In the Random House edition of *WE THE LIVING*, published in 1958, Miss Rand discusses the changes she made in the text from the original edition, published by MacMillan in 1936. She suggests that her changes consisted chiefly of rewording a few awkward sentences. She writes: "I have not added or eliminated anything to or from the content of the novel. I have cut out some sentences and a few paragraphs that were repetitious or so confusing in their implications that to clarify them would have necessitated lengthy additions. In brief, all the changes are merely editorial line-changes." But if one compares the 1958 edition of *WE THE LIVING* with the original 1936 edition, it's obvious that some very important changes were made. Changes with significant philosophical and moral implications. Are you aware of this fact?

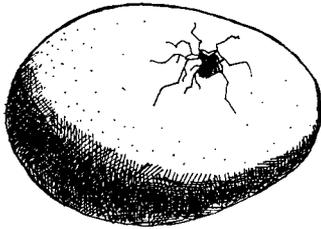
BRANDEN: Certainly.

REASON: Yet Miss Rand does not acknowledge this.

BRANDEN: No.

REASON: Can you explain that?

BRANDEN: I can only say that it is not Miss Rand's policy, as I have known her, to make such acknowledgments.



REASON: Do you believe that she knowingly minimized the significance of the changes?

BRANDEN: She made the changes. She knew what was in the original edition and she knew what was in the new edition. Judge for yourself.

REASON: Did she really regard those changes as unimportant and insubstantial?

BRANDEN: Now you are asking me to go inside her head. I prefer not to do that.

REASON: It is rather well-known that Miss Rand can be unusually harsh on people who ask unfortunate questions at her lectures, questions that antagonize her.

BRANDEN: Yes, she gets very unpleasant sometimes. She yells; she abuses; she attacks the questioners; she launches into discussions of their motives; she "psychologizes."

REASON: What was your attitude toward this when you were present?

BRANDEN: In my early years, while I never shouted or carried on as Miss Rand did, I sometimes treated questioners too harshly when I felt their questions were foolish. Gradually my attitude changed, as I came to see how wrong this was.

Miss Rand and I had many discussions on the subject. I tried to explain to her why it was wrong to make people feel frightened to ask questions, why it was disastrous for their intellectual growth and totally against the spirit of our philosophy.

Sometimes, walking home from a lecture, she would joke about it. She would say, "Aren't you proud of me? I didn't get angry once tonight."

But it wasn't really funny. So in the last few years I moved toward phasing her out of participating in the question-and-answer period following my lectures. I knew she did not enjoy participating in the question periods and was there only to oblige me, because it would be a value to my students to see her and question her, but I told her this was no longer necessary. Her absence thereafter was good for her and good for me. Toward the end, she came only to the opening lecture of the basic course on Objectivism—and gave one guest lecture on literature.

REASON: When were you first aware of being dissatisfied with your life in New York in the Objectivist circle?

BRANDEN: That's hard to answer because it was a gradual thing. In one sense I can say that I was never really happy there. Nor was anyone else, in my judgment, although I doubt that they would admit it.

There is no way to communicate the tension in that circle surrounding Miss Rand. There is a constant concern with doing nothing to upset her. A constant concern to avoid her anger or disapproval. It tends to make all spontaneity impossible.

But she has such a great mind, she has so much to offer, and intellectual conversations with her can be so intellectually exciting and stimulating that it seemed to make everything else worthwhile. At least, that's how it was for me, for many years.

It was hard for me to face the fact that, as a person, I did not really like her in important respects. It is not pleasant for me to say it, even now.

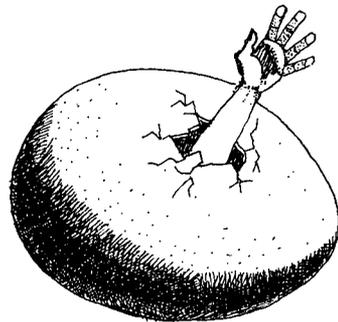
Another reason why I was not happy during my New York years was because—although I did not acknowledge it—I did not really care much for the other members of the circle. I *wanted* to like them, but I didn't, not really. I couldn't admire them. Whatever her faults, Ayn Rand had and has genius. But the others . . .

REASON: What about them?

BRANDEN: The ones who are still there just aren't anything in particular—not by my standards. I don't mean that some of them don't have intelligence. But they are not in any way unusual as people. Without Ayn Rand, what would they be? Any moral significance they imagine their lives may have results from their association with her. She is their one claim to fame, if you know what I mean. It's not a healthy situation.

However, perhaps some of them will accomplish something worthwhile in the future. It's possible. Who can say? It's even possible that some of them may break free, may strike out on their own.

REASON: Can you say anything about the purges or excommunications in the New York circle that one hears about?



BRANDEN: Well, let's see. I remember that Leonard Peikoff had two or three "temporary" excommunications across the years. I don't remember why and I don't recall the exact number. He was, in effect, placed on probation. I'm sorry I can't recall the details. But his worship of Ayn Rand was unflinching, and he was always readmitted.

Across the years, almost every member of the circle was "placed on probation" at one point or another. Almost everyone got into hot water at some point in his relationship with Ayn Rand, and there were big scenes and denunciations and so forth, but no permanent excommunications.

The first permanent excommunication, I suppose, was Edith Efron. She did or was alleged to have done a number of things that made Ayn Rand, and the rest of the circle, and me, mad at her. So she was bounced out.

I participated in that. It was disgusting—I think a lot of the trouble was sheer misunderstanding, and some of it was lying on the part of her accusers.

What I am certain of is that she was dealt with very unjustly by everyone, including me.

Fortunately, I have renewed my friendship with her—as has Barbara Branden and my wife Patricia.

Edith is a brilliantly intelligent woman and, incidentally, has written an immensely important book dealing with television network political bias entitled *THE NEWS TWISTERS*.

At the time when she was bounced out, I had many emotional reservations about the rightness of what we were doing. I felt a good deal of sympathy for her. I suppressed it. I told myself I was being "soft." The truth is that my emotions were right. I later learned that Barbara and Patricia had similar feelings. For all I know, others in the circle did, too.

REASON: No other excommunications?

BRANDEN: Not until the break between Miss Rand and me. Barbara took my side so she was out. So was Wilfred Schwartz, for the same reason.

One of the most disgraceful aspects of Miss Rand's attack on us—the most disgraceful, perhaps—was her remarks about Barbara. I refer to her suggestion that Barbara took my side for financial reasons. Barbara took my side because of her personal integrity, because she knew that the things Ayn Rand was alleging about me were false.

I think the single most crucial event that caused Barbara to break with Miss Rand was when Miss Rand screamed to her that she would do everything possible to prevent the publication of *THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SELF-ESTEEM*. That was too much for Barbara. It made inescapably clear the nature of Ayn Rand's own state at that time.

Had Barbara remained on Miss Rand's side, Miss Rand was prepared to make Barbara her heir, to do a great deal for her financially, and to help her in other ways. Barbara threw all that away by defending me.

So Miss Rand's charge against Barbara is the exact opposite of the truth. And Miss Rand had the means to know it.

REASON: Do you feel that Miss Rand's attack hurt you?

BRANDEN: It hurt me personally, at the time. I had idolized her since the age of 14, when I first read *THE FOUNTAINHEAD*. I admired her more than any human being on earth. To see myself smeared so cheaply, so viciously, and so untruthfully, was a shattering experience.

It was the final evidence, and it took me a long time to grasp it fully, that the Ayn Rand I had admired since the age of 14 did not exist and perhaps had never existed.

It did not hurt me professionally. Miss Rand's allies were saying that this was to be the end of me, that no admirer of Miss Rand would deal with me thereafter. They imagined that everyone would take Miss Rand's statements on faith and that no one would exercise independent, critical judgment.

Ayn Rand and her immediate friends have always held the Ayn Rand following in some degree of contempt—at least, at times—and one evidence of that contempt is their belief that whatever Miss Rand said on this subject, however vague, however unsubstantiated, however hysterical, would automatically be believed and accepted. That's where they miscalculated. It didn't turn out that way. In the end, the person Miss Rand disgraced was herself.

You have to realize that her attack on me did not remotely acknowledge the real cause of her anger. I do not believe she would dare to acknowledge it, because of the light it would throw on her.

Did I hurt her? I did. But I did not give her cause for the kind of attacks she launched. Did I make some bad mistakes during those years? I did. But the matter should have been settled privately between us, with sanity and dignity, as it

could have been. It should not have been turned into a public scandal.

In defending myself, I was forced to reveal facts about her that I would have preferred to leave private. I had no wish to attack her or embarrass her. But she gave me no choice, under the circumstances. To have remained silent would have been to imply that her attacks were justified.

Yet even in the answer to her that Barbara and I wrote, we were still protecting her, still telling less than the full truth about her behavior.

REASON: Do you defend her today?

BRANDEN: No. There are things I do not choose to say about her today because there is no good reason to do so. I do not care to carry on a vendetta. I leave that to the other side—to Miss Rand and her allies.

After the break, Barbara and I received many sympathetic letters, hundreds of them, and an amazing number of people had evidently guessed a good deal of the truth about Miss Rand's motivation. They guessed it merely on the basis of Miss Rand's statements.

REASON: You are not prepared to discuss her motivation or the actual nature of the conflict between you?

BRANDEN: I am not. It is no one's business. It is not information that anyone has a right to.

REASON: After the break, many of Miss Rand's supporters began disparaging your intellectual achievements, denying that you had accomplished anything important, after all the years when Miss Rand had praised you and your work. Why was that?

BRANDEN: That was to be expected. That is completely consistent with Miss Rand's personal policies.

REASON: In what way?

BRANDEN: To explain this, I have to go back a bit.

Before the break with Edith Efron, Miss Rand had read part of a novel that Edith was then writing and she had praised Edith as being a brilliant literary talent, which she is. Unfortunately, Edith subsequently abandoned the novel for reasons that are irrelevant in this context. Anyway, shortly after the break with Edith, I heard Miss Rand speaking of Edith's writing ability disparagingly, and when I reminded her of the complimentary things she had said in the past, she denied having said them and insisted that she regarded Edith only as a *potential* talent. I knew this was not true. I told

Miss Rand that regardless of what one thought of Edith, she was an unusually intelligent and gifted woman and a brilliant writer. Miss Rand avoided answering me directly, but she persisted in denying her past compliments to Edith's work.

The point of this incident is that Miss Rand has a tendency to rewrite history. If she likes a person, everything he does is wonderful. If she doesn't like a person, nothing he does is any good. If she took that attitude with Edith, I knew she would do it with me. That is precisely what happened.

After Miss Rand and I had broken, but during that period when Miss Rand and Barbara were still friendly, I told Barbara that before this was all over Ayn would be denying the originality of my work as a psychologist. Barbara looked at me aghast and told me that that was impossible, that regardless of what had happened Ayn Rand was still Ayn Rand. But within a week of that conversation my prediction came true. We began to hear the stories.

REASON: Have there been any new excommunications since the time you left New York?

BRANDEN: At the time I left, I told people that it was only a matter of time until Miss Rand's lawyer, Henry Holzer, would be ousted. Not that that's any compliment to him, by the way. My prediction has been confirmed. He's out now, too. It hasn't been announced in *THE OBJECTIVIST*. I wondered if they would be foolish enough to make such an announcement. I mean, how many purges and excommunications can you have before you begin to look ridiculous? It was done quietly.

REASON: What kind of man is Frank O'Connor, Miss Rand's husband?

BRANDEN: I don't know quite how to answer that. I feel affection for him and sadness. I think he was and is a very decent man, caught up in something that he did not know how to handle. He is probably the worst victim in this whole tragedy, at least in certain respects. I cannot feel anything but fondness for him.

REASON: What does he do occupationally?

BRANDEN: In his fifties he developed an interest in painting. So far as I know, he works at that full time.

REASON: Did he ever make any contribution to Objectivism or to the Objectivist movement?

BRANDEN: No.

REASON: Was he expected to?

BRANDEN: No.

REASON: How do you evaluate the contribution of Dr. Allen Blumenthal?

BRANDEN: There's nothing to evaluate.

REASON: He practices Objectivist psychotherapy, does he not?

BRANDEN: What is Objectivist psychotherapy? There is no such thing.

There are the psychological theories originated by me, on which Blumenthal claims to base his work as a therapist—or, anyway, he used to claim it. Now he's probably claiming that he got it all from Ayn Rand.

Blumenthal was never trained as a psychiatrist, either by me or by anyone else. His sole training is as a physician. I advised him on an occasional case, when he came to me for help, and we had occasional discussion, but that was all.

REASON: Do you know anything about the kind of therapy he practices?

BRANDEN: Quite a bit. I've heard tapes of his sessions with patients. And I've spoken to a few therapists who have been through the training program he offers.

REASON: What do you think of it?

BRANDEN: It has nothing of any importance in common with the kind of therapy I practice. And I do not respect it. I do not approve of his whole approach—it is pedantic, moralistic, guilt-inducing. I used to resent the faintly patronizing manner with which he would discuss his patients. He did not convey respect. And he seems to imagine that he is going to lecture people into mental health.

At one time I shared many of the errors he is still making. A good deal of his therapy is, in effect, his own adaptation of the kind of therapy I did in my twenties—which I subsequently discarded, because it wasn't good enough.

As of the time when I left New York, he had contributed nothing original of any importance in the field of psychotherapy. From reports that I receive, I gather that he is still working with my concepts but affecting to be oblivious as to where they came from.

It's amusing to think of him trying to work with some of my more recent concepts, as presented for instance in *THE DISOWNED SELF*. It would blow his mind.

REASON: You never miss your old way of life?

BRANDEN: Never. The life I want, the life I always wanted, is the life I am living today.

REASON: Do you feel resentful or vindictive toward your old associates back in New York?

BRANDEN: If you mean the people surrounding Ayn Rand, you have to remember that at one time I made many of the mistakes they are still making. And more than that, I contributed to the mistakes they are making. It was I who created the Ayn Rand circle in New York. I contributed to the Ayn Rand mystique. So, to some extent, they are my creatures. I do not mean to imply that I am responsible for their behavior, because I do not believe that any person is responsible for the behavior of another. I do not blame Ayn Rand for my past mistakes and I do not blame myself for their present mistakes. But neither do I wish to play the role of a totally innocent victim who never did any of the things for which I am now criticizing them.

Resentment? At times I suppose I feel resentment toward them, but not often, not any more. I did feel that two or three years ago. It doesn't seem to matter now. Besides, I have accepted the fact that they are getting what they deserve.

REASON: What is that?

BRANDEN: They are there.

REASON: In *WHO IS AYN RAND?* you wrote very glowingly of Miss Rand's novels. Have your views changed in any way?

BRANDEN: As a novelist, there is no one like her. She is the greatest. I think that future generations of literary critics are going to look with considerable scorn and contempt on the critics of our age who have failed to recognize what she has accomplished.

REASON: There are no reservations about her work whatever?

BRANDEN: There are certain touches in her novels that bother me and I guess have always bothered me, but in the past I did not pause to consider them, I did not think about them.

In *THE FOUNTAINHEAD*, for example, the relationship between Roark and Dominique is dramatic, fascinating, exciting. In many ways I love it. But as a psychological portrait, Dominique is completely unreal. Her behavior is incredibly irrational. I am referring most especially to her attempts to harm Roark professionally. I cannot believe for a moment that anyone with Dominique's admirable qualities would behave that way. Literarily, the characterization doesn't fully work. Not even if one allows for poetic license and artistic stylization.

In *ATLAS SHRUGGED*, I would mention a few things. I think the most objectionable touch in the book, morally, is Galt's and Dagny's willingness to let Hank Rearden believe, for a month, that Dagny is dead. Miss Rand may have needed it literarily, for dramatic purposes, but morally and psychologically it is criminal. No political purpose is served by keeping Rearden in that dreadful state of ignorance. And you do not do that to another human being, not for any reason whatever. It is cruel beyond belief.

Then there is Eddie Willers. If you take him literally, you would have to regard him as a very neurotic and pathetic man, but he is clearly not intended to be viewed that way by the author. He has no life of his own, no friends, no personal interests, only his loyalty to Taggart Transcontinental and his silent, unadmitted, unrequited love for Dagny. A man who is willing to live that way for so many years is a man disastrously lacking in self-esteem and self-assertiveness. Yet he is obviously intended to be viewed as admirable by Miss Rand.

Just as in real life, Miss Rand tends to evaluate people according to the degree of their loyalty and worship of her, so, in her fiction, she tends to characterize the other figures in her books, their attitude toward her heroes and heroines, by the degree of their love and appreciation. Eddie's "feudal serf" psychology is treated as touching and admirable; in fact, it is sick. That Miss Rand does not recognize this says something about her own attitudes.

Or again, consider Francisco. For most of his adult life, from the time he goes on strike, he exists in a state of sexual celibacy. After he leaves Dagny, we are told there are no other women in his life.

Do you appreciate what a tragedy this would be? What in hell can the government do to Francisco, in terms of regulating his economic activities, that would be more disastrous to him personally than the kind of emotional starvation to which he subjects himself? It's so unrealistic! It would not be a denial of his love for Dagny to have a relationship with some other woman who he admired during those years. It would certainly have been possible for him to have found such a woman. It would not be treason or disloyalty or anything of that kind. And it would have given him some kind of human life during those years. That Miss Rand chose to handle the situation as she did makes one wonder how she views the role of sex in human life.

But what the hell, so there are a few things one can quarrel with in the book, so what? *ATLAS SHRUGGED* is the greatest novel that has ever been written, in my judgment, so let's let it go at that.

REASON: One last question on this subject. Can you envision a reconciliation taking place between Miss Rand and you?

BRANDEN: No.

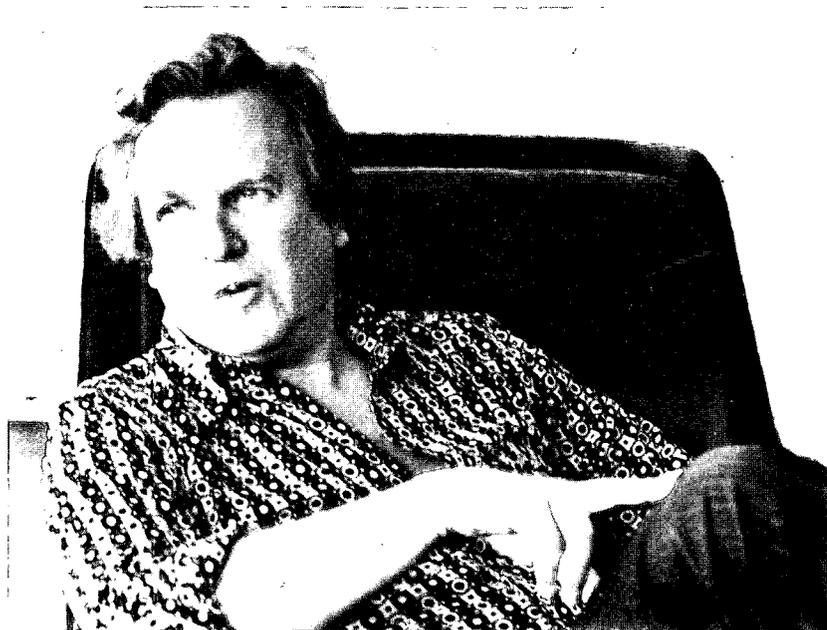
REASON: You would refuse to consider it?

BRANDEN: I wouldn't put it that way. If Miss Rand ever wanted to speak with me, I would agree—if only out of my sense of drama.

Our relationship still feels to me like an unfinished novel; the last chapter is missing. Perhaps there never will be a last chapter. Almost certainly there won't be. I don't like that. It's not good fiction. But then, life is seldom as satisfying as art.

REASON: Why are you so certain that she would never seek to approach you?

BRANDEN: Because by now she has almost certainly wiped out of her mind everything she ever knew about me to the good and has persuaded herself that I am a monster. She would have to do that, to support her own actions. Also, to approach me would mean that she was



willing to consider the possibility that, in the past, she may have made some mistakes. And that would open the door to the question: what mistakes? And I do not believe *that* is a question she is prepared to consider or will ever be prepared to consider.

It's too bad. Life shouldn't be this way. Sometimes the whole situation strikes me as insane.

We cared for each other very much. Not withstanding everything I've said, there was a good deal between us that was very happy, very rewarding, and fulfilling. It will never come again.

Sometimes when I am alone, in spite of everything I know I find myself feeling affection and smiling at her in my thoughts. And then I wonder, at whom am I smiling? Does that person exist? Did she ever exist?

Sometimes for a moment I forget everything that has happened and I want to share with her some new idea of mine. And then I remember.

REASON: What sort of things would you want to communicate?

BRANDEN: More than anything else, perhaps, the things I say in *THE DISOWNED SELF*.

And yet I wonder if she would be able to understand the importance of that book to her own work. I don't know. But the whole Objectivist movement needs that book.

I am hoping that, with *THE DISOWNED SELF*, I can undo some of the damage I caused students of Objectivism in the past. You know, in spite of Miss Rand's and my past claims to the contrary, there is a subtle but very powerful bias against emotions in Objectivism—or in the way Objectivism is presented to people. To the extent that I shared that error, and perpetuated it, I encouraged my students to fear their own emotions, to distrust themselves. I didn't know that that was what I was doing, but it's a fact. Perhaps I will undo some of that damage with my new book. Perhaps they will learn from the book a new way of seeing themselves, of dealing with their emotions, of integrating

reason and emotion. Perhaps it will help some of them to become free of guilt. Perhaps some of them will learn greater self-acceptance. It would mean a great deal to me if I could accomplish that.

REASON: Can you say anything about your future literary plans?

BRANDEN: At present, I am at work on a book dealing with the psychology of man-woman relationships, as I already mentioned. It will be rather different from the course on "The Psychology of Romantic Love" that I gave some years ago, although naturally there will be some overlapping. If that book comes out as scheduled in the fall of 1972, that will be four books published in four years. The first one, *THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SELF-ESTEEM*, took me seven years to write. But after that it has been one a year. I'm a bit tired. I feel I need a rest.

I also need time to study, to pursue some new ideas, new researches, and to try to synthesize and integrate the things I have been observing and learning. So I doubt that I will publish again for several years after 1972. But I hesitate to make predictions of this kind because anything could happen to change my plans. I might get very excited about some idea and want to write about it.

I said earlier in this interview that I was 14 years old when I decided to be a psychologist. I neglected to mention that during the same year I also decided to be a novelist. That is a major passion of mine, fiction-writing.

As my plans now stand, my next book following the one on man-woman relationships will be a novel. That will be several years away. It will deal with the world of psychology.

REASON: Do you have any interest in political activity? In involving yourself in the political scene? Or writing on political subjects?

BRANDEN: I certainly don't plan to engage in political activity. But I have been thinking about the question of writing on an aspect of politics.

There is a particular problem that interests me; you could call it psycho-

politics. It concerns the anti-capitalist mentality. The psychology of all the people who are antagonistic to industrialism, technology, and a free-market society.

You know, the old enemies of capitalism used to denounce it on the grounds of its alleged exploitation of the worker. But today, when the American worker is so well off materially, that argument doesn't carry much weight, not that it ever did. Now the emphasis of the attack is shifting; now the talk is all about "alienation" and how capitalism and technology "alienate" man from his "true self." When that argument wears thin or wears out, they'll come up with something else. But why? What is it they really hate? That's the question. And why do they hate it? That's another good question.

Of course, Ayn Rand says a great deal that is illuminating on this subject in *ATLAS SHRUGGED*. And Ludwig von Mises has some important things to say in his book, *THE ANTI-CAPITALISTIC MENTALITY*. But I don't believe that either of them has exhausted the subject. I feel there is still more to say. And the issue interests me enormously. At some point I feel relatively certain I will write on this subject, but I can't say when.

REASON: How do you view the current political scene?

BRANDEN: As an unmitigated disaster. How else can one view it?

REASON: What do you think of Nixon?

BRANDEN: I have never liked Nixon. I have never trusted him, although I suppose he was preferable to the alternatives. But what a choice!

REASON: Do you keep abreast of the Libertarian movement?

BRANDEN: To some extent. I think I have a general knowledge of what's going on.

REASON: Do you see any hope there?

BRANDEN: I can't really judge. I don't know the extent of the movement. I don't know its influence. I don't know what the younger generation of Libertarians is



going to do.

REASON: Would you have any advice to give them?

BRANDEN: Yes, I think so. In fact, I would enjoy speaking to Libertarian groups. I think it's unfortunate that Libertarians so often leave the initiative to the Leftists. For example, it was the Leftists who were the first—publicly and in a big way—to oppose our involvement in Viet Nam. It was the Leftists who were the first—publicly and in a big way—to oppose the draft. It was the Leftists who were the first—publicly and in a big way—to denounce racism in this country.

Never mind that the Leftists had their own motives for doing so and that those motives would not be the motives of

Libertarians. The fact remains that we should have never have involved ourselves in Viet Nam, the draft is evil, and racism is contemptible. Libertarians—the true defenders of individual rights—should have been the first to speak up on these subjects, loudly and clearly and publicly.

I don't mean that these are the only issues to which Libertarians should address themselves. Far from it. But it would have been immensely important had Libertarians been the first to speak up on these problems.

Libertarians don't seem to know what the vital issues are, where the battle lines most need to be drawn, and which issues should be attacked first. They don't seem to have a good sense of practical reality in these matters.

If it were not such a bromide, I would say they are suffering from a lack of knowledge of how to communicate.

I am hoping that your magazine will be a step in a better direction.

REASON: What do you want out of life? What are your goals?

BRANDEN: To live. To know that I am totally using myself, using my powers, living to the limit of what I can do. To discover as much about human psychology as I can. To write some good novels. And always to feel about life as I do right now.

REASON: You have been very candid during this interview, which we appreciate. Thank you. □