

R.D. Laing

Developer of IEMT, Andrew T. Austin, credits R.D. Laing as being one of the primary influences on his philosophy in the treatment of mental health. By co-incidence, Austin spent some time working alongside Laing's granddaughter in the early 2000s.

R. D. Laing ¹⁾ was a Scottish psychiatrist and writer who was known for his unconventional and controversial approach to the treatment of mental illness. He was born in Glasgow in 1927 and studied medicine at the University of Glasgow before training as a psychiatrist.

Laing was interested in the role of social and cultural factors in mental illness and argued that many psychiatric diagnoses were based on societal norms and expectations rather than objective scientific evidence. He believed that individuals who were diagnosed with mental disorders were often misunderstood and mistreated, and that their symptoms could be understood as a way of coping with and expressing the difficulties and stresses of their lives.

Laing's ideas were influential in the anti-psychiatry movement of the 1960s and 1970s, which sought to challenge traditional approaches to mental health treatment and promote a more holistic and humanistic understanding of mental illness. However, his ideas were also controversial and sparked a great deal of debate and criticism within the psychiatric community. Laing died in 1989 at the age of 61.

Sanity, Madness and The Family

Insanity – a perfectly rational adjustment to an insane world.*Ronald D. Laing*

In his book “Sanity, Madness and The Family” ([R.D. Laing, Aaron Esterson, 1964](#)), R.D. Laing argues that mental illness is not a personal failing or a medical condition, but rather a result of the toxic and dysfunctional relationships within a family. Laing asserts that the roles and expectations imposed on individuals by their families can lead to feelings of isolation, powerlessness, and alienation, which can manifest as mental illness. He also argues that the process of seeking treatment and being labeled as “mentally ill” can further reinforce and reinforce these damaging family dynamics. Instead of viewing mental illness as a personal problem that can be fixed through medication or therapy, Laing suggests that it is a social and interpersonal issue that must be addressed at the level of the family.

Self and Others

R.D. Laing's book “The Self and Others” ([R.D. Laing, 1969](#)) is a work of social psychology that explores the nature of human relationships and how they are shaped by the individual's sense of self. Laing argues that the self is not a fixed, stable entity, but rather is constantly evolving and shaped by the relationships we have with others. He asserts that our relationships with others are a crucial factor in the development of our sense of self and that they can either support or undermine our sense of identity.

Laing contends that the way we perceive ourselves and others is largely influenced by our social and cultural environment and that this can have a significant impact on our relationships and the way we relate to others. He suggests that our sense of self is often shaped by our relationships with parents,

siblings, and other significant figures in our lives, and that these relationships can have a lasting impact on our sense of identity.

Laing also explores the concept of “ontological insecurity,” which refers to the feeling of uncertainty or insecurity about one's own existence and the meaning of life. He argues that this insecurity is often the result of our relationships with others, and that it can lead to feelings of isolation, loneliness, and even mental health problems.

“All groups operate by means of phantasy. The type of experience a group gives us is one of the main reasons, if not for some people the only reason, for being in a group. What do people want to get from the experience of being in a particular set of human collectivities? The close-knit groups that occur in some families and other groupings are bound together by the need to find pseudo-real experience that can be found only through the modality of phantasy. This means that the family is not experienced as the modality of phantasy but as ‘reality’. However, ‘reality’ in this sense is not a modality, but a quality attachable to any modality. If a family member has a tenable position within the family phantasy system, his call to leave the system in any sense is likely only to come from outside the phantasy system. We vary in readiness, and in desire, to emerge from the unconscious phantasy systems we take to be our realities. As long as we are in apparently tenable positions, we find every reason not to suppose that we are in a false sense of reality or unreality, security or insecurity, identity or lack of identity. A false social sense of reality entails, among other things, phantasy unrecognized as such. If [someone] begins to wake up from the [group] phantasy system, he can only be classified as mad or bad by [that group] since to them their phantasy is reality, and what is not their phantasy is not real.” *R.D. Laing, Self and Others*

Overall, “The Self and Others” is a thought-provoking and insightful examination of the role that relationships play in shaping our sense of self and our understanding of the world around us.

The Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise

“The Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise”(R.D. Laing, 1967) is a work of psychology that explores the nature of human consciousness and how it is shaped by social and cultural forces. Laing argues that our understanding of the world and our place in it is largely influenced by the experiences we have and the relationships we form with others. He contends that our experiences shape our perceptions and beliefs about ourselves and the world around us, and that this can have a significant impact on our sense of identity and our behavior.

Laing explores the concept of “ontological insecurity,” or the feeling of uncertainty or insecurity about one's own existence and the meaning of life, and how it can lead to feelings of isolation and disconnection from others. He suggests that this insecurity is often the result of our relationships with others and the social and cultural environments in which we live, and that it can contribute to mental health problems.

What we call ‘normal’ is a product of repression, denial, splitting, projection, introjection and other forms of destructive action on experience. It is radically estranged from the structure of being. The more one sees this, the more senseless it is to continue with generalized descriptions of supposedly specifically schizoid, schizophrenic, hysterical ‘mechanisms.’ There are forms of alienation that are relatively strange to statistically ‘normal’ forms of alienation. The ‘normally’

alienated person, by reason of the fact that he acts more or less like everyone else, is taken to be sane. Other forms of alienation that are out of step with the prevailing state of alienation are those that are labeled by the 'formal' majority as bad or mad." *R.D. Laing, The Politics of Experience/The Bird of Paradise*

Laing also discusses the role that power dynamics play in shaping our relationships and experiences, and how these dynamics can lead to feelings of oppression and inequality. He argues that it is important to challenge and resist these power dynamics in order to create more equitable and fulfilling relationships and experiences.

Overall, "The Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise" is a thought-provoking and insightful examination of the role that experiences and relationships play in shaping our consciousness and our understanding of the world around us.

Wisdom, Madness and Folly: The Making of a Psychiatrist 1927-1957

R.D. Laing's book "Wisdom, Madness and Folly: The Making of a Psychiatrist 1927-1957" ([R.D. Laing, 1981](#)) is an autobiography that covers the first 30 years of Laing's life, including his childhood, education, and early career as a psychiatrist.

In the book, Laing reflects on his experiences growing up in Glasgow, Scotland, and how his early relationships and experiences influenced his development as a person and as a psychiatrist. He discusses his education at the University of Glasgow and his early work in the field of psychology, including his involvement in the Scottish Society for Mental Health and his work with patients at the Glasgow Royal Mental Hospital.

Laing also explores the concept of mental illness and the ways in which it is understood and treated within the field of psychiatry. He critiques the traditional medical model of mental illness and its focus on symptoms and diagnoses, arguing that it often fails to take into account the social and cultural context of the individual's experiences. Instead, he advocates for a more holistic approach to understanding and treating mental illness that takes into account the person's unique experiences and relationships.

Overall, "Wisdom, Madness and Folly: The Making of a Psychiatrist 1927-1957" is a fascinating and thought-provoking look at Laing's early life and his development as a psychiatrist, as well as his views on mental illness and the field of psychiatry.

The Divided Self

R.D. Laing's "The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness" ([R.D. Laing, 1965](#)) is a psychological study that explores the concept of "madness" and the way it is perceived and treated in modern society. Laing argues that madness is not a medical condition that can be cured with drugs or therapy, but rather a natural and inevitable aspect of the human experience. He asserts that the social and cultural forces that shape our understanding of mental illness often contribute to the suffering of individuals who are labeled as "mentally ill."

In a world full of danger, to be a potentially seeable object is to be constantly exposed to danger.

Self-consciousness, then, may be the apprehensive awareness of oneself as potentially exposed to danger by the simple fact of being visible to others. The obvious defence against such a danger is to make oneself invisible in one way or another. *R.D. Laing, The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness*

Laing contends that the “divided self” refers to the way in which individuals often feel disconnected from their own thoughts, feelings, and experiences. He suggests that this division is often caused by social pressures and expectations that force individuals to conform to certain roles and behaviors, leading to a sense of disconnection from their true selves. Laing also explores the role of language and communication in the creation and maintenance of the divided self, arguing that the way we use language to describe and understand mental illness can further contribute to the suffering of individuals.

Overall, “The Divided Self” is a thought-provoking and influential work that challenges traditional understandings of mental illness and offers a new perspective on the experience of madness.

¹⁾ R. D. Laing [Wikipedia](#)

1. ^ R.D. Laing, Aaron Esterson, 1964. *Sanity, Madness and the Family*. Tavistock publications, ISBN 9780140134667.
2. ^ R.D. Laing, 1969. *Self and Others*. Pantheon Books, ISBN 9780394444604.
3. ^ R.D. Laing, 1967. *The Politics of Experience*. Penguin, ISBN 9780140224108.
4. ^ R.D. Laing, 1981. *Wisdom, Madness and Folly*. Macmillan, ISBN 9780333370759.
5. ^ R.D. Laing, 1965. *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness*. Penguin Books, ISBN 9780140207347.

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