

The Economist, he has been arguing for years that however "different" the Japanese may appear or believe themselves to be, in the end they are subject to the same market forces as anyone else. In his 1989 book *The Sun Also Sets*, Emmott analyzed the Japanese economy, concluding that Japan's trade surpluses, capital exports, and savings rate are destined to subside as demographic, cultural, and economic forces follow their natural course. *Japanophobia* briefly updates that argument in light of the past four years, while focusing more narrowly on a particular phenomenon: the global expansion of Japanese multinational companies.

JAPANOPHOBIA SKETCHES OUT SIX REASONS why Japanese firms have rushed to invest overseas: perceived opportunities to arbitrage superior management against lower wage rates; the need to evade trade barriers; the cheapness of foreign assets paid for in inflated yen borrowed at low interest rates; the need to be represented locally to be successful in certain highly competitive markets; the opportunity to take advantage of local technology; and the pursuit of Japanese customers overseas.

Emmott reviews the experience of Japanese multinationals overseas in four industries—cars, entertainment, tires, and finance—and makes a plausible case that their successes and failures can be accounted for in decidedly mundane terms. And failures there have been indeed. The takeover of Firestone by the Japanese firm Bridgestone has been as pathetic a comedy of errors as any all-American corporate foul-up. The major Japanese securities firms and banks prospered only so long as their Japanese customers overseas had pots of money, while their efforts to build genuinely domestic businesses were non-starters. Sony and Matsushita paid grossly inflated prices for Hollywood studios in a quest for a supposed synergy between entertainment software and hardware. The investments are now finally showing some signs of life, but the long-term success of those ventures is still an open question.


By contrast, the Japanese automakers have, on the whole, been much more successful, and Emmott describes some of the ways in which skilled management has overcome the problems of overseas investment. He dissects the fuss over "local content," and argues that the logic of "lean production" dictates that manufacturers locate more and more aspects of the business near their target markets if "transplant factories" are to be successful over the long haul.

Emmott's case studies are useful in puncturing the illusion of Japanese invincibility. His broader macroeconomic arguments, which are presented in greater detail in *The Sun Also Sets* and which I have not laid out here, are clear and convincing as far as they go. His skepticism toward revisionist industrial-policy nostrums is on the mark. But in the end he really doesn't meet the challenge raised by *Looking at the Sun*, however flawed its conclusions may be.

That's because Emmott makes no attempt to justify grand ideas. He simply assumes that neoclassical economic theory holds within a certain domain of validity. His books relentlessly pile up concrete details to build his case that the phenomena he describes are indeed understandable on his terms. But recall Fallows's gripe that neoclassical economics fails to explain differential growth adequately. By confining himself to a neoclassical framework, Emmott fails to ad-

dress satisfyingly the underlying fears which give the revisionist approach its appeal.

These fears are perhaps more about ourselves than about Japan. Suppose, for example, that in all of the dimensions that matter, Japan is indeed converging on the West and is destined to settle into a respectably sluggish economic middle age typical of other G7 countries. Even if Japan were to negotiate the transition to slower growth without serious social mishap, we would still face a far greater challenge to our thinking about economy and society than any posed by Japan in miracle-growth mode. On present trends, we would be left with a situation in which developed nations settle into an indefinite period of slow growth, while rapid development is limited to nations playing catch-up.

Libertarian ideals are closely linked in the American psyche with ideas of steady progress and unlimited frontiers. Their survival depends on the identification and wide cultivation of those extra-economic virtues and habits which make continued growth possible. In that sense, at least, Fallows's alarm is a timely one. We still have our work cut out for us. 

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A Call to Consciousness

By James Sniechowski

The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem, by Nathaniel Branden, New York: Bantam Books, 346 pages, \$22.95

"OF ALL THE JUDGEMENTS WE pass in life, none is as important as the one we pass on ourselves." With that introductory declaration, Nathaniel Branden sets the direction for the book in which he crystallizes

his life's mission—the exploration and articulation of the deep structure and value of self-esteem. It is an important mission for our time.

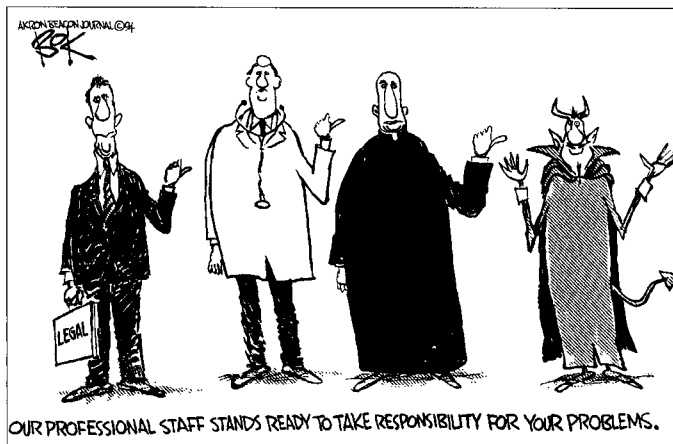
The notion of self-esteem has been deservedly ridiculed for being soft-headed,

delusional, and destructive. Consider, for example, a *Time* magazine report on standardized math tests given to 13-year-olds in six countries. The Koreans scored highest and the American scores were the worst. Nevertheless, when asked if they *felt* they were good at math, the Americans were number one.

Similarly, most new-age gurus advocate strategies of "affirmation" to teach their followers how to manifest success, abundance, and self-esteem. All one need do, say the gurus, is systematically repeat such statements as "I am valuable just as I am" or "I love myself" or "I deserve all that I want." These teachers assure their disciples that, with practice, reality will align itself with the devotee's desire and a powerful, effective self will appear.

Such views are the product of what Branden calls "feel good" self-esteem. They are based in a sense of entitlement and a belief in effortless gratification. "A disservice is done to people," he contends, "if they are offered 'feel good' notions of self-esteem that [are] divorced from questions of consciousness, responsibility, and moral choice." Those who embrace such notions deny the very real demands and exigencies of life. They abdicate decision and recoil at the appearance of challenge. Ultimately, they are in danger of becoming infantilized, naive, and incapable of self-motivation and achievement.

Standing against such notions, Branden offers a reality-oriented approach to self-esteem. He advocates conscious living in which one "generates principles from concrete facts and applies principles to concrete facts...in the pursuit of meaning and understanding." Self-esteem, in this context, is not an exercise in solipsism, or in its less virulent relative, narcissism. Rather, it is grounded in the relation one has to one's self as that self stands in relation to the world. The dynamic is necessarily reciprocal and interdependent. Only in that way can there be meaning in the terms *objective* and *subjective*.



FOR BRANDEN, SELF-ESTEEM IS COMPOSED of two parallel elements, one objective and one subjective. The first is *self-efficacy*—"confidence in the functioning of my mind, in my ability to think, understand, learn, choose, and make decisions...my ability to understand the facts of reality that fall within my own sphere of interest and needs." Facts provide a perspective from which we strive to determine accuracy from error, truth from falsehood, reality from delusion. "No one can feel competent to cope with the challenges of life who does not treat seriously the distinction between the real and the unreal." Without an objective relation to facts, self-esteem is impossible.

Spousal domestic violence, for example, can be understood as a painful manifestation of the absence of self-efficacy. We ask why the suffering party doesn't leave the relationship. Violence is, after all, very often present during courtship, before marriage and children add further pressures to the relationship. Despite the danger signs, however, many men and women remain involved in humiliating and degrading circumstances—in large measure because they do not face the facts of their relationship. Self-efficacy would demand a clear assessment of the objective reality and a determination to behave in one's own best interest.

The notion of "one's own best interest" leads to the second element, *self-respect*—the certainty one feels and knows of his or her own value. Self-respect implies "an affirmative attitude toward my right to live and be happy, [my] comfort in

appropriately asserting my thoughts, wants, and needs." Self-respect is the subjective pole. It too requires rigorous assessment, but of one's own psychic landscape. Internal events, such as assumptions, beliefs, and expectations, must be continually evaluated to determine their appropriateness to one's current life circumstances.

In the example of spousal violence, self-respect would

ask: How do I value myself? What beliefs do I hold about myself that attract and allow for such belittling treatment? What must I do to transform my own self-deprecating and destructive impulses? Self-respect would act as a spur for change.

UNDERSTOOD THIS WAY, SELF-ESTEEM IS neither automatic, an expected birthright, nor mystical, available only through grace and divine intervention. It is the result of conscious effort and determination. One can build one's self-esteem through commitment and practice. And Branden is not merely a theorist: His book includes an elegant and practical 31-week program for building self-esteem. He warns, however, that effort itself, no matter how concerted, can be misguided.

Take, for example, "the highly productive workaholic who is driven to prove his worth to, say, a father who predicted he would always be a loser." The son may be a worldly success, but it is almost axiomatic that he will be "crippled in his ability to find joy in his achievements," because he defines and experiences himself as deficient and defective. He can never be enough. As long as he assents to such belief, his striving is ultimately impotent, because he can never undo the Gordian Knot tied by his father.

On this point Branden makes one of his most incisive and caring statements: "If my aim is to prove I am 'enough,' the project goes on to infinity—because the battle was already lost on the day I conceded the issue was debatable." Such an endeavor can only be other-defined and

other-directed, because it is concerned with proving one's worth to others. It is destined for failure, because the person attempting the proof is sabotaged by a sense that renders proof impossible.

In the second half of the book, Branden extends his principles beyond individuals into the arenas of child rearing, education, work, psychotherapy, and the culture at large. We must understand, he argues, that the idea of *self* is a relatively recent psychological phenomenon, particularly as experienced by the mass of humanity. Historically, most people lived their entire lives in small groups. Often, the tribe was the largest entity with which they had contact. The group was the locus of identity, and its members understood themselves within that framework. The group determined character, assigned roles, prearranged relationships. The world was small and set. Everyone knew their place.

"The essence of the tribal mentality is that it makes the tribe as such the supreme good and denigrates the importance of the individual," Branden writes. What a man or woman thought, felt, desired, imagined was synonymous with what tribal authority taught to be acceptable. Furthermore, authority, for the most part, did not reside in this or that individual but was a function of a group process in which everyone was subsumed. Ritual and dogma set the parameters. Punishment and the fear of the gods kept everyone in line. One's identity and security was not a matter of personal vision but derived from being an integral member of the group.

Self, as we understand it today, was practically nonexistent. There was little or no need for interpersonal skills, because there was little meaningful difference between one person and another. Self, let alone self-esteem, was a foreign and possibly fatal concept.

Today, however, most of us come into constant and sometimes significant contact with mere acquaintances and complete strangers. Unlike the tribal mentality that minimized differences, our daily lives bring us into situations in which inevitable and often radical differences prevail. This profusion of differences forces

the self to stand out in relief. Consequently, the idea and experience of being not like others is an unavoidable actuality.

This doesn't mean that most people possess a conscious regard for their own particularity. Quite the contrary. Such appreciation requires effort and awareness. Most people pass their lives in a state of unconscious habituation to the ideas and expectations they formed, for the most part, in their childhood. That echoes the tribal mentality. But, even so, they cannot avoid the plurality of beliefs, tastes, customs, and world views of modern daily life. So a sense of self occurs if only by

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default, if only in the irritation of being exposed to differences.

As a consequence, contemporary well-being depends upon our competence in negotiating person-to-person traffic. To do so we must continually assess ourselves and others, regardless of whether or not we possess the interest, tools, or skills.

THIS ANALYSIS HAS POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES. Beginning with the Renaissance, through the Reformation and Enlightenment, a clearer psychological sense of self emerged, and self-ownership became a reality. The self could act upon and become the result of its own private choices. The world witnessed a new form of government and politics based on that emergent sense.

The paradigmatic leap undergirding

the founding of the United States was the recognition of the fundamental existence, rights, and sovereignty of the individual as distinct from the dictates of the group. That revolution demanded that the purpose of government was to serve the individual and not the other way around. Reciprocally, the individual had to assume the task of self-governance. But we may ask to what degree most people, then or since, have understood, appreciated, and lived the fact and implications of the psycho-political self.

For many people today, psycho-political life is little different from that of the Middle Ages, when society at large, in Branden's words, "did not value self-assertion; did not understand individuality; could not conceive of self-responsibility; could not imagine innovativeness as a way of life;...did not grasp the relation of mind, intelligence, and creativity to survival."

The current rise of the victimarchy is a vestige of medieval psychology. Despite our avowal of the value and sovereignty of the autonomous individual, for victim groups the self is of little value except as the object of oppression by others. We are besieged by one disadvantaged group after another claiming impotence and innocence and demanding compensation for their purported handicaps and injuries. Individual responsibility becomes an impediment to achieving redress. Self-empowerment and self-directedness fall away, replaced by the demand that others be responsible.

And in these days of rising fundamentalism, there is a growing pressure to comply with group mentality, to surrender the self to dogma. With that, liberty and freedom are in grave danger. But healthy self-esteem can be a powerful and compelling antidote to this inclination toward herd-think.


In this environment, it is particularly important to understand that self-governance is more than a political slogan. It is a way of life. Those who take seriously the implications of self-governance must be responsible for ourselves and to others, learning to create and support our own ex-

istence as a natural course of events. We must choose to face the conditions we create and discover, striving to master ourselves rather than be mastered.

Self-esteem is not a feel-good trend. It is critical to the survival of the way we live. It requires "greater self-responsibility and integrity...the willingness to move through fear to confront conflicts and discomforting realities." A healthy self-esteem is the *sine qua non* of a robust and free life.

As Branden observes, "The American culture is a battleground between the values of self-responsibility and the values of entitlement." The former entails freedom, and freedom has never been free. It obliges effort and vigilance. It stands on

conscience and active involvement. If men and women abandon self-responsibility, they become mere spectators in their lives. They resign personal authority and are then compelled to follow.

The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem, then, is a call to consciousness and participation. Its core idea is: "Your life is important. Honor it. Fight for your highest possibilities." This is a book that should not just be read. It should be chewed on, digested, and absorbed into one's identity. It is a guidebook for a well-nourished and powerful life. 

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Lying for a Living

By Jacob Sullum

Thank You for Smoking, by Christopher Buckley, New York: Random House, 272 pages, \$22.00

ON THE FIRST PAGE OF *THANK YOU for Smoking*, we get a description of the evil committed by tobacco companies. A speaker at the Clean Lungs 2000 conference is in the middle of introducing Nick Naylor, chief spokesman for the Academy of Tobacco Studies. "I'm certain that our next...panelist," the speaker hesitated, the word just too neutral to describe a man who earned his living by killing 1,200 human beings a day. Twelve hundred people—two jumbo jet planeloads a day of men, women, and children. Yes, innocent children, denied their bright futures....Lambs, slaughtered by Nicholas Naylor and the tobacco industry fiends he so slickly represented. More than 400,000 a year! And approaching the half-million mark. Genocide, that's what it was..."

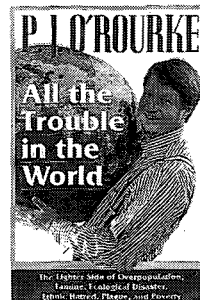
A bit exaggerated, to be sure, but not much different from the rhetoric of anti-smoking activists (or "gaspsers," as Nick calls them). Christopher Buckley, a Wash-



Christopher Buckley: The tobacco industry's main sin is mendacity, not murder.

ington journalist and ex-smoker, appreciates the absurdity of such fulminations, and much of this satiric novel (his fourth) pokes fun at the sanctimony of the anti-smoking movement. The tobacco industry is so besieged by self-righteous paternalists lately that even readers who are inclined to sympathize with the gaspers

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