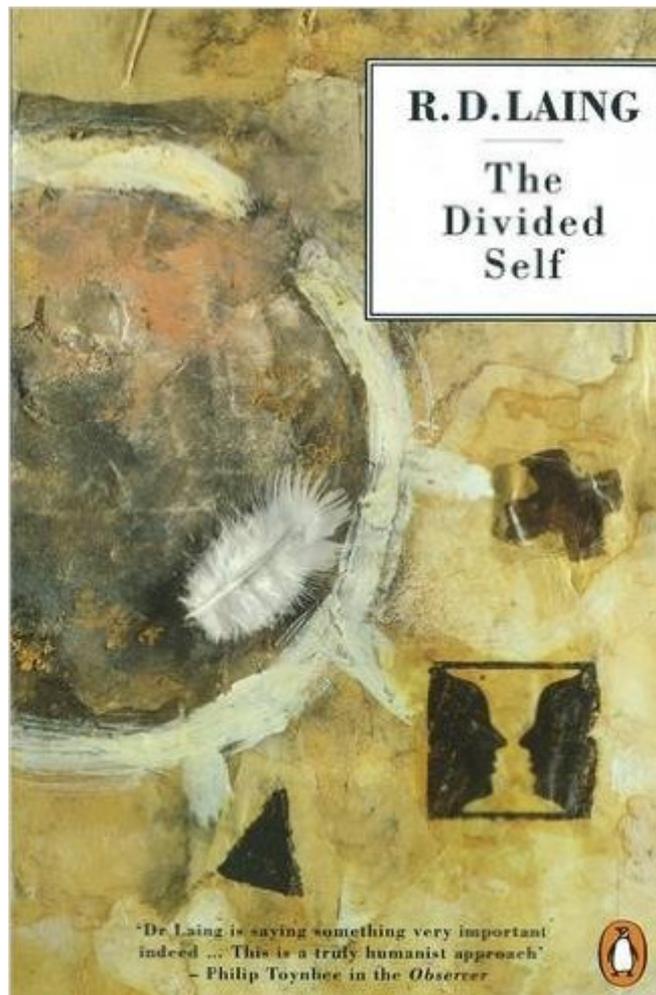


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The Divided Self: An Existential Study In Sanity And Madness (Penguin Psychology)



Synopsis

Dr. Laing's first purpose is to make madness and the process of going mad comprehensible. In this, with case studies of schizophrenic patients, he succeeds brilliantly, but he does more: through a vision of sanity and madness as 'degrees of conjunction and disjunction between two persons where the one is sane by common consent' he offers a rich existential analysis of personal alienation. The outsider, estranged from himself and society, cannot experience either himself or others as 'real'. He invents a false self and with it he confronts both the outside world and his own despair. The disintegration of his real self keeps pace with the growing unreality of his false self until, in the extremes of schizophrenic breakdown, the whole personality disintegrates.

Book Information

Series: Penguin Psychology

Paperback: 224 pages

Publisher: Penguin Books; Revised ed. edition (August 30, 1965)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0140135375

ISBN-13: 978-0140135374

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.5 x 7.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 3.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (41 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #63,783 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #16 in [Books > Health, Fitness & Dieting > Mental Health > Schizophrenia](#) #29 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Movements > Existentialism](#) #39 in [Books > Medical Books > Psychology > Movements > Behaviorism](#)

Customer Reviews

In this valuable study, Dr Laing proposes to examine the way some individuals are very proficient in acquiring a false self in order to adapt to false realities and to give an account of specifically personal forms of depersonalisation and disintegration. It is no small task for the therapist to articulate what the patient's "world" is and his way of being in it in order to outline his psychopathology. The author states that if we look at his actions as signs of a disease, we impose categories of thoughts on the patient in our effort to try to explain his mental state and it isn't easy for the therapist to transpose himself into the patient's strange and alien view of world in order to understand his existential position. Dr Laing states that many patients suffer from "ontological

insecurity" because they feel insubstantial, the ordinary circumstances of life constituting a continual threat to their own existence. He mentions personalities like Franz Kafka, Samuel Beckett and Francis Bacon. Then Dr Laing proceeds by giving the account of three forms of anxiety encountered by the ontologically insecure subject: engulfment, implosion and petrification. To illustrate these three forms, the author describes the case of Mrs R. who suffered from agoraphobia and schizophrenic withdrawal. Interestingly enough, the schizoid individual constantly feels vulnerable as he is exposed by the look of another person and that is why he fears live dialectical relationships with live people and prefers to relate himself to depersonalised persons or to phantoms of his own fantasies, thus the distinction between the "embodied" and "unembodied" self. Such an individual is afraid of the world, frightened that any impingement will be total and engulfing.

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