

# Lifelong Learning, Nathaniel Branden, Torture



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*"Finding the Challenges" is an original column appearing every other Wednesday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by Verbal Vol. Verbal is a software engineer, college professor, corporate information officer, life long student, farmer, libertarian, literarian, student of computer science and self-ordering phenomena. Archived columns can be found here. FTC-only RSS feed available here.*

A theme emerges in these columns. The very essence of human experience is self-experience. We are self-aware. Each person is at the helm of her own self-experience. Each person can grasp that the degree to which that experience is worthwhile is within her reach. The degree to which a person derives joy and satisfaction from his own experience belongs to no one else, albeit others can share in the benefits. One derives joy and satisfaction through learning, through self-esteem, and through self-determination. Self-determination includes avoiding the traps laid by others.

## **Lifelong Learning**

The very heart of self-esteem is learning, particularly self-directed learning. Yesterday, I learned, again and furthermore, through two events the importance at both ends of life of learning.

I attended a briefing session for all of the course facilitators for the Spring 2015 term of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Kentucky. OLLI is a group open to people 50 years of age and up. I will be working with a Discussion Group, *Whatever Happened to the Age of Reason? Philosophy from Ockham to Mencken*. Some of my experiences in this group will most likely be shared in this column as the Spring progresses.

While I was at this meeting, I was like a curious kid in a candy store of ideas. One gentleman talked to me about pianos, the Gutenberg press, and the Breeders' Cup upcoming at Keeneland Racecourse in 2015. I talked to an Iranian about the Middle East, an Italian about Opera. I conversed with friends about jury duty, ukeleles, collage making, creative writing, and 20th Century German history. I was excited to be reminded that learning never stops.

The second event of the day concerned the other end of the learning experience. My daughter had asked me to help my grand-daughter with math. I picked up the 10 year old after basketball practice, and we launched into a wonderland of ideas about numbers and counting and telling stories and describing problems. Her mental agility was amazing. We talked about fast food, logic, language, basketball, science, history, anthropology, numbers and quantitative things.

The most rewarding thing we talked about, however, was how each of us was in charge of our own learning. First, we considered that if her teacher had 60 minutes to teach math to 30 students, then it was likely that she would only get 2 minutes of individual attention, on average, in that hour. Next, we analyzed the idea that I might spend 1 or 2 hours a week with her. But then we discovered that if she took charge, and thought of herself as a math observationist 24 hours a day, how far she would go. She was thrilled with the idea. Arithmetic is all around us, even in our dreams, as well as language, as well as music, nature, kinetics, geology, biology, sports, history ... and the combinations of these things are endless.

## **Nathaniel Branden**

Voluntaryism does not mean just to go along to get along. Voluntaryism is a robust, inner driven philosophy, world view, and life direction. A robust voluntaryist is chock-full of self-esteem. The person who gave me the strongest push toward thinking about self-esteem in a rational way was Nathaniel Branden. Dr. Branden passed away on December 3rd.

“My mission is to inspire readers to honor their life and happiness.” That is what it says in the banner at his Web homepage. Luckily we still have his works to carry us forward to honoring our own individual lives and happiness. What a felicitous phrase for a voluntaryist — honoring your life and happiness.

Some people may tend to dismiss Branden, thinking of him only as Ayn Rand’s former paramour, particularly since they both chose to vilify the other, and to denigrate the other’s work, after their very rough break-up.

But Branden really distinguished himself by taking what he had learned from Rand and synthesizing it into a formidable body of work on self-esteem characterized by objectivism, individualism, discovery of self, recovery of self, and self-ownership. To me, his concepts are at the core of my voluntaryism. And, it seems to me, that his goal “ ... to inspire readers to honor their life and happiness” would be a great model for stating what each here at EVC is trying to communicate.

*“There is overwhelming evidence that the higher the level of self-esteem, the more likely one will be to treat others with respect,*

*kindness, and generosity.” – Nathaniel Branden*

## **Logic Fallacy #20 – Framing the Debate (Torture)**

Here we go again. Framing the debate is a special case of special pleading and of moving the stasis point. A proper argument should have as its scope only the things that are known and strictly logical conclusions which can be based on the knowns. But those whose interests lie with keeping as much unknown as possible profit by shifting the debate to that which is not in question.

In this particular case, I refer to the clamor surrounding The Committee Study of the Central Intelligence Agency’s Detention and Interrogation Program, aka the Torture Report.

We do not hear debates about the morality of torture because it is a given for most that torture is immoral and it is a fight that the other side cannot win (or even survive). So the open skirmish is about side issues or non-issues.

Politicians nearly always jump to these side issues when they do not wish to take on main issues, head on. So the news reports are full of inane sound bytes about rectal hydration, nuclear devices on time triggers in cities with millions of people, vilification of third parties, scape goats, and alibis.

Among political mercenaries this practice is called “framing the debate” which means distorting a debate as to where it begins and/or ends, it’s breadth and/or depth. When this is going on, you can be sure that you are being kept away from the meat and potatoes. You are being hydrated with appetizers and desserts so that you lose your taste for anything substantial.

The biggest platter of distraction that we are being fed is the pseudo-question of whether torture is effective. There are no answers to such a question. No one has seen a case in which torture was shown inarguably to have created good results. But beyond that, any determination of effectiveness would not change the facts nor the question of criminality.

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Sometimes, in my enthusiasms, I may seem like a battering ram, but truly I do not demand that anyone enslave themselves to my ideas. I ask only that you may cast your own light on these musings, and I hope that you may take some happiness from it.

Embrace learning as though it may vanish — but it will not. Let that learning lead you to understand how unique you are. And from your unique vantage point, decide that you will form your own thoughts, that you will not be misled by dodges and feints from those who seek to steal away your power.

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