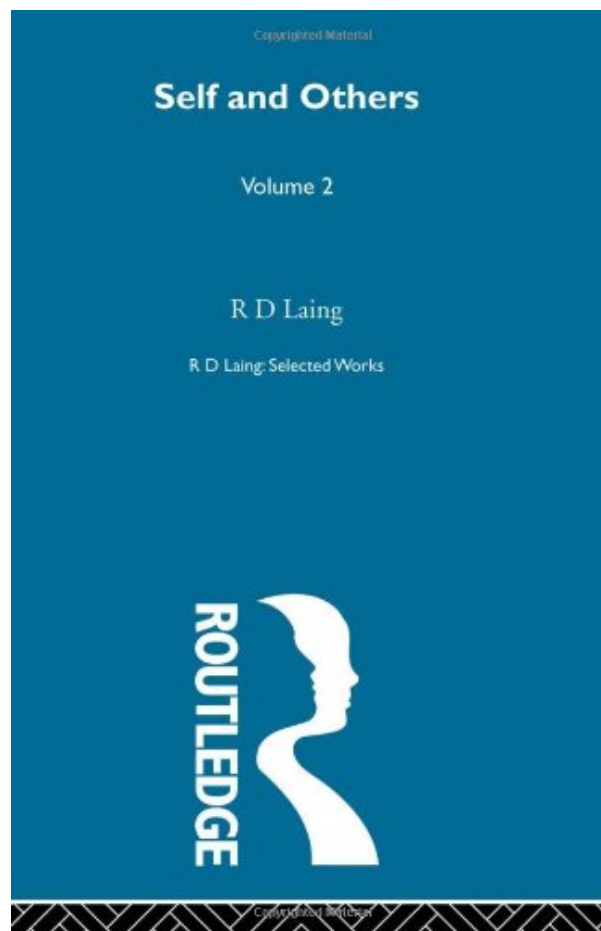


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# Self and Others

Volume 2

R D Laing

R D Laing: Selected Works



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Published in the year 2002, Selected Works RD Laing: Self & Other V2 is a valuable contribution to the field of Major Works.

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- Binding: Hardcover
- 184 pages

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A very good read

By joseph peterson

I was pleasantly surprised by this book. It looked so unassuming at the library and so ancient with its old dust jacket, but this book is another timeless work, by someone I wish I had come into contact with in my early twenties as opposed to now in my thirties. This book shows people in very easy to understand language how Schizophrenia actually happens and how people often use "difference" to equate with wrong or right thinking. He shows how Cartesian Dualism fails to address the real underlying problems at hand in interpersonal relationships. The self defines itself through the eyes of others and can constantly feel the need for justification of importance or merit to the point of irrationality. But also that others can come to associate the irrationality as something wrong or immoral about the person as opposed to a disorder the self is just completely unconscious of. In other words the person comes to believe that they are in and of themselves wrong or right based on their interactions with other people and begin to define themselves opposite to anything they feel is not their self in order to feel right or prove someone else's falsity. This places the individual in a "untenable" position. They are no more an actor upon themselves but constantly re-evaluating everyone around them in order to try to escape this position, what they fail to realize is that no escape is possible and that life can present unanswerable conditions. Often the person going through this experience will feel as though they are unable to decide what is right or wrong for themselves. This leads to a sort of paranoia of the sort that nobody likes them or that nobody thinks about them and they project the image that they could care less about what anyone else thinks about them. There seems to be a sort of thrashing about and rehashing of thoughts with an inability to relate to others and alienation sets in. The book uses many literature examples of untenable positions as well as psychiatric situations and recordings to illustrate the process of the mind of someone dealing with schizophrenia and the inability of the disorder to exist outside of a relation to others. I still liked Politics of Experience more but this book is highly recommended as well.

11 of 12 people found the following review helpful.

A Gem

By Christopher Richards

Note: This review is based on the paperback. With examples from clinical experience and theory, existential literature, fine art, and children's stories, R. D. Laing illustrates how the pressures of conformity act upon individuals in our society. Each of us is constantly influenced by others as we influence them. Authority figures judge others and create realities for both themselves and those being judged.

The book affirms a personal world. It debunks the idea that phantasy can be observed by another as a series of facts. Phantasy, an object relations term intentionally not spelled with an 'f,' is the real experience of a subject. A social phantasy is an internalized experience by a group. For example, a dominant group phantasy is that the therapist has the 'answers.' We can think of this as 'expertise phantasy'. If only the patient could find the answer he would cease to suffer.

One person can only infer through language and gesture what the experience of another can be. Laing said elsewhere: I cannot experience your experience.

We must tolerate ambiguity and paradox. Laing cites the teachings of Hsi Yun, a Zen Master of about 840 A.D: "That the real difficulty is not so much in his questions being unanswerable as in his continuing in the state of mind that leads him to ask them."

Selves for Liang can be either authentic or false. False selves are an adaptation to false realities. Laing explores and illustrates everyday untenable situations, identity, attribution, pretense, elusion, delusion, and collusion.

This is well worth reading. I read it first at age 17 and didn't understand it well. Forty years later it makes for better reading. It's a gem.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

THE CONTROVERSIAL PSYCHIATRIST LOOKS AT THE "PSYCHOTIC," etc.

By Steven H Propp

Ronald David Laing (1927-1989) was a Scottish psychiatrist who was often considered part of the anti-psychiatry movement (although he rejected this characterization); he wrote many other books such as Politics of Experience, The politics of the family and other essays, etc. He wrote in the Preface to the First 1961 Edition [revised edition, 1969], "I shall try to depict persons within a social system or 'nexus' of persons, in order to try to understand some of the ways in which each affects each person's experience of himself and of how interaction takes form. Each contributes to the other's fulfillment or destruction." (Pg. xi)

He begins by saying, "is unconscious phantasy a mode or a type of experience? If it is, it is with a difference. If not, what is it, if not a figment of imagination? The psychoanalytic thesis can be stated thus: it is not POSSIBLE to prove the existence of unconscious phantasy to the person who is immersed in it. Unconscious phantasy can be known to be phantasy only after the person's own emergence from it." (Pg. 3)

He asks, "Is it a contradiction in terms to speak of 'unconscious experience'? A person's experience comprises anything that 'he' or 'any part of him' is aware of, whether 'he' or every part of him is aware of every level of his awareness or not. His experiences are inner or outer; of his own body or of other person's bodies; real or unreal; private or shared. The psychoanalytic contention is that our desires present themselves to us in our experience, but we may not recognize them. This is one sense in which we are unconscious of our experience. We misconstrue it." (Pg. 8)

He observes, "Some 'psychotics' look on psychoanalysis as a relatively safe place to tell someone what they

really think. They are prepared to play at being a patient and even to keep up the charade by PAYING the analyst, provided he does not 'cure' them. They are even prepared to pretend to be cured if it will look bad for him if he is having a run of people who do not seem to be getting better. Not an unreasonable contract." (Pg. 28)

He suggests, "the man-in-the-street takes a lot for granted: for instance, that he has a body which has an inside and an outside... The ordinary person does not reflect upon these basic elements of his being; he takes his way of experiencing himself and others to be 'true.' However, some people do not. They are often called schizoid. Still more, the schizophrenic does not take for granted his own person... he lacks the usual sense of personal unity, a sense of himself as the agent of his own actions rather than as a robot, a machine, a thing, and of being the author of his own perceptions, but rather feels that someone else is using his eyes, his ears, etc." (Pg. 35-36)

He argues, "The most significant theoretical and methodological development in the psychiatry of the last two decades is, in my view, the growing dissatisfaction with any theory or study of the individual which isolates him from his context. Efforts have been made from different angles to remedy this position." (Pg. 65) He asserts, "One basic function of genuinely analytical or existential therapy is the provision of a setting in which as little as possible impedes each person's capacity to discover his own self... A large part of the art of therapy is in the tact and lucidity with which the analyst points out the ways in which collusion maintains illusions or disguises delusions." (Pg. 105)

Laing is not the highly controversial and polarizing figure he once was; with the passage of time, one can more easily appreciate what he had to say.

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