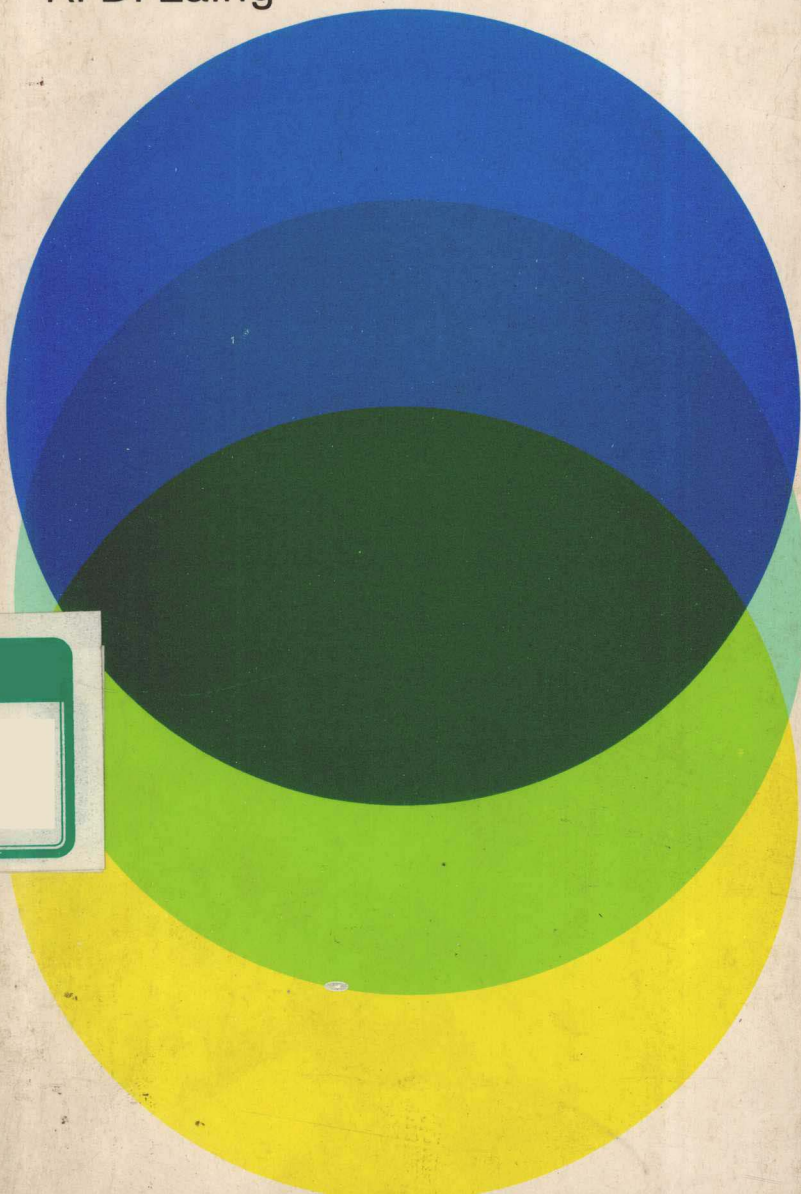


The Divided Self

R. D. Laing



PELICAN BOOKS

THE DIVIDED SELF

R. D. Laing was born in Glasgow in 1927 and graduated from Glasgow University as a doctor of medicine. He is one of the best-known psychiatrists of modern times. In the 1960s he developed the argument that there may be a benefit in allowing acute mental and emotional turmoil in depth to go on and have its way, and that the outcome of such turmoil could have a positive value. He was the first to put such a stand to the test by establishing, with others, residences where persons could live and be free to let happen what will when the acute psychosis is given free rein, or where, at the very least, they receive no treatment they do not want. This work with the Philadelphia Association since 1964, together with his focus on disturbed and disturbing types of interaction in institutions, groups and families, has been both influential and continually controversial.

R. D. Laing's writings range from books on social theory to verse, as well as numerous articles and reviews in scientific journals and the popular press. His publications are: *Self and Others*, *Interpersonal Perception* (with H. Phillipson and A. Robin Lee), *Reason and Violence* (introduced by Jean-Paul Sartre), *Sanity, Madness and the Family* (with A. Esterson), *The Politics of Experience* and *The Bird of Paradise*, ~~Know~~ *The Politics of the Family*, *The Facts of Life*, ~~Do You Love Me?~~, *Conversations with Children*, ~~Sonnets and~~ *The Voice of Experience*.

R. D. Laing

The Divided Self

An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness



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To my mother and father

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Preface to the Original Edition

This is the first of a series of studies in existential psychology and psychiatry, in which it is proposed to present original contributions to this field by a number of authors.

The present book is a study of schizoid and schizophrenic persons; its basic purpose is to make madness, and the process of going mad, comprehensible. Readers will judge variously the success or failure of this aim. I would ask, however, that the book should not be judged in terms of what it does not attempt to do. Specifically, no attempt is made to present a comprehensive theory of schizophrenia. No attempt is made to explore constitutional and organic aspects. No attempt is made to describe my own relationship with these patients, or my own method of therapy.

A further purpose is to give in plain English an account, in *existential* terms, of some forms of madness. In this I believe it to be the first of its kind. Most readers will find a few terms strangely used in the first few chapters. I have, however, given careful thought to any such usage, and have not employed it unless I felt compelled by the sense to do so.

Here again, a brief statement about what I have not tried to do may avoid misunderstanding. The reader versed in existential and phenomenological literature will quickly see that this study is not a direct application of any established existential philosophy. There are important points of divergence from the work of Kierkegaard, Jaspers, Heidegger, Sartre, Binswanger, and Tillich, for instance.

To discuss points of convergence and divergence in any detail would have taken me away from the immediate task. Such a

discussion belongs to another place. It is to the existential tradition, however, that I acknowledge my main intellectual indebtedness.

I wish to express here my gratitude to the patients and their parents about whom I have written in the following pages. All of those to whom I have referred at any length have given their willing consent to this publication. Names, places, and all identifying details have been changed, but the reader can be assured that he is not reading fiction.

I wish to register my gratitude to Dr Angus MacNiven and Professor T. Ferguson Rodger for the facilities they provided for the clinical basis for this study and the encouragement they gave me.

The clinical work upon which these studies are based was all completed before 1956, that is, before I became an assistant physician at the Tavistock Clinic, when Dr J. D. Sutherland generously made secretarial help available in the preparation of the final manuscript. Since the book was completed in 1957 it has been read by many people, and I have received much encouragement and helpful criticism from more individuals than I can conveniently list. I would like to thank particularly Dr Karl Abenheimer, Mrs Marion Milner, Professor T. Ferguson Rodger, Professor J. Romano, Dr Charles Rycroft, Dr J. Schorstein, Dr J. D. Sutherland, and Dr D. W. Winnicott for their constructive 'reactions' to the MS.

R. D. LAING

Preface to the Pelican Edition

One cannot say everything at once. I wrote this book when I was twenty-eight. I wanted to convey above all that it was far more possible than is generally supposed to understand people diagnosed as psychotic. Although this entailed understanding the social context, especially the power situation within the family, today I feel that, even in focusing upon and attempting to delineate a certain type of schizoid existence, I was already partially falling into the trap I was seeking to avoid. I am still writing in this book too much about Them, and too little of Us.

Freud insisted that our civilization is a repressive one. There is a conflict between the demands of conformity and the demands of our instinctive energies, explicitly sexual. Freud could see no easy resolution of this antagonism, and he came to believe that in our time the possibility of simple natural love between human beings had already been abolished.

Our civilization represses not only 'the instincts', not only sexuality, but any form of transcendence. Among one-dimensional men,* it is not surprising that someone with an insistent experience of other dimensions, that he cannot entirely deny or forget, will run the risk either of being destroyed by the others, or of betraying what he knows.

In the context of our present pervasive madness that we call normality, sanity, freedom, all our frames of reference are ambiguous and equivocal.

A man who prefers to be dead rather than Red is normal. A man

* See recently, Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, Beacon Press, 1964.

who says he has lost his soul is mad. A man who says that men are machines may be a great scientist. A man who says he *is* a machine is 'depersonalized' in psychiatric jargon. A man who says that Negroes are an inferior race may be widely respected. A man who says his whiteness is a form of cancer is certifiable.

A little girl of seventeen in a mental hospital told me she was terrified because the Atom Bomb was inside her. That is a delusion. The statesmen of the world who boast and threaten that they have Doomsday weapons are far more dangerous, and far more estranged from 'reality' than many of the people on whom the label 'psychotic' is affixed.

Psychiatry could be, and some psychiatrists are, on the side of transcendence, of genuine freedom, and of true human growth. But psychiatry can so easily be a technique of brainwashing, of inducing behaviour that is adjusted, by (preferably) non-injurious torture. In the best places, where straitjackets are abolished, doors are unlocked, leucotomies largely forgone, these can be replaced by more subtle lobotomies and tranquillizers that place the bars of Bedlam and the locked doors *inside* the patient. Thus I would wish to emphasize that our 'normal' 'adjusted' state is too often the abdication of ecstasy, the betrayal of our true potentialities, that many of us are only too successful in acquiring a false self to adapt to false realities.

But let it stand. This was the work of an old young man. If I am older, I am now also younger.

London

September 1964

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to the author and to Grune & Stratton for permission to quote from *Meaning and Content of Sexual Perversions*, by Medard Boss; to George Allen & Unwin in respect of *The Phenomenology of Mind*, by Hegel, translated by J. B. Baillie; to Baillière, Tindall & Cox in respect of *Lectures on Clinical Psychiatry*, by E. Kraepelin; to The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis in respect of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, by Sigmund Freud, from *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. XVIII; to Rider & Co., London, in respect of *The Analysis of Dreams*, by Medard Boss, and *The Psychology of Imagination*, by Jean-Paul Sartre; and to Martin Secker & Warburg in respect of *The Opposing Self*, by Lionel Trilling.

† The author wishes to thank Dr M. L. Hayward and Dr J. E. Taylor for their kind permission to quote at some length in Chapter 10 from their paper 'A Schizophrenic Patient Describes the Action of Intensive Psychotherapy', which appeared in the *Psychiatric Quarterly*, 30, 211-66.

*Je donne une œuvre subjective ici, œuvre cependant
qui tend de toutes ses forces vers l'objectivité.*

E. MINKOWSKI

Part 1

