

MAN, MADNESS AND RESPONSIBILITY

R.D. Laing's Existential

Understanding of Madness

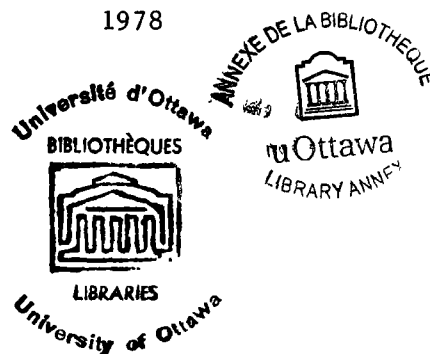
by

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Man is a mystery ; if you spend your entire
life trying to puzzle it out, then do not
say you have wasted your time. I occupy
myself with this mystery, because I want to
be a man.

Fyodor Dostoevsky

(Letter to his brother, 1839)

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INTRODUCTION: (i) A Philosophical Approach to Laing's Writings

"The psychotic", writes the Scottish psychiatrist R.D. Laing, "is more than anything else, simply human."¹ Starting from this presupposition, Laing is concerned with showing that "it (is) far more possible than is generally supposed to understand people diagnosed as psychotic."² His books and articles are an attempt to make madness intelligible in existential terms.³ Laing explicitly rejects the clinical-medical model of madness which considers the psychoses to be physiological diseases and which regards the behaviour of the psychotic as symptomatic of his disease. He denies the existence of the fact of schizophrenia and interprets the view that there is such a disease as an assumption or hypothesis.⁴ Laing's thesis is that madness can be understood as one mode of human existence.

Laing's writings on man and madness lie mainly within the

(1) R.D. Laing, The Divided Self 'An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness', Harmondsworth, England, Penguin Books, 1965, p. 34. see p. 51 of this paper.

(2) Ibid., p. 11

(3) As they are used in this paper, the terms 'intelligible' and 'understandable' connote the same meaning. Thus, we do not intend the following connotations: 'intelligible to someone other than the 'mad' person (eg. the psychiatrist)', and 'understandable to the 'mad' person himself'. It is not necessary for Laing's thesis that the 'mad' person be able to understand his own behaviour and experience in the way that Laing makes these intelligible in his writings.

(4) Laing uses the terms 'psychotic' and 'schizophrenic' throughout his writings to refer to a person (or his behaviour or experience) insofar as he is regarded, from a clinical-medical point of view, as psychotic or suffering from schizophrenia. By using the term 'mad', written in single quotation marks, in this paper, we intend the same connotations. No attempt is being made herein to distinguish between the various types of psychoses. see R.D. Laing and Aaron Esterson, Sanity, Madness and the Family, 'Families of Schizophrenics', 2nd ed., Harmondsworth, England, Penguin Books, 1970, p. 12.

disciplines of psychology and psychiatry. The presupposition on which they rest and the implication towards which they point, however, suggest a philosophical treatment of these writings. In this paper we will make explicit, and therefore justify, Laing's presupposition of the 'mad' person's essential humanness. The idea of a 'mad' person's sense of responsibility which is implied by Laing's existential understanding of madness is briefly discussed. By an examination of some of Laing's books we bring out the factors in interpersonal relations which he considers critical to personal-identity development. Using these as a guide to an investigation of the structure of madness, we demonstrate that the behaviour and experience of the 'mad' person can be made intelligible as a deliberate response of a person faced with a crisis in personal identity. Insofar as madness can be understood in this way, the 'mad' person can be said to retain a sense of responsibility to himself and, in one sense of the word, to be 'responsible' for his actions.

Laing's study of madness lies in the existential-analytic tradition of psychiatry. Dissatisfied with theories of man and mental illness that were confined by concepts and assumptions borrowed from the sciences of nature, this tradition represents an attempt to found a new psychology and psychiatry which would reflect man's totality as well as his uniqueness. Although this concern for human existence qua human began (in modern times) with Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, existential psychiatry received its immediate inspiration from nineteenth-century naturalistic psychology, which was unable to develop a conception of man adequate to his humanness, and twentieth-century existential phenomenology, which provided this conception. Existential phenomenology threw a new light on the study of man. Based on its anthropological insights, madness was able to be seen, not as the result of some disease, but as one mode of

human being-in-the-world whose existential structure could be understood as deviations from the general structure of human existence. While Laing acknowledges his debt to this philosophical tradition, he notes "important points of divergence from the work of Kierkegaard, Jaspers, Heidegger, Sartre, Binswanger and Tillich, for instance."⁻⁵⁻

Laing's psychiatry follows from his psychology. He argues that an understanding of what it is to be 'mad' is a special case of understanding what it is to be human. Much of his writings therefore, apart from dealing with madness itself, develop ideas on various ways in which people interrelate and the effects of these on personal-identity development. Laing applies these ideas towards an understanding of madness since it is his contention that the key to understanding the 'mad' person, qua person, lies in the intelligibility of his interpersonal relationships. Herein, we feel, lies Laing's greatest contribution to existential psychiatry: the central role played by a phenomenology of interpersonal relations in the existential understanding of madness. Indeed, as Laing argues in criticizing the clinical-medical model of madness, it is only as a result of an extreme interpersonal disjunction arising between two persons, one of whom is sane, that the other may be admitted to a mental hospital and an examination of his physiology begun to determine the clinical symptoms of his 'mental illness'. Laing writes:

I suggest, therefore, that sanity or psychosis is tested by the degree of conjunction or disjunction between two persons where the one is sane by common consent. ⁻⁶⁻

Laing's study of interpersonal relations is conducted from a phenomenological perspective. He tries to understand a person's behaviour

(5) R.D. Laing, The Divided Self, Op. Cit., p.9.

(6) Ibid, p. 36 (emphasis in original).

as a function of that person's experience. In trying to make the behaviour of the 'mad' person intelligible, Laing stresses that all modes of his experience must be given consideration. But he does not base his case for the existential intelligibility of madness solely on the argument for the phenomenological validity of all 'worlds' of experience. This bracketing of the 'objective world' is only his first step. Laing goes on to demonstrate that the behaviour and experience of the 'mad' person, as with every person, is structured around a life-project. In the special case of madness, this project involves the establishment and maintenance of a sense of identity - for it is precisely this that the 'mad' person is not able to take for granted and must constantly protect in his day-to-day existence. Possessing only a minimal sense of self and regarding relations with others as risking even this, his behaviour becomes intelligible as a response to this crisis of identity. His actions, however bizarre or socially unacceptable, can be understood as attempts to deal with and overcome what he regards as a threat to his very being, that is, as a consequence of his existential orientation and ontological presuppositions.

All of Laing's books are concerned with some aspect of the social intelligibility of madness. But over and above discussing this in terms of the regularities and idiosyncrasies of interpersonal relations, there is much diversity in his basic project. One could, by studying his books in the order in which they were written, trace a broadening in his thought on madness. In his first book, The Divided Self (1959), written when he was twenty-eight, Laing tries to show by a study of the

organization of the being of the schizoid person, that "there is a comprehensible transition from a sane schizoid way of being-in-the-world to a psychotic way of being-in-the-world."⁻⁷⁻ Laing argues that in attempting to escape from the terror he experiences in the 'real' world, the schizoid person erects a fortress of an 'outer' false self and retreats into an 'inner' world of phantasy and imagination. Going mad is understood as the gradual failure of this self-defence strategy; psychosis as the collapse of this 'inner' world and, in some cases, existential death. In later works, notably Sanity, Madness and the Family (1964) and The Politics of the Family (1968), madness is understood as a person's response to an untenable position within his family nexus. By examining the 'mad' person's clinical symptoms in the context of his interpersonal relationships in the family, Laing tries to show that "the behaviour and experience of that person who has already begun a career as a diagnosed schizophrenic patient, (is) intelligible in light of the praxis and process of his or her family nexus."⁻⁸⁻ Finally, in The Politics of Experience (1967), Laing argues that the 'mad' person is someone seeking refuge from, and in some cases, a way beyond, the alienating and dehumanizing forces of society. In the introduction to this book, in which he takes up the challenge to "provide a thoroughly self-conscious and self-critical human account of man", Laing writes:

Humanity is estranged from its authentic possibilities. This basic vision prevents us from taking any equivocal view of the sanity of common sense, or of the madness of the so called madman...We are bemused and crazed creatures, strangers to our true selves, to one another, and to the spiritual and material world - mad, even, from an ideal standpoint we can glimpse but not adopt.⁻⁹⁻

(7) Ibid., p.17.

(8) R.D. Laing and Aaron Esterson, Sanity, Madness and the Family, Op. Cit., p.27.

(9) R.D. Laing, The Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise, Harmondsworth England, Penguin Books, 1967, p. 12.

In such a society, "madness need not be all breakdown. It may also be breakthrough."⁻¹⁰⁻ Potentially, going mad can signify liberation as well as enslavement, existential rebirth as well as existential death. To parallel this development in his writings, one could argue for Laing's own transition from psychiatrist to anti-psychiatrist to radical psychiatrist and social critic.⁻¹¹⁻

Laing has not published anything in which he attempts to draw together these diverse aspects of his thinking into a unified position. However, second editions of his earlier works explicitly acknowledge the shift in his ideas on madness. In the preface to the second edition of The Divided Self (1964), Laing hints at the theme which is to underscore The Politics of Experience. In this, he writes 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 adopt to false realities."⁻¹²⁻ Despite this change in viewpoint, Laing tells the reader that he will let the original book stand for "this was the work of an old young man. If I am older, I am also now younger."⁻¹³⁻ His second book, The Self and Others (1961), retitled in a second edition to Self and Others (1969), was extensively revised "without being changed in any fundamental way."⁻¹⁴⁻

(10) Ibid., p.110.

(11) See Robert Boyers and Robert Orrill, eds., R.D. Laing and Anti-Psychiatry, New York, Harper and Row, 1971. This paper does not deal with the critique of society contained in and implied by parts of Laing's books. Inasmuch as we are dealing with his ideas on the understanding of madness in terms of a crisis of personal identity, this aspect of his thought is not directly relevant. With this approach to Laing, however, we do not wish to minimize or ignore his social critique.

(12) R.D. Laing, The Divided Self, Op. Cit., p.12. This preface is omitted in the American (Pantheon) edition of The Divided Self.

(13) Ibid. p.12.

(14) R.D. Laing, Self and Others, 2nd. ed., Harmondsworth, England, Penguin Books, 1969, p. 7.

Sanity, Madness and the Family, except for the addition of a preface reiterating its aim of assessing the social intelligibility of the behaviour and experience of schizophrenics, was reissued in 1970 without any changes to the body of the work. Therefore, discussion of Laing's ideas on madness which draws on aspects of all these books, will yield a more adequate understanding of man and madness.

In trying to assess Laing's contribution to the thought of our age, many commentators have emphasized his later works. In what might be called a 'political' interpretation of his writings, these authors have attributed to Laing the idea that every person is, to some extent or other, necessarily a threat to self. Their discussion of his ideas is based on this premise. According to this interpretation, interpersonal relations can only be destructive of personal development.

To impute to Laing the view that persons are essentially antagonistic is to ignore a large part of his writings. In all of his books, including the latter ones, Laing develops some aspect of the reciprocal influence of self and others. He understands much of this interaction to be necessary for personal development and beneficial to self. In this sense, persons can be said to feel a sense of responsibility to others. It is only when, owing to an extreme interpersonal disjunction, there is a breakdown in relations, that the actions of other(s) may become destructive of self. In some cases, depending on its extent, this disjunction may eventually lead one person to 'become mad' (i.e., to be taken to a psychiatrist who diagnoses him as suffering from, e.g., schizophrenia). The 'mad' person does experience others as a threat to himself. Indeed, Laing argues that his behaviour can be made intelligible as a response to this threat - whether or not it is founded 'in reality'. This intelligibility implies that the 'mad' person feels little or no

sense of responsibility to others, but an exaggerated sense of responsibility to himself. In drawing these implications from Laing's existential understanding of madness, we are not, therefore, intending to collapse the distinction between sanity and madness.

Laing demonstrates quite convincingly that those of us who are sane are so at least in part because of our relations with others. To argue that personal relations are, intrinsically, destructive of self, is to argue that persons are sane in spite of their interpersonal relations (or that only hermits are sane !). Those commentators who ascribe to Laing the view that other can only be a threat to self, or who 'derive' it from his writings, fail to realize that the other would be able to contribute to the destruction of self only if he could contribute to the development of self. Indeed, it is only in light of the latter possibility that Laing is able to present such a strong case for the social intelligibility of madness.

Without the potential for constructive interpersonal relationships, and mutual human enrichment, the goal of those psychiatry which attempt to understand and treat people as people, would not be possible. Indeed, if Laing himself felt that personal relations could only be depersonalizing, would he have chosen psychiatry, of all professions, as a base for his exposition of the human condition? His insights into madness have provided him with insights into man. His ability to empathize with the alienation and suffering of the 'mad' person, as well as his intellectual understanding of this person's existential predicament, enable Laing to give us a glimpse into the world of madness that is both compassionate and comprehensible. He has been able to get to know the schizophrenic and tell us about those people who have lost their sanity in order that they might survive. In discussing the requisites for an existential therapy,

Laing writes:

...the therapist must have the plasticity to transpose himself into another strange and even alien view of the world...Only thus can he arrive at an understanding of the patient's existential position. I think that it is clear that by 'understanding' I do not mean a purely intellectual process. For understanding one might say love. But no word has been more prostituted. What is necessary, though not enough, is a capacity to know how the patient is experiencing himself and the world. If one cannot understand him, one is hardly in a position to 'love' him in any effective way...The schizophrenic has to be known without being destroyed. He will have to discover that this is possible.-15-

To the 'mad' person himself, madness is a confusing and often terrifying experience. Like a traveller who is lost and in trouble in a strange land, the 'mad' person is primarily concerned with getting assistance, with finding someone or something familiar that will get him out of his quandary and back to safer ground. Inasmuch as he is frightened and confused and capable of giving only a biased or introverted account of his existential situation - and unsure even of this - it is unlikely that he can direct others to his aid, no matter how strong their concern or willingness to help. Laing's writings, based as they are on the essential meaning and characteristics of being human and providing an objective but nonetheless personalistic account of psychosis, furnish the therapist with a sort of rough map of the territory of madness. Guided by this, as well as by a sense of empathy for the feelings of the 'mad' person, the chances of reaching him and rescuing him from his existential predicament are greatly enhanced.

(15) R.D. Laing, The Divided Self, Op. Cit., p.34.

This paper is a study of Laing's ideas on the existential understanding of persons - sane and 'mad', and the ways in which persons interrelate.⁻¹⁶⁻ The focus of this understanding is on experience: on how a person experiences himself, the others with whom he interacts, and the groups to which he belongs. As Laing repeatedly argues, only in light of his experience is a person's interpersonal action intelligible. In giving primacy to the phenomenological, in stressing how persons experience the world, the ground is being laid for an understanding of why a 'mad' person, qua person, experiences the world in a particular way and, ultimately, for a discussion of the existential intelligibility of madness. One will not be able to understand the 'mad' person if one does not accept his world as real and his world-view as valid.

An important part of the relations between persons is the other's definition of self. Through his interpersonal relationships, a person gradually develops a sense of his identity. The discussion of Laing's ideas on interpersonal relations in this paper will assess the role played by the other in self-identity development and explicate the conditions that must be fulfilled in an interpersonal relationship for any person to form and maintain a secure sense of identity. The consideration of this aspect of human interaction serves as a bridge between a discussion of the 'general' case of the intelligibility of interpersonal relationships

(16) cf. Edgar Z. Friedenberg, Laing, Great Britain, Fontana, 1973, Chapter 2, pp. 32-56. In this book Friedenberg argues that it is Laing's major conclusion about the ways in which individuals interact that accounts for the widespread interest of his books today. Friedenberg states this conclusion in the following way:

Human personality develops in each of us as we respond to the particular power situations in which we find ourselves; our personality comes to be largely defined by our customary ways of coping with the demands that impinge on us, and our anticipation of possible failure or punishment. (p. 32)

Our own analysis of Laing's writings is along these lines too.

and the 'special' case of the intelligibility of madness. To the extent that these minimal personal-identity requirements are not fulfilled, a person becomes preoccupied with developing or preserving a stable sense of identity in his relations with others. Insofar as the behaviour and experience of a 'mad' person can be accounted for in terms of this quest for identity, madness is intelligible in existential terms.

In trying to establish or maintain a sense of his identity, the 'mad' person, as all persons, must depend to some extent on his relations with others. But in his case this quest is undertaken in the absence of basic self-assurance and has to be conducted in the face of the lethal threats these interpersonal relationships represent to him. Inasmuch as the behaviour of people who are secure in their sense of identity is directed at fulfilling themselves, the behaviour of a person whose entire life is a project of self-preservation is likely to appear odd. Living in a world which he can not share with other people, his behaviour directed toward a goal alien to them, it is not surprising that someone in this existential position who is unable to find a viable solution to his identity crisis, may become psychotic.

(ii) General Plan of this Paper

(1) The Question of Intelligibility:

The discussion of Laing's ideas on the intelligibility of human behaviour in general and the behaviour of the 'mad' person in particular involves setting down a solution to the following question:

To what extent do the writings of R.D. Laing
make madness intelligible?

This question shall be referred to as 'The Question of Intelligibility'.

(2) Background and Context of The Question of Intelligibility:

By tracing the rise of existential psychiatry as a reaction to nineteenth-century naturalistic psychology, we discuss the historical and philosophical background of Laing's writings. The context in which the Question of Intelligibility is answered is specified by contrasting opposing views of man and of madness. In light of this context, the question is rephrased to:

To what extent do the writings of R.D. Laing
make madness intelligible in existential terms?

(3) Answering the Question of Intelligibility:

Inasmuch as Laing regards the understanding of the 'mad' person as a special case of the understanding of all persons, answering the Question of Intelligibility involves a consideration of:

(a) the General Case: 'Laing's Theory of Interpersonal Relations'

Laing's ideas on understanding the various ways in which people interrelate are discussed. Based on these ideas the role played by interpersonal relations in personal identity development is evaluated. Out of this emerges the 'Minimal Personal-Identity Requirements'. These are the conditions that must be fulfilled in any interpersonal relationship for the persons therein to develop and maintain a secure sense of identity.

(b) the Special Case: Case studies of madness

Four case studies of madness are presented with the aim, in each case, of assessing the social and existential intelligibility of the 'mad' person's behaviour and experience. From each case emerges the 'Issues of Intelligibility'. These are the ideas in terms of which the 'symptoms' of the person's madness become intelligible in the light of his/her social and existential life-situation as attempts to establish a secure sense of identity.

(4) Final Step in the Solution to the Question of Intelligibility:

By way of concluding the paper the ideas derived from Laing's studies of interpersonal relations in general are compared to the ideas derived from his studies of madness. This is to say that the Minimal-Personal-Identity Requirements are compared to the Issues of Intelligibility. If the latter can be expressed in terms of the former then we argue that Laing's writings show that madness can be made intelligible in existential terms.

(5) Epilogue:

The idea of a 'mad' person's responsibility for his actions as well as his sense of responsibility to himself are briefly discussed. Both these ideas are implied by an existential understanding of madness.

CHAPTER #1

(i) Historical and Philosophical Background to Laing's Writings

Psychology arose as a discipline in the nineteenth century at a time when natural scientists were contributing much toward the explanation, systematization, and prediction of events in the non-human world. In an effort to gain a scientific understanding of man the early psychologists tried to apply the methods of natural science to the study of human phenomena. Although this marriage was partially successful, some thinkers felt that a naturalistic psychology was inappropriate and inadequate to the study of man. One voice of dissatisfaction was the philosophy of existentialism. This philosophy, writes Rollo May, "is the effort to understand man by cutting below the cleavage between subject and object which bedevilled Western thought and science since shortly after the Renaissance."¹ As existentialism came to be applied to the study and treatment of the mentally ill the school of existential psychiatry arose. Laing himself belongs to this brief but powerful tradition in his efforts to understand and help the 'mad' person. To account for the development of the existential movement in psychology and psychiatry, and to set Laing's writings in their place in this tradition, we must go back to Descartes and the origin of this epistemological dichotomy.

Descartes' distinction between matter and mind has influenced the

(1) Rollo May, 'Origins of the Existential Movement in Psychology' in Rollo May, Ernest Angel, Henri F. Ellenberger, eds., Existence 'A New Dimension in Psychiatry and Psychology', New York, Simon and Schuster, 1958, p.11.

study of both man and nature up until the present day. With the distinction between res extensa and res cogitans Descartes hoped to get at the essence of the world and gain absolute and indubitable truth. Mathematics was his key to understanding the world which he conceived of as mechanistic, deterministic, and subject to exact laws. For almost two hundred and fifty years following the publication of his Discourse on Method (1637) scientists tried to realize Descartes' dream of a universal science. The triumphs of Newtonian and Classical mechanics in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, coupled with the practical achievements of the industrial revolution, seemed to bring Western man very close to the realization of the Cartesian ideal. To the educated man of the mid-nineteenth century the world ran according to a more geometrico.

From its infancy psychology was subject to the influences of Cartesian dualism and positive science. Insofar as internal mental states were immediately reflected in external bodily states the early psychologists felt that a science of the mind could be based on experimentally induced responses. The methods of nineteenth century empirical psychology, borrowed from the physical sciences, came to dictate its subject matter. It dealt with the quantifiable to the exclusion of the non-quantifiable, physiology rather than the psyche, behaviour but not experience. The natural scientific idea of analyzing the whole in terms of the operation of its simpler constituents was adopted in Wundt's school of Introspectionism. The explanation of complex mental processes such as learning was undertaken by a study of feelings, images, sensations, etc. Just as the natural scientist in his laboratory engaged in detached observation the empirical psychologist studied the operation of the mind or psyche. This was conceived of not as a subject-psyche but as an

object-psyche, perceiving and reacting to a separate and distinct world. This subject - object cleavage has been called by Ludwig Binswanger, one of the pioneers of existential psychology, "the cancer of all psychology up to now."⁻²⁻ Empirical psychology, he writes, "reduces human psychic life to quantitatively variable, dynamic, elementary processes taking place in objective time."⁻³⁻

The rise of science and technology also had an effect on ideas of madness.⁻⁴⁻ Prior to the industrial revolution, both the mad man and criminal were separated from society as homeless paupers without valid or socially useful roles. The spread of factories and the subsequent demand for the cheapest possible labour resulted in the separation of the criminal from the mad man on the basis of prospective employability. Although both received the same treatment - imprisonment - the criminal might be controlled and rehabilitated by his punishment and (re)join the labour force. Reforming the mad man, thought to be deprived of his wits and incapable of rational assertion, required a different rationale. This came with Griesinger's idea that psychopathological phenomena could be explained in terms of diseases of the brain. With the identification of madness and mental illness, the diagnosis and treatment of the mad person fell into the realm of natural science.

(2) Quoted in Rollo May *et al.*, eds., Existence, Op. Cit., p. 11.

(3) L. Binswanger, 'Freud and the Magna Charta of Clinical Psychiatry', in Jacob Needleman, ed., Being-in-the-World 'Selected Papers of Ludwig Binswanger', Translated and with a Critical Introduction to his Existential Psychoanalysis by Jacob Needleman, Harper and Row, New York, 1963, p. 186.

(4) For a history of changes in ideas on madness see Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilization 'A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason', Tr. by Richard Howard, Pantheon Books, New York, 1956.

With this exclusive concern for the quantifiable and emphasis on method, the Cartesian epistemological distinction between res extensa and res cogitans developed into a distinction in substance between observing subject and observed object. This dichotomy was most apparent in the sciences of nature, especially in physics. Basic to classical mechanics is the idea that the observer is entirely independent of what he observes and is totally free from the influence of special circumstances surrounding his observations. By the close of the nineteenth century, physicists had been very successful in their attempts to understand man-sized events. But because of their failure to account for certain phenomena on an astronomical and atomic scale, fundamental concepts of classical physics, and indeed the idea of objectivity itself, began to be questioned by physicists themselves.⁻⁵⁻ Although few celestial riddles remained, astronomers were unable to account for the miniscule but significant advance in the perihelion of the planet Mercury in its orbit around the sun. In the atomic-sized world classical mechanics failed "conspicuously and completely"⁻⁶⁻ to account for results of experiments on the structure of the atom conducted during the first decade of this century. Natural radioactive decay of certain elements, the photoelectric effect, the wave-particle duality of light, all remained unexplained. William H. Coates and Haydon V. Whyte, in their

(5) This division of phenomena of the physical world into three types according to their size is found in Sir James Jeans, Physics and Philosophy, Cambridge University Press, London, 1942.

(6) J. Jeans, Physics and Philosophy, Op. Cit., p.123.

intellectual history of Western Europe, write that the turn of the century was a period of "intramural epistemological crisis"⁻⁷⁻ within the scientific community. They continue:

The suspicion got about that science was not a value-free inquiry into the nature of the world, but was as value laden as any other form of inquiry - as subjective as art and as 'conventional' as historiography. ... (Philosophers of science such as Mach and Poincaré) promoted the notion that science was merely another useful world view, and was therefore as dependent on the 'opinions' of scientists, as much a slave of fashion and fad, as any other aspect of human culture.⁻⁸⁻

This suspicion was confirmed in "the new physics"⁻⁹⁻ that developed in the first quarter of the twentieth century. In 1903 Rutherford and Soddy enunciated the fundamental law of spontaneous radioactive disintegration. Einstein's special theory of relativity (1905) did away with the Newtonian idea of absolute space and time by stipulating that the description of all phenomena was relative to the frame of reference from which the description was made. His general theory of relativity (1918) replaced the idea of universal gravitation with the concept of a curvature in the space-time continuum, and was able to account for the motions of all of the planets in our solar system. The quantum mechanics of Planck, Bohr and Schrodinger abandoned the classical idea that irradiated matter emitted radiation continuously and replaced this with the notion of the quantization or atomization of energy. The photoelectric effect thereby became understandable. With the Quantum Theory, the long-standing notion of a sharp distinction between subject and object was no longer tenable. In 1926, with his principle of

(7) Willson H. Coates and Hayden V. White, The Ordeal of Liberal Humanism 'An Intellectual History of Western Europe', Volume II 'Since the French Revolution', McGraw Hill, New York, 1970, p.294.

(8) Ibid., p. 293.

(9) J. Jeans, Physics and Philosophy, Op. Cit., p. 126.

uncertainty, Heisenberg quantitatively established the relation between the observer and the observed by specifying this in terms of a mathematical probability. With these developments, scientists had to abandon forever their hope of a detached, totally objective description of the universe. The experimenter was part of his experiment.

This new physics had its effects throughout the scientific community. Coates and Whyte speak of a "second scientific revolution"¹⁰ whose results were as shocking to the educated laity as was Copernicus' challenge to Ptolemaic cosmology almost four hundred years earlier. With this revolution, the geometrical certitude envisioned by Descartes gave way to a statistical probability stipulated by Heisenberg. Insofar as quantum physics was able to solve puzzles left unanswered by classical physics, and at the same time subsume this older system as a special case, this revolution was successful. Scientists have emerged from it confident of their powers because they are more conscious of their limits. But this radical questioning of two-and-one-half centuries of scientific thought went beyond the periphery of science. In the third quarter of the nineteenth century, certain scientifically inspired theories of man began to be criticized. Some writers, aware of the naturalistic trend in empirical psychology, attacked its theories as being inadequate to the totality of man. Psychologists limited their investigations to aspects of the human psyche which were amenable to quantification such as learning, memory, perception and sensation. There was a concomitant lack of attention to non-measurable psychic phenomena such as emotion, volition, or understanding. Behaviour was explained as a response to environmental stimuli, experience accounted for in terms of the physics

(10) W.H. Coates and H.V. White, The Ordeal of Liberal Humanism, Op. Cit., p. 292.

of light and sound and the physiology of the nervous system, and learning was reduced to stimulus-response mechanisms and the laws of association. In short, instead of trying to develop a unified concept of man which would underpin and coordinate their various researches, psychologists divided man into numerous faculties and explained the operation of each in isolation from the whole.

Nor did empirical psychology require an idea of the essential meaning and characteristics of being human. Indeed, the demand for an "anthropology"⁻¹¹⁻ was dismissed as metaphysical and unscientific. Yet it was precisely in this spirit that the psychology of the day was criticized by irrationalist thinkers such as Dilthey, Bergson, Husserl and Freud, insofar as it professed to provide an understanding of man. All these writers felt that, in the final analysis, any theory of man must be based on a non-scientific idea, one not subject to empirical verifiability. Whether this was Dilthey's doctrine of the Erlebnis, Husserl's concept of intentional consciousness, Bergson's Élan Vital or Freud's theory of the unconscious, the emphasis is super-physical. Despite individual differences, all four men saw limitations in science and sought to go beyond it and arrive at an understanding of man that would do justice to his humanity.

Dilthey reacted against the excessive rationality of his age and attempted to establish a distinction within scientific inquiry

(11) The usage of this word follows that of Binswanger. He does mean cultural anthropology, the comparative study of races, mores, etc., but the study of man ("anthropos") and, more exactly, "the study of the essential meaning and characteristics of being human," L. Binswanger, 'The Existential Analysis School of Thought' in Rollo May et. al., eds., Existence, Op. Cit., pp. 191-213.

between disciplines concerned with non-human nature (Naturewissenschaften) and those dealing with man (Geistwissenschaften). The former dealt with objects which are analyzable in terms of their external attributes and which function as instances of general, universal, causal laws. The latter is a study of entities endowed with consciousness which must be understood in categories other than those of location and mechanical causation. Dilthey stressed that the Naturewissenschaften are essentially determining sciences which assume and deal with limits, while the Geistwissenschaften are liberating sciences which begin with openness and are concerned with the freedom of the human act. He argued that an understanding of this involves the discovery and explication of the meaning and purpose of the act as well as a description of the act itself. The cultural sciences must be concerned with how subjective states become objectified as part of the sociocultural context. Their method is neither empirical nor objective, but phenomenological.

Husserl developed the phenomenological method for the investigation of intentional consciousness which he saw as "the unitary relation between transcendental subjectivity and transcendental objectivity."⁻¹²⁻ He hoped to establish philosophy as a rigorous science and thereby provide a foundation for the natural and human sciences. Husserl felt that the science of his day had become a closed system, replacing wisdom by scientific rationalism and knowledge by scientific fact. Science had excluded philosophy from its domain

(12) L. Binswanger, 'Heidegger's Analytic of Existence and It's Meaning for Psychiatry', in Being-in-the-World, Op. Cit., p. 207.

and radically questioned philosophical inquiry. In doing so Husserl felt that science was headed toward a crisis. He argued that it had severed its roots by cutting itself off from the only means of understanding that its theory and methodology were grounded in the ontological structure of man and the world.

This immanent ontological crisis and the actual intramural epistemological crisis in science was reflected in the intellectual mood of Europe at the close of the nineteenth century. By refusing to inquire into the meaning of his existence or to answer the call of his freedom, it seemed to Husserl that European man had lost faith in himself and in his being. With the failure of positive science and psychology to provide an adequate understanding of man and the world the way was left open for psychologism and historicism to define universal, necessary truth in terms of the effects of the conditions contingent on these truths. Husserl tried to establish the a priori conditions for universal, necessary, apodictic truth in terms of the structure of human consciousness. He criticized both psychologism and historicism. The former, as exemplified by empirical psychology, fragmented and reified consciousness. Until it could establish a priori psychical concepts, psychology would remain pre-Galilean and therefore unscientific. Historicism saw all philosophies as possessing only historical and thus relative validity. Either it is itself a product of history or it refutes itself. At best it can decide the relative validity of any philosophy. Husserl felt that only an essentialist phenomenology was able to establish the relationship between consciousness and being and thereby provide a basis for science. Without this scientific philosophy, there could be neither science nor philosophy.

In his idea that man was as much a product of irrational, unconscious instincts as of conscious, rational will, Freud was part of the anti-rationalistic movement in late nineteenth century Europe. He went beyond the behavioural psychology of Fechner and Wundt in locating the key to the human personality in the unobservable unconscious. To probe the secrets of this realm he developed the method of psychoanalysis, and attempted to show "the deepest essence of man is instinctual impulse whose elemental nature is the same in all men and which directs him to the satisfaction of certain primal needs."⁻¹³⁻ But throughout his life Freud remained under the influence of his teachers Meynert and Wernicke who, with their studies in physiology and neuroanatomy, had continued Griesinger's investigation of the diseases of the brain. Indeed it was the spirit of epistemological optimism which prevailed in the natural sciences in the mid-nineteenth century that gave Freud's enterprise both its direction and momentum. He believed that knowledge of the universe could not be obtained by revelation, inspiration or insight, but only by the evaluation of carefully verified observations. But his research into the human psyche did not stop at the empirical. "In our method, Freud wrote in a statement which most concisely articulates the natural-scientific spirit of psychoanalysis, "observed phenomena must take second place to forces that are merely hypothesized."⁻¹⁴⁻ Freud's genius, as Binswanger argues in his paper 'Freud's Conception of Man in the Light of Anthropology',⁻¹⁵⁻ was his development of the idea of Homo natura -

(13) L. Binswanger, 'Freud's Conception of Man in the Light of Anthropology', in Being-in-the-World, Op. Cit., p.156.

(14) Ibid., p. 156.

(15) Ibid., pp.149-181.

man as nature - as the theoretical framework upon which all of his psychoanalytic explorations were structured. Although psychoanalysis could not fully explain the human psyche, Freud felt that his theory and method could minimize man's guilt feelings, anxiety and suffering, and help bring about a happier, healthier humanity.

To account for elements common to all men as well as for the richness of human diversity Freud drew on insights of the natural sciences. He saw in all men the clash between the irrepressible, unconscious drives of instinct and the socialized and civilized demands of conscience. The instincts he conceived of as rudimentary forces which could ultimately explain human society, culture, art and religion - just as the wide variety of qualitatively different elements is due to a quantitative difference in the nuclei of their atoms. In his psychodynamics, Freud spoke of the interplay of the forces of instinct in analogy to electrical and mechanical systems. The extent of this analogy is emphasized by Binswanger in the following lengthy passage from Freud:

Deep down, the individual life, too, is chaotic, dark, inaccessible, and only describable in negative comparison to the "organized" Ego. It is like a "cauldron of seething excitement"; it is "somewhere in contact with somatic processes" and "takes over from them instinctual needs and gives them mental expression" though we can not say in what substratum this contact is made. "These instincts fill it (the Id) with energy, but it has no organization, no unified will, only an impulse to obtain satisfaction for instinctual needs, in accordance with the pleasure principle. The laws of logic - above all, the law of contradiction - do not hold for processes in the Id. contradictory impulses exist side by side without neutralizing each other or drawing apart; at most they combine in compromise formations under the overpowering economic pressures toward discharging their energy..." "...Instinctual cathexes seeking discharge - that, in our view, is all that the Id contains. It seems, indeed, as if the energy of these instinctual impulses is constituted differently to that which is found in other regions of the mind. It must be far more fluid and more capable of being discharged, for otherwise we should not have these displacements and condensations, which are so characteristic of the Id and which are so completely independent of the qualities of the object... with which it is cathected. What would one not give to understand these things better!" -16-

(16) Ibid., p. 161.

According to Freud's Oedipal theory, the amoral child, impelled by unconscious erotic and aggressive drives of the Id, and guided only by the pursuit of pleasure, must sublimate his desires and succumb to the dictates of reality in order to survive. With instinct being repressed at the risk of neurosis, a balance must be found between repression and sublimation. In this struggle with his parents the child learns and adopts the values and norms of his family as an ego-ideal and gradually develops and internalizes these as a conscience or Super-ego. Since the family is representative of society and culture, this ontogeny accounts for the individual's socialization. Proper resolution of the Oedipus complex results in a well-adjusted, self-improving, law-abiding person; if this is not well resolved, an antisocial or asocial personality may be the result.

Psychoanalysis conceives of mental illness in terms of incorrect perception of external reality. A person is mentally ill when there is a discrepancy between his view of his life-situation and a correct, objective assessment of it. His responses to other persons and things are therefore inappropriate and cause unnecessary anxiety. Instead of being goal-oriented, his behaviour is focussed on resolving inner conflict. His capacity for work and recreation is correspondingly diminished. He is unable to meet unrealistic, self-imposed standards or to understand or accept his failures. Unsure of his own limits and abilities he is unable to correct or compensate for his errors. Psychoanalysis aims at alleviating his suffering and restoring him to his place in society. The mentally-ill patient is taught to distinguish between his needs and his abilities and the requirements of society. With this insight his anxiety diminishes and his ability to act appropriately and effectively increases. By improving his perception of and ability to deal with the world the

patient is restored to full productive and recreative potential. His suffering becomes limited to that which life would otherwise inflict. Psychoanalysis aims at teaching the patient who he is by defining him in terms of his social and economic roles. This is not to say that it advocates a surrender to external demands in order to get along in life, but only that one should be wary of one's vulnerabilities and aware of one's abilities. But insofar as external reality figures prominently in psychoanalysis, the analyst must remain committed to an objective assessment of the world and a detached evaluation of his patient's place in it.⁻¹⁷⁻

Despite criticisms of Freud's theories by Jungians and Gestalt therapists, Freudian psychoanalysis remains the dominant mode of psychotherapy today in North America and Britain. In Europe, however, a counter method of psychotherapy has made deep inroads. This is the existential analytic school of psychiatry. Existential analysis is an attempt to reexamine the symptoms and treatment of mental illness in light of the writings of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger. Its roots lie in the dissatisfaction of some analysts with psychiatries based on a naturalistic theory of man. These men felt that so long as an understanding of man is guided by the dictates of a theory of man there would always remain questions as to the applicability of the theory to the individual person receiving therapy. Insofar as existential analysis is based on this dissatisfaction it represents an

(17) Existential therapists are quick to point out that Freudian theory, remaining as it does within a mechanistic framework, is not reflected in the humanness of psychoanalytic practice. vide Medard Boss, Psychoanalysis and Daseinsanalysis, Tr. by Ludwig B. Lefebvre, Basic Books, New York, 1963, especially Chapter 4, pp. 61-74; and Ludwig Binswanger, 'Freud's Conception of Man in the Light of Anthropology' in Being-in-the-World, Op. Cit., pp. 149-181.

attempt to be more objective and more scientific than a psychology or psychiatry which conceives of man in terms of the categories of non-human nature. Existential analysis does not rely on a theory of man; nor does it become lost in scientific abstraction, explanation or calculation in its study and treatment of human beings. This repudiation of theory constitutes the fundamental difference between the natural sciences of man and the existential sciences of man.⁻¹⁸⁻

Ludwig Binswanger's criticism of Freudian theory is typical of this existentialist reaction against naturalistic psychiatry. In a paper entitled 'Freud's Conception of Man in the Light of Anthropology', Binswanger argues that the central Freudian idea of homo natura allows only a partial understanding of man and of mental illness. Homo natura - man as nature - is for Freud not an actual man, but a natural-scientific, biopsychological idea comparable to 'organism' in biology or 'matter' in physics. This idea is arrived at as the result of reducing empirical evidence to a sort of least-common denominator in order to facilitate a reconstruction of the phenomenal to fit a pre-conceived hypothesis. If man is viewed through Freud's narrow naturalistic perspective, we see, Binswanger writes:

...the pure specimen of homo natura: Bodily instinct, the gaining of pleasure (sacrificing a lesser for a greater gain), inhibition because of compulsion or pressures from society (the prototype being the family), a developmental history in the sense of ontogenetic and phylogenetic transformation of outer into inner compulsions, and the inheritance of these transformations.⁻¹⁹⁻

(18)Vide M. Boss, Psychoanalysis and Daseinsanalysis, Op. Cit., p. 30.

(19) L. Binswanger, 'Freud's Conception of Man in the Light of Anthropology', in Being-in-the-World, Op. Cit., p. 153, parentheses in original.

According to this conception, the basis of man's being is his bodiliness; he is the product and passive plaything of unconscious instincts. Homo natura is not only a will to power but a will to life and its enrichment by the preservation of forces responsible for life.

Binswanger argues that to interpret man as homo natura and to take instinctual impulses as the basis of this interpretation involves "a destruction of man's knowledge of himself - a destruction of anthropological experience."²⁰ This idea of man does not take into consideration the many other different determinants of individual human life: a man's plans, projects, aspirations, etc., those factors which make him an individual, and not merely an example. An individual's life, Binswanger notes, must be understood in relation to what he calls his world-design. Conceiving of man only as homo natura involves abstracting from the variety that characterizes human life in order to appropriate what is common and basic to all persons. The result, the product of this scientific dialectic, is a tabula rasa. In this process, all that makes man a man, and not an animal, is lost.

Binswanger argues that to discover that aspect of man which is ignored in Freud's writings, one only has to turn at random to any page therein to find references to 'our psyche', 'his psychic apparatus', etc. It is these possessive pronouns, Binswanger argues, which imply that what is being referred to is existence as personal existence, that is, self. Yet it is precisely this personal being, which these psychologies presuppose as self-evident and which they just as self-evidently bracket out, that anthropologists consider to be most essential in the study of man. For man is the only being who is conscious of his existence and whose consciousness-of-self is inimical to this existence. To ignore

(20) Ibid., p.166

this aspect of man is to ignore that which is characteristically and uniquely human. By bracketing out "self", Binswanger continues, reciprocal personal communication within a we-relationship is replaced by an irreversible, impersonal relation between doctor and patient or an even more impersonal association between researcher and object of research.

He writes:

Naturalistic psychology ignores the entire structure of ontological problems that surrounds the question as to the genuine who that so relates itself, the question of the human self. When this self is objectified, isolated, theorized into an ego, or into an Id, Ego and Super-ego, it is thereby driven out of its authentic sphere of being, namely existence, and ontologically and anthropologically suffocated.-21-

The result of an impersonal, objective study of man, he concludes, is not psychology but natural science.

Failure in psychiatric therapy may indicate poor therapeutic technique, or it may point to the inadequacy of the theory on which the therapy is based. In discussing these two alternatives, Binswanger points to two epistemological traditions within which psychology and psychiatry have developed. One is the pragmatic tradition dominant in North America and Britain; the other which is more theoretically orientated, finds its proponents on the European continent. In the English speaking world, this pragmatism is fostered by the Lockean idea of the tabula rasa: the initially blank and passive mind. Here the emphasis and tradition is on technique. Behavioral and animal psychology predominate, and the greatest contributions have been in the area of applied psychology and psychiatry. In Europe, following in the Leibnitzian tradition of a potentially active mind, the theoretical basis of technique is stressed. Those who first became dissatisfied with a psychology based on a natural-scientific idea of man belonged to the Leibnitzian tradition. In seeking

(21) Ibid., p. 171.

a fuller understanding for the success or failure of therapy, they turned to a philosophical examination of its theory and of the presuppositions underlying this theory.

Empirical psychology, cast in the mold of the sciences of nature, rests on the theoretical presuppositions of these sciences. It makes certain assumptions about the nature of man and the world which are not themselves open to scientific verification. Thus, for example, science presupposes a dichotomy of subject and object and argues, following as a corollary, that man can study the world from a detached, 'objective' vantage point.⁻²²⁻ But it is precisely these presuppositions which limit the course of science and empirical psychology to certain paths by restricting the problems with which they can deal, or by defining the types of answers allowable in their epistemological framework. Thus, for example, the basic question of how man is able to perceive the world in a meaningful way is answered in terms of the physics of sound and light and the neurophysiology of the body. Ultimately such an explanation is concerned with elucidating the nature of the relationship between man and the world. But by its very structure it leaves unexplained the processes by which blind particles (or waves) of energy are converted into things which have meaning for the perceiver. To argue that this meaning is learned presupposes man's ability to learn and, more fundamentally, that the world 'contains' implicit meanings which can be learned. Although the natural-scientific explanation of perception rests on these presuppositions, science is unable to explain the

(22) The advances of the new physics did not serve to obliterate the epistemological distinction between the scientist and the object of his study, but established a certain statistical interrelationship between them. (See p. 19).

presuppositions themselves. Indeed, the demand for an explanation is dismissed on the basis of its empirical nonverifiability, that is, it is dismissed as unscientific and unnecessary. But so long as a dichotomy between subject and object is retained, the nature of the relationship between man and the world will remain a mystery. So long as the human existent is reduced to a mere subject, the way in which this subject can meet and understand an object, or communicate and interrelate with another subject, is unexplainable.

Natural science and naturalistic psychology rest on unexplained presuppositions. Neither discipline was able to come up with an adequate understanding of man. Some psychiatrists, in search for an anthropology upon which they could ground their understanding of man, saw that this must begin where science and psychology had stopped: it must begin with an examination of their presuppositions. They argued that a better understanding of man could be established on the basis of new and more adequate presuppositions about man and the world.

These presuppositions were first set down in the ontological analysis of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger. His inquiries into the meaning and characteristics of human existence provided the underpinnings of existential psychology and psychiatry. Ludwig Binswanger and Medard Boss, among the first psychiatrists to apply Heidegger's insights toward a more human understanding of mental illness, have acknowledged their indebtedness to him. Binswanger writes:

The existential research orientation in psychiatry arose from dissatisfaction with prevailing efforts to gain scientific understanding in psychiatry. Psychology and psychotherapy as sciences are admittedly concerned with 'man', but not at all primarily with mentally-ill man, but with man as such. This new understanding of man, which we owe to Heidegger's analysis of existence, has its basis in the new conception of man that is no longer understood in terms of some theory - be it a^a-²³⁻ mechanistic, biologic or psychological one.

and Medard Boss writes:

Martin Heidegger's "analysis of Dasein" is more appropriate to an understanding of man than the concepts which natural science has introduced into medicine and psychotherapy.⁻²⁴⁻

Heidegger's Daseinsanalytic, especially as set down in Sein und Zeit and Vom Wesen des Grundes, has explicitly been cited⁻²⁵⁻ as the basis for Binswanger's Daseinsanalyse and Boss' Daseinsanalysis, and has subsequently come to influence other psychiatrists such as Eugene Minkowski, Viktor von Gebattel and Erwin Strauss in Europe, Rollo May and Gordon Allport in America, and Ronald Laing and David Cooper in Britain.⁻²⁶⁻ To understand this influence it is necessary to briefly discuss some of Heidegger's work especially as this applies to psychiatry.

(23) L. Binswanger, 'Existential Analysis and Psychotherapy' in Progress in Psychotherapy, ed. by Fromm-Reichmann and Moreno, New York, Grune and Stratton, 1956, p. 144. Quoted in Rollo May et al., eds., Existence, Op. Cit., p. 4.

(24) M. Boss, Psychoanalysis and Daseinsanalysis, Op. Cit., p. 28.

(25) Ibid., p. 3.

(26) The terms 'existential analysis' and 'existential psychiatry' are used throughout this paper to refer to all these schools of psychiatry. No attempt is made to establish the relationship of Heidegger's thought to the writings of any of these psychiatrists. For a work tracing the influence of phenomenology on psychology and psychiatry see Herbert Spiegelberg, Phenomenology in Psychology and Psychiatry, 'An Historical Introduction', Evanston, Illinois, Northwestern University Press, 1972. vide L. Binswanger, 'Heidegger's Analytic of Existence and Its Meaning for Psychiatry', in Being-in-the-World, Op. Cit., pp. 206-221.

"The purpose of Sein und Zeit", Binswanger writes in an article discussing the meaning of Heidegger's Daseinsanalytic for psychiatry, "was the concrete working out of the question as to the meaning of Being."⁻²⁷⁻ Heidegger conceives of the ontological structure of human being or Dasein as that of being-in-the-world or transcendence. Implied by this idea of man is the intrinsic meaningfulness of the world. In "An Outline of Analysis of Dasein"⁻²⁸⁻, Medard Boss writes:

Man is at any given moment nothing but in and as this or that perceiving, instinctive, emotional, imaginative, dreaming, thinking, acting, willing, or wishing relation towards the things which he encounters. ...In this sense, man is fundamentally "out in the world" and with the things he encounters. His existence is originally a "being-in-the-world".⁻²⁹⁻

With man's existence conceived of as being-in-the-world, the dichotomy between man as subject and the world as object disappears. Without this dichotomy no theory of mechanical causality, such as stimulus-response or action-reaction, is needed to explain how man relates to the world. Nor is this relationship reducible to the laws of physics and the structure of human neuroanatomy. As being-in-the-world man is essentially object directed and oriented. His relationship to the world is describable in terms of intentionality. Man's being-in-the-world is not an abstraction but always an actual existence. It fulfills itself only in the many particular modes of human behaviour towards things and other people. Man could only relate to these sensibly and efficiently if he illuminated and disclosed their

(27) L. Binswanger, 'Heidegger's Analytic of Existence and Its Meaning for Psychiatry' in Being-in-the-World, Op. Cit., p. 206.

(28) M. Boss, 'An Outline of Analysis of Dasein', in Psychoanalysis and Daseinsanalysis, Op. Cit., pp. 28-48.

(29) Ibid., p. 33.

meaning in his relations with them. This presupposes the absolutely fundamental idea that there is something - as opposed to nothing at all. "The very essence of man's existence," Boss writes, "is an immediate and primary awareness of 'Beingness-as-such'."-30- Without this awareness there would be neither the possibility of understanding that there are certain categories of beings nor of the particular things belonging to these categories. Man is a "light which luminates"-31- whatever particular beings come into the realm of his rays. This fundamental essence of man's being-in-the-world "holds true for all possible ways of existing be they normal or psychotic."-32- Only thus is it possible to speak of somebody doing something 'without thinking' or of grasping an idea 'intuitively'; likewise can a person become spiritually as well as physically blind, or a mad man have meaningful and significant 'hallucinations'. Equally so, this idea of man as primary awareness of Being-ness accounts for why he is able to be affected by someone or somebody both in a physical and emotional way. Thus man's openness to others as well as their significance to him are both basic to his existence.

With the existentialia, the fundamental characteristics of Dasein, Heidegger fills out his ontological understanding of the meaning of being human. Besides being-in-the-world, primary comprehending and lumination, other characteristics of Dasein are his constant attunement to his world, his falling prey to phenomena, his essential spatiality and temporality, and his intrinsic existential guilt and responsibility. These qualities

(30) Ibid., p. 35.

(31) Ibid., p. 37.

(32) Ibid., p. 39.

all contribute to this understanding and, as such, provide clues to the intelligibility of madness as a specific mode of being-in-the-world. The existentialia do not form some sort of ideal or a priori human structure. They are not a Platonic design derived from observable phenomena which always fall short of this design. Rather, the existentialia "always characterize the immediate 'essence' of the factually observable, concrete behaviour of human beings."-33-

A man's mood determines how he sees the world - just as the colour and brightness of a light determine what can be seen by it. The choice, brightness and colouring of his relationships with others and with things is affected by this mood. When he is hungry or tired, for example, he perceives things and relations between things differently than when he is anxious or in love. Dasein needs particular beings with whom it exists, and understands itself in relation to these because it is awareness of Being-ness. Man is thrown - as a light - onto particular beings, falls prey to these, and loses himself to them. This implies that people and things in the world must be such that Dasein is able to luminate and understand them and relate to them in its many different modes of being. Human being and the things which shine forth in the realm of its 'there' "are so immediately integral that...the relationship between Being-ness and man...supports everything insofar as it brings forth both the appearance of things and man's Dasein."-34-

(33) Ibid., p. 40.

(34) Ibid., p. 42.

Dasein's realm of being is not a spot or place where my body is. Rather, the location of my body in space, the physical position of my 'I', is an essential consequence of man's existential spatiality. Dasein is essentially spatial not because it knows or imagines space - although man's taking up space presupposes this knowing - but because it is "spiritual".⁻³⁵⁻ Dasein's spatiality is grounded in the fact that it is essentially world disclosure and must be found in a world-disclosing sphere of activity. This fundamental characteristic is expressed by the existential remoteness or closeness of particular beings with whom he lives, and is gauged by the significance or magnitude of their effect. Existential space is primary since physical space can be derived from it and not vice versa.

Dasein's fundamental spatiality can only be fully understood on the basis of its temporality. 'Being' always means 'being present', presence implies duration or lasting, and something can last only on the basis of time. Existential time is not clock time - an endless sequence of 'nows' in correspondence to which the events of a man's life can be sequenced. "Man's temporality is not, but is emerging as the unfolding and coming forth of his existence."⁻³⁶⁻ Existential 'nows' and 'thens' are 'now as the door bangs' or 'then when we met in Paris'. It is chronicled by significant events and, as such, always implies man's caring for something. The 'now' lasts as long as the caring lasts. "Man carries out his existence in such caring for what is disclosed to him. He lasts from his past through his present into his future in letting things come forth and shine into the luminating realm of his existence."⁻³⁷⁻ He consumes his time in long

(35) Ibid., p. 43.

(36) Ibid., p. 45.

(37) Ibid., p. 45.

or short hours depending on how intensely his existence is fulfilled at a given phase of its unfolding. Boss notes that these insights into man's existential temporality and spatiality are of paramount importance for understanding the otherwise unintelligible time and space phenomena in the experience of many schizophrenics and drug addicts.

Heidegger's Daseinsanalytic has had major implications for the discipline of psychiatry. Two of these are of specific relevance to this thesis. The first is that conceiving of man as originally and fundamentally related to the world allows us to understand all types of human behaviour as specific modes of being-in-the-world. This idea is a fundamental presupposition of any existential understanding of madness. The essence of this implication is stated succinctly by Binswanger when he writes:

If for a moment we remember the definition of being-in-the-world as transcendence and view from this point our psychiatric analysis of existence, we realize that by investigating the structure of being-in-the-world we can also approach psychosis; and realize furthermore that we have to understand them as specific modes of transcending. In this context we do not say: mental illnesses are diseases of the brain (which of course they remain from a medical-clinical viewpoint). But we say: in the mental diseases we face modifications of the fundamental or essential structure and structural links of being-in-the-world as transcendence. It is one of the tasks of psychiatry to investigate and establish these variations in a scientifically exact way. -38-

The basic structure of existence set down in Heidegger's Daseinsanalytik provides us with a systematic guide for this practical, existential analytic investigation. It establishes certain points of reference in each case of psychosis - certain kinds of temporalization and spatialization, lighting and colouring and the texture of world design toward which a given form of existence casts itself. This guide is given by the structure of human being-in-the-world because that structure gives us a

(38) L. Binswanger, 'The Existential Analysis School of Thought', Op. Cit., p. 194.

norm and enables us to determine deviations from this. In each new norm, each new world design with its particular being-in-the-world and self-design, "we see", Binswanger writes, "in existential terms, the real key to the understanding of what is taking place."³⁹⁻ The existential analyst, like the natural scientist, does not stop at the single fact or symptom, but keeps on searching for an all-embracing whole within which this fact can be understood as a partial phenomena. This whole is found in the unity of world-design.

The second implication of Heidegger's ontological understanding of man which concerns us here is the idea of existential guilt and existential responsibility as being primary human characteristics. Although Heidegger establishes a framework in terms of which all modes of being-in-the-world can be evaluated, Boss argues that his Daseinsanalytik provides only the bare beginnings of our understanding of human existence. "Equipped in this way to live in the realm of being" , Boss writes, "man's task is to be both the servant and shepherd of Being-ness."⁴⁰⁻ Man must responsibly undertake all his life-possibilities for world disclosing relationships in such a way that whatever or whomever may enter this realm can come forth into its being to the fullest possible extent. Boss writes:

Man is to accept all of his life-possibilities, he is to operate and assemble them to a free and authentic own self no longer caught in the narrowed-down mentality of an anonymous, inauthentic, 'everybody'. Man's freedom consists in becoming ready for accepting and letting all that is, to let it shine forth in the world-openness as which he exists.⁴¹⁻

(39) Ibid., p. 201.

(40) M. Boss, Psychoanalysis and Daseinsanalysis, Op. Cit., p. 47.

(41) Ibid., p. 47.

The ability to accept this responsibility for oneself and to respond in certain ways to others, or not to do so, he writes, "seems to be the very core of human freedom."⁻⁴²⁻ In this way this ontological understanding of man's existence "reveals its deepest and inexhaustable meaningfulness"⁻⁴³⁻ by defining man's basic morality: his responsibility to others as well as to himself. These ethical values stem from an understanding of man's essence and need not be added a posteriori to an account of human life.

Man is reminded of his existential responsibility by his conscience. Here lies the source of his existential guilt: his "failing to carry out the mandate to fulfill his possibilities."⁻⁴⁴⁻ As long as he is alive, some of man's possibilities remain unactualized. Since he can only live in one mode of world-relatedness at a time and must ignore the rest, man always has a future of possibilities before him. In this sense he must always remain in debt to his existence. In an existential sense, man is always guilty.

The guilt rooted in human existence must be distinguished from the guilt that a person feels from living in a manner which is unfulfilling or false to his own self. This inauthentic guilt or guilt feeling must always be understood in reference to his existential being-in-debt since it is grounded therein.

With this distinction between authentic and inauthentic guilt we come to a characterization of existential psychotherapy. Existential psychiatry views mental illness not in terms of the distorted perception of external reality and loss of productivity, but as falsification of self and loss of creativity. In existential psychiatry, the psychoses and neuroses

(42) Ibid., p. 271.

(43) Ibid., p. 271.

(44) Ibid., p. 270.

are seen as modes of existence arising not from a discrepancy between subjective feeling and objective perception, but from a conflict between the anxiety of identity-loss and the guilt of self-betrayal. This conflict itself has its roots in the absolutely fundamental human need to be. For existential therapy recognizes that in order to avoid the anxiety caused by even a small threat to self, a person will accept a large amount of guilt that accompanies the falsification of himself or of his position in the world. For it is all too easy to ignore the call of conscience or to interpret this as a demand to adhere even more strictly to an inauthentic or self-falsifying mode of life. But such a choice can only lead to an increase in the debt to one's existence, an increase, that is, in one's existential guilt. Existential psychotherapy does not understand this guilt as neurotic or as unnecessary guilt feelings - the consequence of something a person has, or has not, done. This guilt stems from what a person has failed to be; it is rooted in his very existence as such. -45-

The existential therapist, like his Freudian counterpart, is concerned with alleviating his patient's suffering. But therapy does not consist in attempting to correct his faulty perception of reality. Recognizing the guilt and responsibility intrinsic to human existence, the therapist's task is to get the patient to face his existential responsibility, accept a certain degree of ontological guilt and not to abandon himself in his flight from anxiety. This involves getting the patient to explore and learn from anxiety-provoking situations during the therapeutic hour. The insight gained here is not facilitated by a detached, objective therapist

(45) Since what a person is is, in part, determined by what they do this distinction is not always easy to make in practice.

teaching the patient to know himself and his place in the world. Rather, the existential therapist both encourages and enables the patient to remove the mask of his false self which he has erected as a defence against identity loss. Crucial to this process of self-discovery and self-acceptance is the therapist's role as a participant-observer, one who is ready to contribute to a mutually honest, self-disclosing, interpersonal relationship. For it is only through a recognition of his own true subjectivity and a necessarily limited but vital sensitivity to his therapist's that the patient can begin to relate to others in a genuine, self-actualizing manner. The goal of existential therapy, quite apart from restoring the patient to a full capacity for a productive and enjoyable life - although these may follow consequentially - is to restore the patient to himself. If this is successful, Boss writes:

(the person) will let all his possibilities of relating to the world be used as the luminated realm into which all he encounters may come to its full emergence, into its genuine being, and unfold its being to the fullest possible extent. -46-

With the preceding discussion of the historical and philosophical context of Laing's writings we arrive at the main theme of this thesis: a consideration of the existential psychiatry and psychology of R.D. Laing. Herein we are not concerned with Laing's ideas on therapy. Indeed his writings refer to his psychiatric practice only sparingly. We discuss, rather, what constitutes a prolegomenon to this therapy: Laing's existential understanding of madness. His works represent an attempt to understand the behaviour and experience of the 'mad' person in terms of his interpersonal relations. As such they are representative of the existential analytic tradition in psychiatry. By interpreting the structure

(46) M. Boss, Psychoanalysis and Daseinsanalysis, Op. Cit., p. 271.

of human existence such that madness is itself one of the modes of this existence, this tradition has provided the philosophical setting for Laing's work. In deriving the fundamental human characteristic of existential responsibility from an ontological analysis of man's existence, we are presented with one of the implications of Laing's existential understanding of madness: a person's sense of responsibility to himself. What is new, of course, is Laing's work itself. By an examination of his writings we will show, in some detail, that madness is a mode of existence, a way of being-in-the-world. More specifically we will demonstrate that the behaviour and experience of the 'mad' person can be made intelligible as the effort of a person to establish and preserve a sense of identity despite the imminent threat of the dissolution of this represented by his interpersonal relationships. The remainder of this thesis is concerned with this undertaking.

(ii) Definition of the Context of The Question of Intelligibility

From Binswanger's critique of Freud's metapsychology, two ideas of man emerged. One, as Binswanger argues, is based on abstraction, generalization and reduction of lived experience in order to facilitate the construction of the natural scientific idea of homo natura. The other, which might be called the idea of homo persona - man as person, follows from a consideration of the "conditions and potentiality of Dasein as ours ", and is concerned with "the kinds and modes of our existence."⁴⁷ Each of these ideas of man defines a context within which questions about man are raised and certain answers are relevant or permissible. Thus, while the idea of homo natura defines an organismic context for human study, the conception of homo persona suggests a personalistic context. Within the former setting man is viewed as a biological organism whose behaviour is explained by reference to physiological or social processes. In the latter context, man is conceived of as a person and, as such, is only fully understandable by a consideration of his intentions, aspirations, abilities, fears, physical and intellectual limitations, relations with others, etc., that is, by a consideration of all of the factors that make him an individual. Although both of these ideas and contexts for the study of man are not mutually exclusive - and indeed, the personalistic presupposes the organismic - one or other may predominate in research into a particular human phenomenon and suggest a model which underscores all investigation of that phenomenon. Such is the case with the theme of this thesis: madness

(47) L. Binswanger, 'Heidegger's Analytic of Existence and Its Meaning for Psychiatry', in Being-in-the-World, Op. Cit., p. 221.

and the intelligibility of the behaviour and experience of the 'mad' person.

The study and treatment of madness within the organismic context is organized about a clinical-medical model according to which madness is a mental disease explainable in terms of physiological pathology and curable with the use of drugs which affect the physiology of the body. Alternatively, those who advance a personalistic approach in psychiatry adopt an existential model and regard madness as one of the possible modes of human existence. Their efforts to understand the 'mad' person involve an investigation of the entire sphere of his activities, personal relationships as well as his 'inner' mental life.

Laing himself is of the opinion that madness can be made intelligible by considering the 'mad' man as a person and investigating his behaviour and experience in terms of his existential position and interpersonal relationships. In this paper we will demonstrate this existential intelligibility of madness. By so doing we will answer the Question of Intelligibility: 'To what extent do the writings of R.D. Laing make madness intelligible?'. In order to define the context in which Laing's investigation of madness is conducted, as well as to define the context in which the Question of Intelligibility is being raised, we make our first detailed examination of Laing's writings.

In his first book, The Divided Self, Laing makes very clear the context within which his study of interpersonal relations and madness is set by contrasting the personalistic and organismic ways of viewing man. Each context, he argues, gives rise to its own set of descriptions of man. Thus, as an organism man is a collection of molecules, cells, organs and systems which function according to physiochemical and biological principles. As a person he is a responsible agent capable

of free choice and subject to the restrictions of his life-situation and the behaviour of others toward him as well as to purely physiological determinants. Seen as an organism all of his actions are an immediate result of the contraction and relaxation of muscles, while considered as a person his behaviour is a function of his experience and intentions and of the behaviour of other persons. One has only to consider the dissimilarity between the attitude and behaviour of a doctor and a friend at the bed of a dying man to realize the difference between relating to someone as an organism and as a person. Laing stresses that what is at issue here is not the primacy of one view of man over another, that there is no question of a dualism. Rather he is concerned with contrasting two different Gestalts in the study of man, each of which depends on the initial perspective of the investigator. While the human organism may be the conditio sine qua non of the human person, Laing argues that the former gestalt is of no help when one is trying to understand man as a person. He writes:

My thesis is limited to the contention that the theory of man as a person loses its way if it falls into an account of man as a machine or an organismic system of it-processes. The reverse is also true. -48-

Any theory of man is itself conditioned by its vocabulary: as Wittgenstein has put it: the thought is the language. Classical Freudian metapsychology, Laing argues, is made up of terms which refer to man in isolation from others and from his world, or to various isolated parts of his being: 'mind' and 'body', 'psyche' and 'soma', 'psychological' and 'physiological', 'self', 'organism', 'Id', 'Ego', and 'Super-ego'. The other person is conceived of as either an internal or external object -

(48) R.D. Laing, The Divided Self, Op. Cit., p. 21.

or a fusion of both. Given this way of seeing man, is it possible, Laing wonders, to speak of an interpersonal relationship in terms of the interaction of two mental apparatuses? Or can self-deception be described as a barrier between parts of a mental machine? Rather than describing the facts of experience, Laing argues that this dualistic series of terms is used to explain artifacts of psychoanalytic theory. A person may experience himself in terms of this set of distinctions; thus, for example, he may feel his 'mind' to 'contain' alien and harmful 'germs', or that his body is 'outside his mind'. Such descriptions, while not literally true, may be phenomenologically valid and must be treated as so. However it is quite another matter to take this form of self-division as one's theoretical starting point. Laing writes:

The most serious objection to the current technical vocabulary used to describe patients is that it consists of words which split man up verbally in a way which is analogous to the existential splits we have to describe here. But we can not give an adequate account of the existential splits unless we can begin from the concept of a unitary whole, and no such concept exists, nor can any such concept be expressed within -49- the current language system of psychiatry or psycho-analysis.

This conceptual difficulty faces any theory that begins with man abstracted from his personal relations with others or from his place in the world. But from our own personal experience we know that we can be ourselves only in and through relations with other persons and things. In surmounting these problems existential philosophers recognized this primary fact. Laing writes:

Only existentialist thought has attempted to match the original experience of oneself in relationship to others in one's world by a term that adequately reflects this totality. Thus, existentially, the concretum is seen as man's existence, his being-in-the-world. -50-

(49) Ibid., p. 19.

(50) Ibid., p. 19.

Unless a theory of man qua person begins with a concept which describes man in relation to other men and 'in' a world as well as from the realization that he does not exist without 'his' world nor his world without him, then the investigation of madness will begin with a verbal and conceptual splitting that matches the existential splits of the being of some 'mad' persons. Any efforts to help him to unify his being which are based on a theory which objectifies and subdivides man will be stymied from the outset.

A personalistic theory of man faces difficulties that do not arise in the sciences of nature. While the former is concerned with persons and the relationship between persons, the latter involve investigations on objects or systems of objects and the relationship between these. In interpersonal relations the behaviour of self toward other is, in part, based on inferences made by self of the experience of other. These must be based on a logic that is specific to what Laing calls "a science of persons"⁵¹ and can not be derived from the logic of natural science. Natural science is said to be objective and in this sense there is a tendency to contrast reliable, accurate, scientific observation of things with biased, inaccurate, 'merely subjective' observations of persons and interpersonal relationships made within a personalistic context. If one is concerned with understanding man as a person, Laing warns that the tendency to depersonalize and reify him in the interests of being 'objective' must be rigorously resisted. A study of man based on a theory of man as object or organism is not, eo ipso, more objective, nor does it conform more to the facts than a study based on a personalistic theory of man. A study of man can be subjective in the sense of its taking into consideration man's subjectivity without it being biased or ignorant of the facts.

(51) Ibid., p. 17 ff.

The distinction between organismic and personalistic theories of man which serves to define the context of the Question of Intelligibility can be focused on a specific consideration of madness. In citing from a case study of Dr. Emil Kraepelin, Laing draws a contrast between this early German psychiatrist's view of a mentally-ill boy as a diseased patient and his own view of him as a dis-eased or distressed person. Kraepelin is describing the boy's behaviour to a class of medical students. What is of particular importance, Laing notes, is Kraepelin's overriding viewpoint: the boy is diseased in the medical sense, his behaviour is symptomatic of his disease and this can be diagnosed by observation of this behaviour which, because of his illness, is in no way expressive of what he is experiencing. Laing cites at length from Kraepelin's account:

The patient I will show you today has almost to be carried into the rooms, as he walks in a straddling fashion on the outside of his feet. On coming in, he throws off his slippers, sings a hymn loudly, and then cries twice (in English), 'My father, my real father!' He is eighteen years old, a pupil of the Obserrealschule (higher grade modern-side school), tall, and rather strongly built, but with a pale complexion, on where there is very often a transient flush. The patient sits with his eyes shut and pays no attention to his surroundings. He does not look up even when he is spoken to, but he answers beginning in a low voice, and gradually screaming louder and louder. When asked where he is, he says, 'You want to know that too? I tell you who is being measured and is measured and shall be measured. I know all that and could tell, but I don't want to.' When asked his name he screams, 'What is your name? What does he shut? He shuts his eyes. What does he hear? He does not understand; he understands not. How? Who? Where? When? What does he mean? When I tell him to look he does not look properly. You there, just look! What is the matter? Attend; he attends not. I say, what is it then? Why do you give me no answer? Are you getting impudent again? How can you be so impudent? I'm coming! I'll show you! You don't whore for me. You mustn't be smart either; you're an impudent lousy fellow, such an impudent lousy fellow I've never met with. Is he beginning again? You understand nothing at all, nothing at all; nothing at all does he understand. If you follow now, he won't follow, will not follow. Are you getting still more impudent? Are you getting impudent still more? How they attend, they do attend', and so on. At the end he scolds in quite inarticulate sounds.⁼⁵²⁻

(52) Ibid., p. 29.

Laing draws particular attention to Kraepelin's conclusion that the patient was "inaccessible" throughout the examination and that "his talk was only a series of disconnected sentences having no relation whatsoever to the general situation."⁵³⁻ This interpretation of the situation, or the lack of it, depends entirely on Kraepelin's clinical-medical gestalt of the diseased patient in a classroom situation. If this organismic explanation is dropped and in its place we see a dis-eased person who is being displayed and questioned against his will without being given a chance of being heard, it does not require much exegesis to give a personalistic interpretation to this excerpt from Kraepelin's case study. Surely the boy is carrying on a parodied version of a conversation between Kraepelin and his own defiant, rebelling self. From his point of view he deeply resents this public interrogation and does not see what it has to do with whatever is deeply distressing to him. This, however, is of no use to Kraepelin as signs of a disease. Thus, depending on one's viewpoint, Laing argues, there are two different situations going on, two different ways that the boy's behaviour can be seen. He writes:

One may see his behaviour as 'signs' of a 'disease' ; or one may see his behaviour as expressive of his existence. The (latter) existential-phenomenological construction is an inference about the way the other is feeling and acting. What is the boy's experience of Kraepelin? He seems to be tormented and desperate. What is he 'about' in speaking and acting in this way? He is objecting to being measured and tested. He wants to be heard.⁵⁴⁻

To view the patient as a diseased organism, or conversely, as a person, is to prejudice one's whole approach toward the course of treatment. With the latter gestalt the therapist never denies the possibility of

(53) Ibid., p. 30.

(54) Ibid., p. 31.

relating to the patient no matter how long such an interpersonal relationship may take to develop. Indeed it is precisely this human aspect of the patient's being, this potential for relatedness to others that is used for therapeutic ends.

In his account of Kraepelin's case study, Laing is not contrasting a neutral and a biased description or even a subjective and objective one. For it is his contention that in a relationship self must see other in a certain way, must put certain constructions on his behaviour. Rather, the distinction he is making is between explaining the boy's behaviour in terms of his organic disease and understanding this in terms of his experience of the situation. This distinction also serves to further define the context of the Question of Intelligibility. Neither psychiatrist's description of the events in the medical lecture hall is neutral or objective. Kraepelin's is biased by his presupposition that the boy's behaviour can only be explained within the gestalt of 'diseased organism', while Laing biases his description by interpreting the behaviour as that of a distressed and rebellious person. Kraepelin reproaches the boy for scolding him and judges him "inaccessible". But to see his behaviour as symptomatic of a disease is to impose categories of thought on him in an analogous manner. Similarly, to explain his behaviour as the mechanical resultant of an immutable past is to preclude the possibility of what he may be trying to communicate about his experience and feelings. Laing argues that the problem with which a psychiatrist is faced is not one of explanation, that is, of assigning pre-determined meanings to a person's behaviour according to some formula. Rather, he must orient himself to his patient in such a way so as to leave open the possibility of understanding him. He writes:

The art of understanding those aspects of an individual's being in which we can observe, as expressive of his mode of being-in-the-world, require us to relate his actions to his way of experiencing the situation he is in with us.-55-

To arrive at this understanding, observations of the patient's behaviour must be fleshed out by putting these in the context of his life history in such a way as to ascertain the significance of his actions in the perspective of his total world-design. In his own case studies, reported throughout his books, Laing does this by attempting to show that the behaviour and experience of the 'mad' person can be made intelligible if it is interpreted within the context of his or her family-life situation.

Understanding a schizophrenic is not a straightforward matter; two main obstacles lie in the way. Because of his radically different presuppositions and world-orientation, basic assumptions that can be taken for granted in relating to other people may not be made of a schizophrenic. Thus, for example, he may not identify his self and his body and may therefore interpret any advice or help 'he' may receive as given to someone else. Yet the difference between the psychiatrist and the psychotic is not, Laing stresses, an essential one. He writes:

The psychotic, after all, as Harry Stack Sullivan has said, is more than anything else 'simply human'. The personalities of doctor and psychotic... do not stand opposed to each other as two external facts that do not meet and can not be compared. ...The therapist must have the plasticity to transpose himself into another strange and alien view of the world. In this act he draws on his own psychotic possibilities, without forgoing his sanity. Only thus can he arrive at an understanding of the patient's existential position.-56-

To the schizophrenic, being understood represents a double-edged sword.

(55) Ibid., p. 32.

(56) Ibid., p. 34.

He is a person who is desperately afraid of being known for who he is. With his existential separation of body and self he achieves some measure of self-protection. The 'outer', false self may adopt bizarre or socially unacceptable modes of behaviour to keep people 'at a distance' and thereby strengthen this defence. Their understanding exposes this 'inner' private self and makes it more vulnerable to what he feels are their attacks on his being. The schizophrenic is therefore not going to reveal his self to casual inspection by any philandering passerby. Understanding represents a threat; yet at the same time he longs to be understood and loved as who he really is. He simply wants to be himself, but this is what he most fears. If the schizophrenic does come across someone whom he trusts and by whom he feels understood much of his bizarre behaviour may disappear. But this only happens when he feels absolutely sure that the other person understands what he needs and that he will provide it. As Binswanger puts the matter of psychiatric therapy: don't try to get too near too soon.

The next step in specifying the context of the Question of Intelligibility is the distinction of two terms which are of key importance in Laing's writings: process and praxis. These two terms were developed by Sartre in his studies of the human multiplicity and it is from his Critique de la Raison Dialectique that Laing borrows them. In an early paper 'Series and Nexus in the Family', Laing writes:

The distinction between process and praxis is basic and runs through every conceivable human multiplicity.⁻⁵⁷⁻

Laing defines praxis as "events, occurrences or happenings which are the deeds or outcome of deeds of doers"⁻⁵⁸⁻ and process as "events, occurrences or happenings

(57) R.D. Laing, 'Series and Nexus in the Family', in New Left Review, 15, May-June 1962, p. 7 vide. R.D. Laing, The Politics of Experience, Op.Cit., Chapter 4, pp. 65-83.

(58) R.D. Laing, 'Series and Nexus in the Family', Op. Cit., p. 7.

which have no agent as their author but which are the outcome of a continuous series of operations." ⁻⁵⁹⁻ He notes that the distinction between process and praxis could be made in a rough and ready way by saying that process is the type of answer that one gives to the question 'What is going on?' while praxis is the type of answer to 'Who is doing what?'. As Laing is using the term, praxis is always to be understood in the sense of human praxis while process is always to be understood in the sense of non-human process.

The final step in defining the context of the Question of Intelligibility is the definition of two terms which are of central importance to the solution to the question. These two terms are 'intelligible' and 'unintelligible'. They apply to the two contexts within which we have discussed madness. By way of recapitulation, the first of these, the clinical-medical context, is based on an organismic conception of man. In this framework madness is a disease which can be explained in terms of physiological processes such as brain or neural disorder or vitamin deficiency. Viewed in this way, the behaviour of the 'mad' person is not free human action but action under the control of organic processes. The second, the existential context, is based on a personalistic idea of man. From this viewpoint madness is a mode of being-in-the-world which follows from the 'mad' person's existential presuppositions and orientation. His behaviour can be understood as human praxis, that is as the free and deliberate acts of a human agent.

Given this distinction between the two ideas of man, the two contexts of questions about man, and the two models of madness which we have discussed, the following definitions can be made. For the purposes of this paper:

(59) Ibid., p. 7.

If the behaviour of a man, viewed as a person, can be understood in terms of human praxis then his behaviour is defined as INTELLIGIBLE.

and

If the behaviour of a man, viewed as a person, can only be explained in terms of non-human processes, then his behaviour is UNINTELLIGIBLE. -60-

With the specification of the context of the Question of Intelligibility and the definition of 'intelligible', the question must be rephrased slightly in order that it better suit its context. This modification entails the definition of one further idea, that which is expressed by the phrase 'existential terms'. In Laing's view, despite the unusual structure of his being-in-the-world, his existential presuppositions and orientation, and his often bizarre or unacceptable behaviour, the 'mad' person remains a person. Thus in his efforts to make madness intelligible, Laing is basically trying to understand the behaviour and experience of a person. In order for him to do this, he is concerned, to put it most generally, with (a) the world of the person: the conditions in which he lives from day to day, that is, his human and non-human environment,

(60) Laing does not explicitly define 'intelligible' or 'unintelligible' in this way. Rather, his meaning of these terms unfolds through their use. Thus in Sanity, Madness and the Family the authors write:

What goes on in a group may not be intended by anyone. No one may even realize what is happening. But what happens in any group will be intelligible if one can trace the steps from what is going on to who is doing what. (R.D. Laing and Aaron Esterson, Sanity, Madness and the Family, Op. Cit., p. 21.)

In The Politics of Experience, Laing writes:

We will find no intelligibility in behaviour if we see it as an inessential phase in an essentially inhuman process. (R.D. Laing, The Politics of Experience, Op. Cit., p.25.)

(b) how the person experiences his world, and (c) how the person 'gets along' with other people given the way he experiences them, that is, his interpersonal relations. For the purposes of this paper, (a), (b), and (c) are defined as the EXISTENTIAL TERMS of a person's life. Given this definition, the Question of Intelligibility is rephrased to read:

To what extent do the writings of R.D. Laing make madness intelligible in existential terms?

With this final specification of the Question of Intelligibility, the context in which the question is being raised is defined and we can now proceed to set down a solution to the question. Following in the existential analytic tradition of psychiatry, Laing is trying to understand madness by investigating the life of the 'mad' person, conceived of as a person. In his investigation he seeks to make the behaviour and experience of the 'mad' person intelligible in existential terms, that is to say, in reference to the person's world-orientation and interpersonal relations. But insofar as the 'mad' person, qua person, is essentially human, Laing's investigation of madness involves a general study of all persons and the way in which they interrelate. In the following two chapters we will trace this study and in so doing develop what we call 'Laing's Theory of Interpersonal Relations' and the 'Minimal Personal-Identity Requirements'. Following this insight into the role that personal relations play in identity formation and development, we will focus on the special case of the 'mad' person and demonstrate the extent to which Laing makes the behaviour and experience of the 'mad' person intelligible in existential terms.

CHAPTER #2: Laing's Theory of Interpersonal Relations

The experience of oneself and others as persons is primary and self-validating. It exists prior to the scientific or philosophical difficulties of how such experience is possible or how it is to be explained. -1-

(i) Introduction

As the context of this study on madness has been defined, the behaviour of the 'mad' person can be understood only if he is regarded as a person - and not as a diseased organism. Thus, the first step in setting down a solution to the Question of Intelligibility involves an investigation into Laing's ideas on the intelligibility on the behaviour of persons in general. Two axioms, basic to Laing's thought, dictate the structure of this investigation. The first states that a person's behaviour can only be understood by reference to his experience; the second is that both a person's experience and his behaviour are always in relation to someone or something other than himself. -2- With these axioms, Laing embarks on a phenomenological course in his study of persons, that is, one in which the 'experiential world' of the person is given primary consideration. This chapter, therefore, begins with a brief discussion of the phenomenology of interpersonal relations. Then, following an examination of Laing's concept of experience, proceeds to an investigation of interpersonal relations in light of an in terms of interpersonal experience. In this way we will elaborate 'Laing's Theory of Interpersonal Relations'.

(ii) Laing's Phenomenological Approach to the Study of Persons

In defining 'reality' in terms of experience, and not the other way around, Laing belongs in the phenomenological tradition of seeking truth 'in the thing itself'. As he uses the term, 'real' refers to a quality

(1) R.D. Laing, The Divided Self, Op. Cit., p. 23.

(2) See R.D. Laing, H. Phillipson and A.R. Lee, Interpersonal Perception 'A Theory and a Method of Research', New York, Harper and Row, 1972, p. 12 & R.D. Laing, the Politics of Experience, Op. Cit. p. 21, and Chapter #2 of this paper.

describing the various modalities of a person's experience. Defined in this way, 'reality' takes on a certain arbitrary exchange rate - but one that is quickly agreed on in the commerce of interpersonal relations. For what we see of and how we behave in the world is not totally arbitrary or subjective but, as Laing points out, is governed by certain fixed and objective factors. These include the grammar and syntax of language, cultural and transcultural rules and operations of experience, and factors affecting interpersonal comprehension and cooperation. In discussing these, Laing places the reality of the 'objective' world in brackets. After a series of eidetic reductions taking us through self's view of other's view of self's view of...., we arrive at the interpersonal, social world, with increasingly complex levels of these meta-perspectives most closely approximating its reality. Accounts of this world involve the experiential modalities of phantasy, imagination, and dream as well as of waking perception. With this phenomenological epoche', the other is for self not a thing but self's-experience-of-other. Social objects, such as the nexus or group, lose their 'objective' reality, only to regain it again; at the micro level, in the experience of their members, and at the macro level, in the intra-and inter-nexal structures which are the dramatic, historical, non-experiential products of this experience.

In his psychology, Laing is trying to understand interpersonal relations starting from the primary, self-validating experience of persons. He argues that the intelligibility of the behaviour of self toward other and of other toward self must be sought in terms of self's experience of other and other's experience of self. "Interexperience", Laing writes, "forms the crux of social phenomenology."³⁻ All experience involves interpretation and inference, and possibly no two

(3) R.D. Laing, The Politics of Experience, Op. Cit., p. 17.

people experience the 'same' thing in the same way. Inasmuch as these inferences and interpretations are not governed by hard and fast rules, interpersonal relations abound with ambiguities. Unless one lives alone, one can not live without these. Indeed, we spend our lives learning to live with them. These ambiguities give rise to true or false, matched or mismatched, conjunctive or disjunctive inferences, interpretations, and expectations between persons. They form "the very stuff of inter-human reality."⁴ It is not surprising, therefore, that some people become lost in the mystifying whirligig of the interpersonal world and find themselves alone in a land which no one can visit - lost at the centre of an alien world of experience; 'mad'. Given the degree of arbitrariness of social reality and of the ambiguity of the interpersonal world, the private, unshareable 'world' of the 'mad' person is valid from a phenomenological viewpoint and justified from an existential one. He can not, or will not, leave this 'world'. To understand and to help him, we must enter it.

(iii) The Concept of Experience in Laing's Writings

There is a tendency in some psychologies to regard experience as something inside a person's head, or as referring to some part of his psyche - as opposed to some part of his soma; the language of experience is regarded as subjective - as opposed to objective. In his use of the term 'experience', Laing intends to collapse these inner/outer, psyche/soma, subjective/objective distinctions. He argues that a person's experience is not inside his head, nor is it 'intrapsychic' - as if each person has a psyche which his experience resides in. "A person's experience", he writes, "is his psyche; his psyche is his experience."⁵ A person's experience of a

(4) R.D. Laing, H. Phillipson and A.R. Lee, Interpersonal Perception, Op. Cit., p. 28.

(5) R.D. Laing, The Politics of Experience, Op. Cit., p. 19.

room is in the room. Experience used to be called the soul. It does not exist without an experiencer, nor does an experiencer exist without experience. In Self and Others Laing writes:

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 his awareness or not.⁻⁶⁻

Basic to his concept of experience is Laing's distinction between "quality" and "mode" of experience.⁻⁷⁻ According to this distinction, there are different modes of experience or ways of experiencing (eg., waking perception, phantasy, dreaming, imagination, etc.), each of which has a certain quality attached to or describing it (eg., real, imaginary, full, empty, etc.). Thus, for example, waking perceptions are usually experienced by most people as real, although some people, while awake, sometimes have experiences which they feel are unreal or imaginary; what is 'in one's imagination' can be so real that it is taken as reality. As they are used here, the terms 'real', 'unreal' and 'reality' are all qualities describing the experiential modes of waking perception and imagination.

Any one mode usually predominates in a person's experience at any given time. But one may experience someone or something in different modalities at different times, or even at the same time. Laing illustrates this in discussing a conversation between two men, whom he calls Peter and Paul. When alone with Paul, Peter is seeing and hearing him (P_p), and is able to keep up his part of the conversation. But Peter's mind is elsewhere. He is imagining how pleasant it will be to be alone Paul's wife Jill (P_i) and remembering the last time they were together (P_r).

(6) R.D. Laing, The Self and Others, Op. Cit., p. 22.

(7) Ibid., p. 25.

But he is unaware of his imagination and memory, or he may be aware that he is imagining or remembering something, but be unable to say what it is. At this time Peter includes P_p , P_r , and P_i . All of Peter is not in communication with Paul; he is not giving Paul his undivided attention. One hour later, Peter is alone with Jill. He is aware of the way he was thinking of her when he was with her husband. He may even remember that his mind seems to go blank when he is with Paul, but while with Jill he is unable to even remember what Paul had to say to him. It is not unusual, Laing notes, for people to split their world of awareness in this manner. He writes:

The part of Peter in communication with Paul is unconscious of what is going on in his imagination (and memory). Peter is not communicating with himself very well. -8-

Laing enriches this idea of the interplay of the modalities of experience with a discussion of Raskolnikov's dream of the beating of the old nag in Dostoyevsky's Crime and Punishment. Citing long passages from the text in order to bring out his point, Laing notes that Dostoyevsky's genius is his unmistakable grasp of the counterpoint of the modalities of experience. By presenting the reader with an intricate mosaic of dream, phantasy, imagination, memory and waking perception, Dostoyevsky is able to convey to the reader Raskolnikov's anger and desperation prior to his murder of the old woman and her sister. In his dream, Raskolnikov is a seven year old boy empathizing with the helpless animal. He awakens in terror as though it was he who had been beaten to death, but immediately recalls with horror his intention to bludgeon and rob the old woman. Because he imagines himself to be Napoleon and bound by a 'higher' justice, Raskolnikov justifies his ruthless plan. But when

(8) Ibid., p. 31.

he finally decides to carry it out on the following day, he feels like a condemned murderer. When the time arrives, just before the old woman opens her door, Raskolnikov suddenly loses the feel of his own body.

Laing comments:

He is 'lost' between his imagination, where he thinks of himself as Napoleon, his dream, where he is a little boy, and his phantasy, where he is a beaten old mare and an old woman he is about to kill... In the modality of phantasy, he is the victim, whereas 'in imagination' and 'in reality' he is the executioner... In order to murder this old woman, his action-in-phantasy is to re-project 'the old nag' on the person of the money-lender who 'in reality' means nothing to him.⁻⁹⁻

After the murder, Raskolnikov speculates that he murdered the old woman 'to be Napoleon', 'for money' or just 'for spite'.

Phantasy, as a modality of experience, always has meaning. It is "a particular way of relating to the world."⁻¹⁰⁻ Self or other may experience phantasy as inner or outer, public or private, shareable or unshareable, real or unreal. As it is experienced by many people, phantasy is distinguished from what they regard as mature, sane, rational adult experience. Laing argues that to the extent that we are aware of experience in the modality of phantasy, or refuse to acknowledge that our behaviour implies a relational experience or experiential relation that gives it a meaning, phantasy may be called 'unconscious'. Thus the psychoanalytic idea of an 'unconscious phantasy', either as the specific content of an experience or as a type of experience, is a contradiction in terms.⁻¹¹⁻

To amplify his idea of phantasy Laing again gives an example of a conversation between two men, Peter and Paul. Peter is trying to get

(9) Ibid., p. 65 - 66.

(10) R.D. Laing, The Politics of Experience, Op. Cit., p. 28.

(11) R.D. Laing, Self and Others, Op. Cit., p. 17ff.

something across to Paul, but no matter how hard he tries, Paul does not understand. It seems increasingly important for Peter to 'get through to' Paul, but the stronger he puts his point, the more impervious Paul seems. Finally Peter gives up. Paul, on the other hand, misunderstands Peter, but unaware of this, sees Peter simply as attacking him and feels he has to put up a wall against this assault. Laing notes that it would be mistaken to regard this example as "merely metaphorical". He writes:

The(two men) are more and less related to each other 'in phantasy' than each pretends to be to himself and to the other. (This) dissociation of each from his phantasy and the phantasy of the other betokens the lack of relationship of each to himself and to the other... Here, two roughly complementary phantasy experiences belie the calm manner in which two men talk to each other.-12-

The role phantasy plays in interpersonal relationships within the family will be explored later in this section.

(iv) The Distinctions, Operations and Rules of Experience:

Any event, however public that event may be, is experienced by each person in his own way. In this sense, experience of all events is "private in a qualified sense."-13- In the same way, although it is common and shareable, the world is, perhaps, never experienced in the same way by any two people. In this sense, we live in different worlds.

In his Personalism, Mounier wrote :

The Universe is full of men going through the same motions in the same surrounding, but carrying within themselves, and projecting around them, universes as mutually remote as the constellations.-14-

(12) R.D. Laing, The Politics of Experience, Op. Cit., p. 28.

(13) R.D. Laing, Self and Others, Op. Cit., p. 35.

(14) E. Mounier, Personalism, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952, p. 5. Quoted in R.D. Laing, Self and Others, Op. Cit., p. 37.

The world is a unity of the given and the constructed. But, as Laing argues in his book The Politics of the Family, it is difficult to determine what is given and what is constructed. Different people experience the 'same thing' differently and we are often shocked or incredulous at how different people in different cultures experience, and act in, the world. If children experience a virgin world,

Laing thinks that they do so in a way that they can not communicate to us; as adults, we have forgotten what this world was like. Adult experience is a sophisticated product of learning and abstraction; it is the end result of process and praxis and is governed by both natural and social laws. He argues that at a certain level, it is important to distinguish between these two levels, but that this may present difficulties since the deeper social laws and praxis are implanted in us, the more like natural laws and processes they appear. Laing writes that, in our culture:

People carry out different operations (on their experience) according to different sets of instructions to maintain much the same primary distinctions (which are) mapped onto the social cosmos strictly according to the rules (of experience). According to what these distinctions are applied to, and how they are applied, and how they are applied, different worlds of experience are generated and maintained. -15-

The distinctions of experience, combined according to the rules of experiential syntax seem to help towards giving us a sense that our experience makes sense. This syntax of common sense is as obscure as it is necessary.

In trying to get beneath the natural and social laws, the processes and praxis which govern the way in which the world appears, and in discussing

(15) R.D. Laing, The Politics of The Family, Op. Cit., p. 36.

experience in terms of its distinctions, operations and rules, Laing is trying to present us with a plausible account of how these 'different worlds of experience' are created. Phrased in the language of phenomenology, he is asking the reader to perform the *epoché*, to suspend his judgement about the 'real' world and to give primacy to the phenomenal world: the world as it is experienced. For to understand the 'mad' person, to 'see' how he sees the world, it is necessary to enter a 'different world of experience'. One will not be able to do this if one does not accept this world as 'real' - 'real' insofar as that term describes the 'mad' person's existential setting.

In experiencing, we make distinctions with which we were not born. We apply these to the virgin given, the "prima materia"⁻¹⁶⁻, and experience the result as given. Laing argues that by the age of one, the following distinctions (among others) have been made: me/not me, inside/outside, pleasant/unpleasant, real/not real, good/bad, here/there, then/now. Although these are used by everyone, the way in which they are applied will vary and, consequently, so does 'the world' which is experienced. Irrespective of how or when these distinctions come to be made, Laing's point is that they did not exist in the first place. In terms of these distinctions a person can feel: inside-me-here-now-good-real-pleasant. In our society this is a highly prized identity. Imagine, Laing asks, the hell of arriving at: me-unreal-bad-here-inside-now-pain. This, he adds, is common.

Laing considers the inside/outside distinction. This is hard to avoid. Except in moments of ecstasy such as are sometimes experienced in making love or listening to music, or with a high fever,¹ is seldom dropped. To emphasize how deeply this distinction governs

(16) Ibid., p. 23.

our experiential world, Laing asks us to imagine the following actions: (i) swallow the saliva in your mouth, (ii) take a glass of water, sip and swallow it (iii) spit in a glass of water, swallow spit and water. Many people can not do any of these and are especially disgusted at the thought of doing (iii). One is aware that there is a difference between saliva inside one's mouth and saliva one inch in space outside one's mouth. There is even a sharper differential in terms of faeces, inside and outside.

Most of us feel ourselves to be inside our skin and what is outside this to be not ourselves. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to go about a modern city without taking it for granted that you are inside your skin and outside mine and, conversely, that I am inside my skin and outside yours. In our culture, it is regarded as sane, reflexive awareness to think of oneself as being inside one's body, and of one's body being inside one's private space. But some people do not feel this way and think of themselves only as a public spectacle; others do not feel their bodies to be real. In our culture this may be grounds per se for being considered mentally ill.

The manner in which we draw these distinctions in experiencing the world is governed by the rules and meta-rules of experience. These rules not only enable, but often demand that different values be given to different things in the social world. Laing writes:

Rules govern all aspects of experience, what we are to experience and what not to experience; and the operations that we must and must not carry out in order to arrive at a permitted picture of ourselves and others in the world.-17-

(17) Ibid., p. 34-35.

Using algebra theory as a model⁻¹⁸⁻, Laing proposes a schema for projecting different values onto various regions of the social world. Thus, if the range of values consists of: good, bad, optional (good or bad) and neutral (neither good nor bad), than according to the rules of experience, it is good to project the value 'good' onto a person or thing that, by convention, tradition, etc., is good. If, for example, one is patriotic, then it is mandatory to project 'good' on one's country and 'bad' on the enemy. Since neither this operation nor the rule for its application are experienced one merely thinks of one's country as good and the enemy as bad. One can, of course project a good value onto a bad region, and think well of what one is supposed to think ill of. A good or a bad thought only becomes good or bad in relation to its object.

The meta-rules govern our experience of these rules. Thus if a certain rule demands we think highly of someone (call this Rule #1), then there may be a meta-rule #1 which forbids the changing, challenging, questioning or even seeing that there is a Rule #1, as well as a meta-rule # 2 which forbids one seeing that there is a meta-rule #1 and meta-rule # 2 itself. This only applies to certain rules. One can talk about the rules governing how and when one may cross the street; but in the family nexus, one is not supposed to talk about incest or this rule. The situation is complex until one begins to break the rules against seeing that there are rules. The complexity lies not with reality itself, but in one's inhibitions against seeing what may be obvious once these inhibitions are removed.

(18) An element x , belonging to the set A , can be projected or mapped onto an element y , belonging to the set B , by the operation of projection or mapping. If the operation is called $*$ then y is the image of x under $*$. The set A is called the domain of $*$ and the set B is called the range of $*$.

Laing writes:

If certain things can not be thought about: and among these is that there are certain things that can not be thought, including the aforementioned thought, then he who had complied with this calculus of anti-thoughts will not be aware he is not aware that he is obeying a rule not to think he is obeying a rule not to think about X. So he is not aware of X and not aware he is not aware of the rule against being aware of X. By obeying a rule not to realize he is obeying a rule, he will deny there is any rule he is obeying. -19-

The basic distinctions and rules of experience ensure that one's views conform to the views of those around him. One effects this normalization of experience by performing certain operations on one's experience. Their principle function, Laing writes:

(is the) production and maintenance of experience that is at least desired, and at best tolerated, in the family and by the family in the first place. -20-

Laing lists these operations as: denial, splitting, displacement, scotomization, replacement, projection, introjection, rationalization, repression, regression. They are described in the psychoanalytic literature as defence mechanisms. -21-

These operations apply constraints on what we do and do not experience. They change and substitute what is in accord with the rules of experience and do this according to rules that govern the operations themselves. We are very aware of these operations and distinctions of experience, but are not very aware that we make them. Almost any of these operations are "sanctioned" -22- if "they help to serve up a "normal" product. It is difficult to behave sufficiently "normally" without (them). -23- Most operations on experience are themselves operated on to render them unconscious. Only to the extent that the operations on the operations of

(19) R.D. Laing, The Politics of The Family, Op. Cit., p. 42.

(20) Ibid., p. 29.

(21) Ibid., p. 27.

(22) Ibid., p. 32.

(23) Ibid. 32

of experience can be neutralized, can these operations become elements of experience and examined. Until this is done, they have to be inferred. Such inferences may themselves be blocked by operations such as denial and scotomization. While it is comparatively easy to catch someone else operating on his experience, it is very difficult to catch oneself doing this. Repression is one of the operations which cancels my experience of operations so that I neither experience the original operation nor the annihilating one. Repression involves the following elements:

(a) I forget X, and (b) I am unaware that there is an X I have forgotten, and (c) I am unaware that I have forgotten X, and (d) I am unaware that I am unaware that I have forgotten that I have forgotten X. Laing writes:

Repression is the annihilation, not only from the memory of, but of the memory of, a part of experience, together with the annihilation of the experience of the operation.⁻²⁴⁻

More than any other social set, families are both the domain and range for the operations of projection and introjection respectively. According to his use of these concepts in The Politics of The Family, Laing argues that the identity of any person can be conferred on another by introjection or projection. Thus, for example, a newborn son is seen by his parents as 'the image of his grandfather'; or they hope that he will grow up to 'follow in his father's footsteps'. These projections onto a family member can be combined with introjections from outside the family and further projected and introjected ad infinitum in a process that lasts over many generations. The more one studies families, Laing notes, the more apparent these multi-generation patterns become. Inasmuch as the total picture may cover as much as four thousand generations, what

(24) Ibid., p. 28.

pattern, Laing asks, can we hope to find in a study of the family that is restricted to three or four generations.⁻²⁵⁻ With each new generation,

Laing writes:

the infant is the final common range where all introjections converge and permutate, are pooled and stored to become a sort of projection bank...from which subsequent projections will be released to find their range anywhere from a marital relation, a nuclear family, a social network, to the total social world system.⁻²⁶⁻

Although family roles, even personal identities, are, to some extent, the "social product of the interweaving of the lives of many people over many generations"⁻²⁷⁻, this dramatic structure of intra- and inter-family action and experience is usually not experienced by, and is unknown to, the very people who perpetuate and generate it. Laing notes that the most common situation he encounters in his study of families is the discrepancy between his view of what is going on in a family and what others in the family experience or think is happening. There is often "concerted resistance to discovering (this): complicated strategems to keep everyone in the dark, and in the dark that they are in the dark."⁻²⁸⁻ This difference of viewpoints arises because of the rules which govern family experience and the operations performed on this experience to ensure it conforms to what is regarded as normal and acceptable. If a person persists in violating these experiential taboos of the family, he risks being regarded as bad or mad. Laing writes:

(25) Ibid., p. 20.

(26) Ibid., p. 44-45.

(27) Ibid., p. 1.

(28) Ibid., p. 9.

There are usually great resistences against the process of (projecting) the past onto the future coming to light. If anyone in a family begins to realize he is the shadow of a puppet, he will be wise to exercise the greatest precautions as to whom he imparts this information. It is not "normal" to realize such things; and there are a number of psychiatric names and a variety of treatments for such realizations... -29- Any attempt to wake up before our time is heavily punished.

(v) The Reciprocal Connection Between Experience and Behaviour:

In discussing a person's experience, whether this be in the modalities of waking perception, imagination, phantasy, dreaming, etc., this discussion must be extended to include a whole nexus of others - whether real, imagined, phantasized, dreamt, etc. Each person is always acting upon and is acted upon by others. One can not give an undistorted account of a person without including an account of his relations with others.

In the simplest case of the interrelationship between two persons, I experience you and you experience me.⁻³⁰⁻ For me, you are my-experience-of-you; for you, I am your-experience-of-me. I do not have, nor have I ever had, or will I ever have, your experience of me; just as you do not have, nor have you ever had, or will you ever have, my experience of you. Two persons interrelate through behaviour and experience. The behaviour of each toward the other is mediated by the experience of

(29) Ibid., p. 14.

(30) 'I' and 'you' used here and in other places refer to hypothetical persons. They are employed for the sake of brevity. Discussion of interpersonal relationships in this section is restricted to a consideration of the dyad. However the arguments advanced here apply to the more complex case of three or more persons.

each, and the experience of each is mediated by the behaviour of each. The behaviour of one person can never be a direct consequence of the behaviour of the other. Through my behaviour, I seek to make evident to you what I infer about your experience; similarly you seek to make evident to me, through your behaviour, what you infer about my experience.

In Self and Others, Laing writes:

All one 'feels', 'senses', 'intuits', etc., of the other entails inferences from one's own experience of the other to the other's experience of one's self. This presupposes that the other's actions are in some way a function of the other's experience, as I know mine to be. Only on the basis of this presupposition, however qualified it may be, can one hazard inferences about the other's experience from one's perspective of the other's actions. -31-

The validity or invalidity of these inferences that self makes about other form the "crux of social phenomenology". -32-

Social Phenomenology is "the science of my own and others' experience". -33- It is concerned with the relation between self's experience of other and other's experience of self. Although Laing discusses social phenomenology or "the science of persons" -34- in all of his works, the most extensive treatment of these ideas on the fundamentals of interpersonal relations is found in Interpersonal Perception. Written jointly with H. Phillipson and A.R. Lee, this book discusses, in some

(31) R.D. Laing, Self and Others, Op. Cit., p. 28.

(32) R.D. Laing, The Politics of Experience, Op. Cit., p. 17.

(33) Ibid., p. 16.

(34) R.D. Laing, The Divided Self, Op. Cit., p. 17ff.

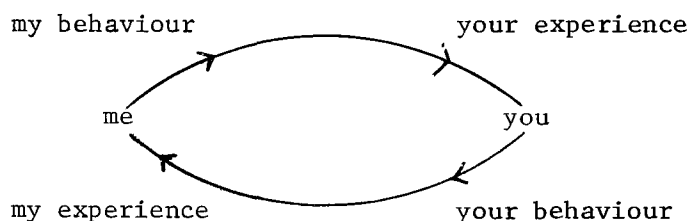
detail, the social phenomenology of the dyad.⁻³⁵⁻ The ideas in this book may be considered basic to Laing's views on interpersonal relations and are presupposed or explicitly incorporated in his consideration of the intelligibility of madness.

In the opening chapter of Interpersonal Perception, the authors write:

In a science of persons, we state it as axiomatic that:

1. behaviour is a function of experience;
2. both experience and behaviour are always in relation to someone or something other than self.⁻³⁶⁻

Given these axioms, the simplest schema for understanding the behaviour of one person must include at least two persons and a common situation, and it must consider their interaction and interexperience. The authors diagram this schema in the following way; they refer to it as the dyadic cycle of interaction and interexperience.⁻³⁷⁻



In this cycle, my behaviour toward you is, in part, a function of my

(35) As the book's subtitle 'A Theory and a Method of Research' suggests, it contains a test for evaluating the extent of interpersonal communication between a wife and husband. In this paper we are only concerned with the theoretical section which provides the rationale behind the test. The important feature of this test is that each person is evaluated not on the basis of his/her responses alone, but on the extent of conjunction or disjunction with the responses of the other person.

(36) R.D. Laing, H. Phillipson and A.R. Lee, Interpersonal Perception, Op. Cit., p. 12.

(37) Ibid., p. 12.

experience of you and this is a function of your behaviour toward me. But the way you act toward me depends on your experience of me which, in part, is a function of my behaviour toward you. Thus the cycle begins again.

The way in which your behaviour is transformed by my experience involves "all the constitutionally and culturally conditioned learned structures of perception"⁻³⁸⁻ that contribute to the way I construe my world. Much of these independent variables of experience are not open to self-consciousness and, to this extent, each of us is programmed to experience in certain prescribed ways. The same act can be seen differently by two different persons, each of whom has different criteria by which he interprets the act. What I find highly significant may seem trivial to you, and vice versa. The authors write:

Experience in all cases entails the perception of the act and the interpretation of it. Within the issue of perception is the issue of selection and repetition. From the many things we see and hear of the other, we select a few to remember.^{-38a-}

The authors do not attempt a discussion of the actual criteria by which behaviour is interpreted, but restrict themselves to an examination of certain interpersonal disjunctions that arise because each person's criteria simply are different.

This examination requires the introduction of terminology used in Interpersonal Perception. According to this, my field of experience includes: my direct perspective, which is my view of myself, other people and things; my meta-perspective, which is my view of the other person's view of myself, other people and things; my meta-meta-perspective, which is my view of the other person's view of my view of myself, other people

(38) Ibid., p. 13.

(38a) Ibid., p. 15.

and things. In theory, these higher order meta-perspectives can be continued ad infinitum, with the most complex perspective being the most concrete. These meta-perspectives are relative to some other person; thus: my meta-perspective with respect to you, or your meta-perspective with respect to me.

As noted earlier, a person's identity is dependent, to some extent or other, on his relations with others. With this idea, the authors apply the foregoing terminology in their discussion of identity. My identity-for-myself is composed of my self-identity, my meta-identities, my meta-meta-identities, etc., ad infinitum. I am not actually able to see myself as the other sees me, and I may not know how he sees me, but I am constantly supposing the other to be seeing me in particular ways and am acting in light of these, actual or supposed, meta-identities. The other I am for the other is different for each other. For each person, my identity undergoes "alterations" or "metamorphoses",⁻³⁹⁻ and these are interiorized by me to become part of my identity. My meta-identities are abstractions; in concreto my identity-for-myself is my synthesis and interiorization of my self- and meta-identities. The concept of meta-identity, therefore, should not be considered secondary in any sense to self-identity.

If relations between two persons are functioning smoothly, then I recognize the other to be the person he takes himself to be, and he recognizes me to be the person I take myself to be. At the other extreme, I am not the person he says I am and he is not the person I say he is.

(39) Ibid., p. 5.

In either case, there is no single, isolated person. I need not passively accept the other's view of me - but I can not completely ignore it. If I do not like what he thinks of me, I can change this by acting toward him in certain ways. This changes his experience of me and consequently his behaviour toward me. In this way my meta-identity with respect to him and ultimately my identity-for-myself is affected. (Similarly, in order that you can experience me as experiencing you as you wish, and so that you can see yourself as you wish, I may have to change the way I act toward you.) Getting you to change your behaviour toward me may not be an easy matter because, among other reasons, you may not want to act differently. Or you may intend to be 'taken' differently from how I, in fact, 'take' you, because of the different criteria each of us has for interpreting certain acts. Thus, for example, I may act in a way that is cautious to me, but cowardly to you; or in a manner that is masculine for me, but overbearing to you. Laing refers to the degree to which two people's criteria for interpreting behaviour are similar as the "coefficient of conjunctive interpretive systems"⁻⁴⁰⁻ and to the degree to which these are different as "the coefficient of disjunctive interpretive systems". I tend to ~~choose~~ to be with others with whom I can be the person I want to be, and the other ~~chooses~~ to be with me for similar reasons. If I come to be mainly concerned with the other I am to the other, this may result in a great deal of alienation from myself. If I can not induce you to see me the way I want you to see me, or the way I see myself, I can operate on my experience of you or I can "invent"⁻⁴¹⁻ your

(40) Ibid., p. 25.

(41) Ibid., p. 21.

experience of me.⁻⁴²⁻ In either case, I render my meta-identity with respect to you independent of you. Both of these operations have as their intentional object, my experience of you. The authors refer to these as projection. They write:

Projection refers to a mode of experiencing the other in which one experiences one's outer world in terms of one's inner world ... (or) in which one experiences the perceptual world in terms of one's phantasy system, without realizing one is doing this.⁻⁴³⁻

The degree to which the modality of projection prevails over that of waking perception is referred to as the "coefficient of phantasy".⁻⁴⁴⁻

Projection directly involves only one part of the dyadic cycle (my experience of you), but it influences and is influenced by other parts.

My experience of you is a unity of the given and the constructed: a synthesis of my own interpretations of my perceptions, which is based on my expectations, learning, and phantasy, and of the distal stimulus that originates from you. The resultant fusion of projection and perception is the phenomenal you as experienced by me; this you-for-me is neither a total invention nor a pure perception nor a simple duplication of your view of yourself. If my experience of you has a high phantasy coefficient,

(42) A third option is also possible. Each of us may confirm in the other a false identity and in so doing have our own false identity confirmed. In Self and Others, Laing discusses this type of interpersonal relationship as a means of resolving personal conflict without either person 'giving in' to the other. vide the section on collusion in the following chapter (p.103).

(43) R.D. Laing, H. Phillipson and A.R. Lee, Interpersonal Perception, Op. Cit., p. 22. A person can seek to make the world actually embody his phantasy; but projection can occur without one so doing. vide Chapter #5.

(44) Ibid., p. 25.

then my actions toward you will be based largely on projection or on highly disjunctive interpretive systems. In this case, my view of you is likely to be different from your view of yourself and your meta-perspective with respect to me. As the coefficients of phantasy and of disjunctive interpretive systems rise, one might expect the disjunction between my view of myself and your view of me, as well as between my meta-identity and your view of my view of myself to increase. My actions toward you will be addressed to a person you do not recognize as yourself, and, in your eyes, I will be acting in a strange way toward you. Thus, for example, you may feel that I am too familiar or too distant, or that I am treating you as a mother or brother and not as yourself.

The easiest part of the dyadic cycle to become phantasized by me is what is going on 'inside' you, since the only validation of this is your testimony. Consider the case where I say that you are unhappy and you deny this. Although this attribution is relatively simple, there are many possibilities of 'truth', and it is difficult to establish the criteria of validity of: (a) who, if either person, is unhappy, and (b) who, if either person, is correct in his inference of the other's feelings. Thus, I may have based my judgement on my own criteria of unhappiness, or I may have simply sensed that you are unhappy without being able to say how I know this, or I may have correctly reconstructed your experience based on your behaviour, or I may simply be putting 'inside' you the unhappiness I am trying not to feel. In addition, I may be making you unhappy by going on in this manner and, if you accuse me of trying to do so, I might reply, "But I was only trying to help you".

Often what is construed as projection can be accounted for in terms of mismatched interpretive systems. The authors give the following example. You are upset and I remain calm and detached, thinking this is

the best way to help. However you feel that if I really cared, I would become more emotional, and you assume that I know this. Thus you become more upset and I continue to remain calm. You then accuse me of deliberately hurting you. Since I am only trying to be helpful, I then accuse you of projecting angry feelings onto me. You, in fact, are not projecting.

(vi) An Example of an Interpersonal Relationship in the Dyad:

In the chapter entitled 'The Spiral of Reciprocal Perspectives', in which they expand on these ideas on the reciprocal relationship between experience and behaviour, the authors present examples of interpersonal disjunction in the dyad. To facilitate this discussion, the following terminology is introduced. They write:

understanding can be defined as the conjunction between the meta-perspective of one person and the direct perspective of the other.

being understood is the conjunction between the meta-meta-perspective of the one person and the meta-perspective of the other.

the feeling of being understood is the conjunction of one's own direct perspective with one's own meta-meta-perspective. -44a-

One of these examples concerns a spiral revolving around a misunderstanding between a husband and wife -whom the authors refer to as Jack and Jill. Jack loves Jill and Jill loves Jack. While Jill feels that Jack loves her, Jack thinks that Jill loves some other man and not himself. However Jill knows that Jack thinks that she does not love him. In this case, each person's view of himself and of the other can be specified in terms of direct-, meta-, and meta-meta-perspectives. Thus:

(44a) Ibid., p. 38.

	<u>JILL</u>	<u>JACK</u>
direct-perspective:	<u>A.</u> loves Jack	<u>D.</u> loves Jill
meta-perspective	<u>B.</u> feels that Jack loves her	<u>E.</u> feels that Jill does not love him - but that she loves Tom or Dick or Harry
meta-meta-perspective:	<u>C.</u> knows that Jack thinks that she does not love him.	

In this situation, there is agreement (conjunction of A. and D.). However while Jill understands Jack (conjunction of B. and D.), Jack misunderstands Jill (disjunction of A. and E.). Jill is aware of Jack's misunderstanding - this is to say she feels misunderstood (conjunction of A. and C.), and she therefore tries to correct the misunderstanding by telling and showing Jack how much she really loves him. Jack, however, persists in believing that Jill loves some other man (Tom or Dick or Harry). This is complicated by the fact that Jack is paranoid. This is to say that his perception of Jill has a high coefficient of phantasy. He persistently refuses to infer from her behaviour that she loves him - no matter how loving she may act toward him. Jill is in a "double bind"⁴⁵: the harder she tries to show Jack she loves him, the more he thinks she is covering up her love for Tom or Dick or Harry. If, on the other hand, she begins to act less loving toward him, this will certainly convince him of the veracity of his belief in her infidelity. The authors write that "Jack's phantasy coefficient of his experience of Jill rises as his perception of her tends to discount his phantasy of her." ⁻⁴⁶⁻

Jack tries to resolve his mistrust by adopting a paranoid strategy. He thinks that so long as Jill thinks he thinks that she does not love him, she will never admit that she does not love him. Therefore Jack pretends

(45) Ibid., p. 32.

(46) Ibid., p. 32.

that he thinks that Jill loves him. But his strategy fails. He is not able to get her to 'give herself away' and admit that she really loves Tom or Dick or Harry - and thus confirm what he really believes. But this does not convince Jack that he is wrong, but only that he has not been clever enough. He reasons that Jill is keeping one step ahead of him and in order to try to catch her, again applies the same type of strategy. This time he thinks: Jill knows that I think she loves Dick, so I will get her to admit this by pretending that I think she loves Tom. (Here Jack is inventing a meta-meta-perspective for Jill.) Jack accuses Jill of having an affair with Tom. Jill (since in fact she loves Jack) denies this. Once again this denial simply reinforces Jack's belief that she loves someone other than him and the spiral of misunderstanding and mistrust begins to escalate. Jack pretends that he knows Jill loves Harry (when he "really" knows she loves Dick), Jill denies this, and once again his belief in her infidelity is reinforced. The spiral continues.

The authors note that once the relationship has reached this stage possibly the only hope of ending the mistrust would be to consult a marriage counsellor or psychiatrist. He might change the issue around which the spiral is centered both in its content and direction. This involves changing the basic issue from Jill's heterosexual love for Jack to Jack's homosexual love for Tom or Dick or Harry. Rather than trying to infer the quality of Jill's heterosexual love from her behaviour, the counsellor or analyst would investigate the possibility of Jack's homosexual love based on his behaviour or feelings. This investigation on the other hand might reveal that the spiral is revolving around mismatched expectancy systems. Thus Jill may be far more demonstrative with Tom, Dick or Harry than she is with her husband since, as a wife, she feels it is her duty to put on a 'social self' and be charming towards her husband's friends. While she

is alone with Jack, she feels she can be her 'real self'. Thus by telling her that she can be her 'real self' all the time, the misunderstanding and mistrust might be put to an end.

This section has dealt with some of the basic issues involved in trying to understand inter-human behaviour in human terms. In developing this understanding, Laing stresses that he is not presenting us with a model of interpersonal relations that is merely an abstraction from the social world. In the appendix to Self and Others, in referring to the terminology developed in Interpersonal Perception for the study of the dyad, Laing writes:

Interpersonal life is conducted in a nexus of persons, in which each person is guessing, assuming, inferring, believing, trusting, or suspecting, generally being happy or tormented by his phantasy of others' experience, motives and intentions. And one has phantasies not only about what the other himself experiences and intends, but also about his phantasies about one's own experience and intentions, and about his phantasies about one's phantasies about his phantasies about one's experience, etc...There are some people who conduct their lives several phantasy steps away from their own immediate experience or their own intentions. There could be no greater mistake than to suppose that these issues are mere 'theoretical' complexities of little practical relevance.⁻⁴⁷⁻

The stress in this discussion of the dyad was on interpersonal disjunction and the consequences of this for interpersonal relations. These vicious circles of mismatched interpretations, expectancies, experiences, attributions and counter attributions is "the very stuff of inter-human reality."⁻⁴⁸⁻ In Interpersonal Perception, the authors assert that one has to enter into this realm in order to understand how one person's attributions about others may become so disturbing and disjunctive to them

(47) R.D. Laing, Self and Others, Op. Cit., p. 174.

(48) R.D. Laing, H. Phillipson and A.R. Lee, Interpersonal Perception, Op. Cit., p. 28.

that he becomes subject to the attributions of 'being mad'. Inasmuch as madness is the outcome of "the most extreme interpersonal disjunction in our culture"⁻⁴⁹⁻, the comparatively simple examples discussed here serve as a ground for the more complicated case studies of madness to be considered in subsequent sections. Indeed it is Laing's thesis in The Divided Self, that "sanity and psychosis (be) tested by the degree of conjunction or disjunction between the two persons where one is sane by common consent."⁻⁵⁰⁻

(vii) The Group:

The discussion of the intelligibility of interpersonal relations can be extended by considering a person's behaviour and experience insofar as he is a member of a group; acting and being acted on by other members of the group. For as living 'in' families and societies, working in offices, factories, etc., playing with friends or acquaintances, all of us are members of one or more groups. Although a discussion of Laing's ideas on the intelligibility of intra-group behaviour grew out of the foregoing discussion on the dyad, we must first consider his concept of the group and especially of the experiential status of the group.

Although Laing develops his ideas on the group throughout his books and papers, the present discussion is based on his paper 'Series and Nexus in the Family'. In this paper, he distinguishes between two theoretical extremes of groups: the series and the nexus.⁻⁵¹⁻ He writes:

(49) R.D. Laing, Self and Others, Op. Cit., p. 43.

(50) R.D. Laing, The Divided Self, Op. Cit., p. 36

(51) R.D. Laing, 'Series and Nexus in the Family' Op.Cit. Although these ideas of the group are based on concepts developed by Sartre in his Critique de la Raison Dialectique, Laing notes that his paper contains "minor modifications" of Sartre's position - especially in his use of the concept of the nexus. see R.D. Laing, The Politics of Experience, Op. Cit., Chapter # 4.

The series is a type of human multiplicity in which no person is essential, where everyone is quantitatively interchangeable. Yet the members are united by a negative unity, by their reciprocal qualitative indifference to each other, and, simultaneously, by their quantitative concern.-52-

A bus queue, a white neighborhood, the anti-semites are all examples of series groups. From the point of view of any of its members, the series is "they" or "them". The series is unified by ideas which are never held by anyone in his own person - each person is thinking only of what the other person thinks. But what the serial "they" think is held with conviction - it is undoubtable and incontestable. Although each member feels unable to make any difference to these ideas, he can not think differently. "The series has a collective power in proportion to each person's creation of this power and his own impotence."-53- Each person in the series will deny his own membership and any internal bond with any other member. Each claims his own inessentiality and allocates to the others the responsibility for his own actions. Yet at the same time, each person is necessary for each other. "The series", Laing writes, "is a collection of reciprocal difference... inessentially (and) solitude... in which there is a conformity to a presence that is everywhere elsewhere (and where) there appears to exist no freedom."-54-

Laing gives the following example of a serial group united by scandal and gossip. John and Mary have a love affair and just as they are ending it Mary finds that she is pregnant. Both families are informed. Mary does not want to marry John and John does not want to marry Mary. But he

(52) Ibid., p. 9.

(53) Ibid., p. 9.

(54) Ibid., p. 11.

thinks she wants to marry him. Mary knows this but does not tell him as not to hurt his feelings. She thinks he wants to marry her. This disagreement and misunderstanding is compounded by the involvement of the families. Mary's mother and John's father are especially hurt by the news of her pregnancy. The mother takes to bed in tears because of the disgrace. She does not mind the situation 'in itself' - especially as her daughter is to be married, but is terribly concerned over what everyone else will say about the way Mary has been brought up. John's father is worried about what Mary's mother will think of him. Both John and Mary are concerned of the effect the whole incident will have on their families - especially on his father and her mother. Within a few days, what initially involved only John and Mary has spiralled up to include all the members of both families. Everyone is very worried about the effect of 'the affair' on everyone else. But no one in his own person is concerned for his or her own sake; each seems willing to turn over his or her responsibility to ubiquitous processes of gossip and scandal which unify this series group. Mary's mother asks her daughter how she can expect John to respect her after all the talk about her illegitimate child. Mary later 'confesses' that she "got fed up" with John just before she found out she was pregnant, but did not want to hurt his feelings since he loved her so much. John disclaims any personal responsibility, saying that he would have arranged for an abortion but decided to go through with the whole affair "because of all that he owed to his father". "By that time", he added, "everyone knew". Everyone did know because the son had told the father who had told his wife who had told her mother who had told her eldest son who had told his wife, etc.

Basic to Laing's ideas on the family is his concept of the nexus, of which the family is one example. As a group, the nexus is at the

opposite theoretical extreme to the series. Laing defines the nexus as:

a group whose unification is achieved through the reciprocal interiorization by each of the other, in which neither a 'common object', nor organizational or institutional structures, etc., have a primary function as a kind of group 'cement'.... To each (of its members) the nexus is the synthesis of the multiplicity of its members and the synthesis of the multiplicity of syntheses that each and everyone here and elsewhere invents and maintains.-54a-

From the point of view of any of its members, the nexus is 'we' or 'us'. In order that you, him, and myself constitute a nexus, it is not enough that I think of myself, you and him together as 'us', and of others as 'them' (or 'not us'). This private act of synthesis does not form a group. In order that we have group identity, you and he must each perform similar acts of synthesis on his own behalf, and each of us must recognize both the other syntheses. Thus, considering only my own synthesis: (i) I must regard myself as well as you and him as 'we'; and (ii) I must realize that you regard yourself, as well as me and him as 'we'; and (iii) I must realize that he regards himself, as well as me and you as 'we'. This is to say that I must perform my own synthesis and interiorize your and his syntheses of the group. In a similar manner, he must perform his own synthesis and interiorize your and my synthesis of the group; and you must perform your own synthesis and interiorize his and my synthesis of the group. Furthermore: (i) I must interiorize your interiorization of his and my own synthesis, and his interiorization of your and my own synthesis; (ii) he must interiorize my interiorization of his own and your synthesis, and your interiorization of my own and his synthesis; and (iii) you must interiorize my interiorization of your own and his synthesis and his interiorization of your own and my synthesis. This

(54a) Ibid., p. 11.

logical spiral of synthesis, interiorization of synthesis, interiorization of interiorization of synthesis... each by each of each other's can, in theory, go on indefinitely. Any one of its members can never, finally and conclusively, grasp the nexus as a whole. It is not and can not be a totality, but is a perpetual sequence of actions that maintain its existence: a continual totalization.

In these considerations lie Laing's ideas on the ontological and experiential status of the group. In discussing this, Laing notes that it is tempting to think of the group as a social object or hyper-organism and to explain a person's experience of 'it' in terms of this. Thus one tends to account for the behaviour of a group, not by reference to human praxis, but in the language of processes. For example, an idea that is common to a group of people is said to influence their collective action; or their behaviour is seen as determined by the structure of their organization. In either case, the social forces at work here seem to be without human authors. Phenomenologically, a group can feel to its members to be a thing over which they have no control; to outsiders it may appear as a social object. But to go beyond this and maintain that, ontologically, a group is a social object, Laing argues, is to become completely mystified. He writes:

The group looked at from the outside comes into view as a social object, lending by its appearance and by the apparent processes that go on inside it, credence to the organismic illusion; as one approaches closer, there is no organism anywhere.⁻⁵⁵⁻

A group is two or more people arranging themselves in certain patterns and assuming certain roles, functions, obligations, etc. Despite their relative permanence and rigidity in time, these do not become reified into some social object. The reality of the group can

(55) R.D. Laing, The Politics of Experience, Op. Cit., p. 72.

only be understood in terms of the experience of each person in the group. "The group", Laing writes, "can be nothing else than the multiplicity of the points of view and actions of its members."⁻⁵⁶⁻ It is a unique being formed by each person's synthesis and interiorization of the same multiplicity into 'we' and of each person's synthesis and interiorization of the multiplicity of syntheses.

To understand the interrelationship of persons in a group, we must consider each person's experience of the group and the other as a group member - especially insofar as this experience is in the modality of phantasy. This discussion will focus in on the family as one type of nexus group. In Self and Others, Laing conceives of the family as being a phantasy image shared by each of its members: a "social phantasy system".⁻⁵⁷⁻ He writes:

All groups operate by means of phantasy... 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 only be found through the modality of phantasy.⁻⁵⁸⁻

And in The Politics of the Family, Laing writes that the family

(is) a shared phantasy image...usually (experienced as) a container of some kind in which all the family members feel themselves to be.⁻⁵⁹⁻

(56) Ibid., p. 81.

(57) R.D. Laing, Self and Others, Op. Cit., p. 38.

(58) Ibid., p. 38.

(59) R.D. Laing, The Politics of the Family, Op. Cit., p. 9.

Normally one is not aware of the experience of one's family as being in the modality of phantasy; one is so caught up in one's immersion in this phantasy that one experiences it as real.⁻⁶⁰⁻ But if a family member realizes that what the others take as real is only an illusion, if he begins to effect a "derealization-realization"⁻⁶¹⁻, then he dissolves the family phantasy 'in' and for himself. In this sense, the reality of the family depends on each member's belief in his belief in 'it'. Because one is, in most cases, in a "tenable position"⁻⁶²⁻ in the family nexus, one never realizes one is 'in' it, nor dreams of getting 'out' of it. In this sense, a person's position in this social phantasy system is doubly false: he takes to be real what is only an illusion and he is unaware of his error. The error, Laing stresses, is not one of content, but of category: he is aware of what he experiences, but is unaware of its modality as phantasy. To describe this state, many images have been used. Laing writes:

We are dead, but think we are alive. We are asleep, but think we are awake. We are dreaming, but take our dreams to be reality. We are the halt, lame, blind, deaf, the sick. But we are doubly unconscious. We are so ill that we no longer feel ill... We are mad, but have no insight.⁻⁶³⁻

We vary in readiness to emerge from the phantasy systems we take to be our realities and, Laing argues, tolerate, punish, treat as harmless,

(60) 'real' here is a quality describing experience. see p.

(61) R.D. Laing, Self and Others, Op. Cit., p. 39.

(62) Ibid., p. 40. This idea refers to a person's existential position and not to his place in a social hierarchy.

(63) Ibid., p. 38.

had or mad those who try to do so or tell us that we should. A person in a tenable position in his family has no reason to suppose his sense of security, reality, identity is false or based on a shared phantasy. The family may offer comfort, warmth and a sense of shelter against the cold, emptiness, or meaninglessness of the 'outside' world. But for some, the nexus is a 'lousy hell' and they want out. It is very difficult for a person in this position, who begins to realize the irreality of the family, to express his insight, much less get confirmation of this by others in the nexus. He may, for example, express a desire 'to get out of the box' which the nexal bonds of his family and other groups to which he belongs have come to represent. Since to the others, this 'box' is the whole world, getting out of it is tantamount to stepping off the end of the world. This is something that no one who loves him can sit idly by and let happen. Indeed, to even express a desire to leave is to express ingratitude. Nor can he expect direct testimony from others that he is correct in his perception of the 'family illusion'. Inasmuch as they are without insight, their agreement would confirm only his misperception, or, at best, show his perspective not to be unique. Only the other's inability to 'see' the person's position would show its correctness. If a person does begin to 'wake up' - and to recognize the family phantasy as phantasy - and to testify to its irreality, the other members of his family might accuse him of being 'out of touch with reality' or mad. In their eyes, this is justified since what is in this phantasy is real (reality), and what is not in it is not real. Laing writes:

If he testifies to any experience outside what they take to be real and true, he can only be involved in a regrettable tissue of phantasy and falsehood, in telling them what they know to be real and true is a regrettable tissue of phantasy and falsehood, in telling him what he knows to be real and true (namely: God has given him a special mission to reveal what they take to be real is a regrettable tissue of phantasy and falsehood and to this end he walked naked and unashamed down the high street and does not care he is disgracing the family) is a regrettable -64- tissue of phantasy and falsehood, for which he needs therapy.

(viii) Conclusion :

The stress in this chapter was on the role played by a person's experience of himself, other persons, and the group, in his relations with others. We showed that a phenomenological account of persons and interpersonal relations is necessary for an adequate account of interpersonal relations and, in so doing, alluded to the importance of a phenomenological perspective in the understanding of madness.

Laing seeks the intelligibility of madness in the 'mad' person's interpersonal relations and, ultimately, in his world of experience. His is not a quest for some characteristic in terms of which the 'mad' person's essential difference can be explained. Rather, based on his understanding of interpersonal relations in general, he seeks to make madness intelligible in terms of a disjunction between the 'mad' person and the others with whom he lives. For as the experience of one person becomes increasingly inharmonious with the experience of the majority of other people in the 'same' situation, his actions will become more and more dissonant with the actions of the others. At some point in this developing disjunction this person comes to be regarded by the majority as 'different'. The more a man that we think is absolutely wrong thinks he is absolutely right and we are absolutely wrong, the sooner we think he

(64) Ibid., p. 40.

has to be helped to realize his 'delusion'. In this sense, Laing notes, reality moves from relative to absolute. "What is referred to as a psychotic episode in one person", he writes, "can often be understood as a crisis of a particular kind in the inter-experience of the nexus, as well as in the behaviour of the nexus."⁶⁵ To lay down the basis for an existential understanding of madness, we must go beyond a consideration of the relative validity of all 'worlds' of experience and extend our account of persons to a discussion of the factors in interpersonal relationships which are essential to the development or destruction of personal identity.

(65) Ibid., p. 41.

CHAPTER #3: Interpersonal Identity Considerations - Identity In The Nexus

(i) Introduction

Throughout his writings, Laing stresses the importance of the role of the other in self's personal identity development. In The Divided Self he writes:

A person's sense of identity requires the existence of another by whom one is known.-1-

and in Self and Others:

All 'identities' require another: some other in and through a relationship with whom self-identity is actualized.-2-

A person's identity, both his identity-for-himself - his private sense of 'I', and his identity-for-others - his public persona by which he is identified as the person he is, are fundamental to his interpersonal relations. Without a firm sense of his own autonomous identity, Laing argues, a person would be unable to relate to others as a human being. Through his relations with others, a person's public and private identities - for, as we have seen, the two are mutually connected - develop and mature or are sabotaged and threatened, as may be the case. In the previous chapter, we discussed interpersonal relations in the dyad and group. This chapter, dealing mainly with Laing's Self and Others, considers the effects of certain types of interpersonal relations on personal identity. The stress will be on those types of interpersonal action which, for all persons, are detrimental to or destructive of personal identity. Out of this discussion emerges the Minimal Personal-Identity Requirements: the requisites for a person's being able to develop and sustain a secure

(1) R.D. Laing, The Divided Self, Op. Cit., p. 139.

(2) R.D. Laing, Self and Others, Op. Cit., p. 82.

sense of his identity.

This paper is an assessment of Laing's ideas on the understanding of the 'mad' person in terms of his response to a crisis in his identity. The Minimal Personal-Identity Requirements developed in this chapter serve, in this sense, as a basis upon which the behaviour and experience of the 'mad' person can be made intelligible.

(ii) The destruction of personal identity in an interpersonal relation

A person's identity is compounded of both his identity-for-himself and his meta-identities: his idea of himself in the eyes of others. As his meta-identities change, so changes his identity-for-himself and, therefore, his sense of identity. Other people form a sort of identity kit whereby one pieces together a picture of oneself. In this sense, you are who you meet. Every interpersonal relation implies a definition of self by other and other by self. This is an ongoing process. Laing writes:

The others tell one who one is. Later one endorses, or tries to discard, the ways the others have defined one... One's first social identity is conferred on one. We learn to be whom we are told. -3-

With this basic idea of the importance of other in self-definition, Laing introduces his concept of complementarity. This he defines as "that function of personal relations whereby the other fulfills and completes self."⁴ One person may complement another biologically, socially, legally, or this can be a matter of highly individualized personal choice. Thus, the fertilized human egg requires the mother for the foetus to come to full term, a woman needs a child in order to be a mother, an infant needs his parent(s) to be a son; a man's wife gives him the identity of

(3) Ibid., p. 94.

(4) Ibid., p. 82.

a husband and he gives her the identity of a wife; each comrade needs the other in order that he be a friend. Complementarity can be central or peripheral to a person and it can have greater or less dynamic significance at different times in his life. If it is genuine, the other contributes to self's sense of himself and to his growth; if it is false, complementarity can be destructive of this. Laing writes:

Personal action can either open out possibilities of enriched experience or it can shut off possibilities. (It) is either predominately validating, confirming, encouraging, supportive, enhancing, or it is invalidating, disconfirming, discouraging, undermining and constricting. It can be creative or destructive. -5-

As this concept is developed in this section, the stress will be on a discussion of interpersonal relationships wherein social and personal complementarity is false or lacking, and with the effects of this on personal identity development. -6-

The most fundamental way in which complementarity is effected in an interpersonal relationship is through attributions other makes about self. Thus, I am constantly being told by others who and what I am, and these attributions serve to define me. Laing writes:

What others attribute to (me) implicitly or explicitly necessarily play a part in forming my sense of my own agency, perceptions, motives, intentions: my identity. -7-

An attribution is equivalent to an instruction to be obeyed implicitly.

(5) R.D. Laing, The Politics of Experience, Op. Cit., p. 29.

(6) In his latest book, The Facts of Life, Laing devotes considerable attention to the repercussions of biological complementarity in his discussion of birth and birth trauma. see Bibliography p. 136. For a discussion of legal complementarity and madness see Thomas S. Szasz, Ideology and Insanity, 'Essays on the Psychiatric Dehumanization of Man', Garden City, Anchor Books, 1969.

(7) R.D. Laing, Self and Others, Op. Cit., p. 151.

It is much more powerful than an order or other form of coercion or persuasion. What I am told I am has much more consequence for my identity development than what I am told to be. This is especially true in the complementary relation between a child and his parents. Much of what a child is told can not be consensually tested or validated (eg. 'You are good' or 'You are worthless') and is simply accepted as part of 'him'. In the Politics of the Family, Laing states that, as children "we receive our earliest and most lasting instructions in the form of attributions."⁻⁸⁻ Indeed, he suspects that clinical hypnosis is an experimental model of this naturally occurring phenomenon. In some families, the hypnotists - the parents - are themselves hypnotized by their parents to carry out instructions on how to relate to their children. Inasmuch as part of these instructions includes the instruction that one is not being instructed, they do not realize they are carrying out instructions. One person's word may be another's command; but attribution need not be verbal. The relationship between two persons may be such that one becomes what the other takes him to be at a glance, touch, cough, etc. These verbal and non-verbal cues may form part of a complex intra-family communications network whose structure, and even presence, remains unnoticed although it determines much of the meaning of this communication. Through discrepancies between what is said and what is done , this network may become 'visible' to an observer outside the family nexus. Laing argues that the other seldom relates to the person self takes himself to be and suggests a "coefficient of induction" to denote the extent to which other's behaviour toward self is directed toward a self defined in terms

(8) R.D. Laing, The Politics of the Family, Op. Cit., p. 11.

of other's attributions. Each of us, to a greater or lesser extent, relates differently to different others and, in that sense, 'becomes' a different person with each other. Between the way I see myself and the way others take me to be, based on their phantasy, projection and attributions, much "secrecy, deception of the other or deception of myself, equivocation, lying, or telling the truth come into play."⁹

Through his actions, a person actualizes his latent self. To the extent to which a person puts himself into what he does, the act is felt to potentiate his sense of being. Thus, Laing distinguishes between authentic and inauthentic being. He writes:

To be 'authentic' is to be oneself, to be what one is, to be genuine. To be 'inauthentic' is not to be oneself, to be false to oneself; to be not as one appears to be, to be counterfeit.¹⁰

A person may feel fulfilled because he has acted authentically, but if he is accorded no recognition for what he does, or if he feels that his achievements affect no one, he may feel a sense of emptiness and futility. In this respect, every person, if he is going to be himself, needs another who is able to complement him in a genuine and satisfactory way. Failure to develop this complementary relationship often instills a sense of failure in self that is self-perpetuating and self-fulfilling. The more the other ignores self, the emptier he feels and the more he hates and envies the other. But the more self does this, the emptier and more alone he feels. Despite success that is measured in impersonal terms, the imperviousness of the other may generate a sense of failure in self. In this way he can come to feel that he makes no difference to anyone or that no one cares for him. In the midst of gratification, he feels

(9) R.D. Laing, Self and Others, Op. Cit., p. 152.

(10) Ibid., p. 127.

perpetually frustrated. When a person begins to question his very capacity to mean anything to anyone, frustration becomes despair. Feeling unable to affect anyone, he lets no one affect him. Every personal interaction becomes a battle; any change wrought by the other is regarded as a personal defeat while any change in the other is felt to be a victory. Such a person may come to mistrust everyone; he spurns their love and despises their gifts. Finally he loses his sense of the other's capacity to give and his own capacity to receive. The very existence of the other person represents a threat and he tries to undermine this other's security simply to establish and maintain his own. He has cut off any chance of an honest reciprocal relationship and in doing so has become a Midas: deserving of only the best, everything and everyone he touches turns to gold.

A person may find himself condemned to an identity as the complement of another whom he wishes to repudiate. Sometimes two (or more) persons may define self in different, incompatible ways in order to complement their identities. In cases as these it is difficult for a person to establish a satisfactory and consistent identity. In an attempt to redefine who he is, the person may come to pivot his whole life around another person; or in forming a self-image that is independent of others' views of himself, develop an identity that is based largely on phantasy. In both cases this new identity will be very unstable and therefore will be intensely defended. Indeed such a person may feel driven to control all of the ways in which he is defined. Disavowing all imposed elements of identity, he becomes the person he chooses to be - at the snap of his fingers. If this goes to an extreme, he may be labelled manic, the "mad way out of intolerable dissonances of reciprocally cancelling identities mapped onto self by self and others."¹¹

(11) Ibid., p. 88.

Throughout his books, Laing considers a variety of ways in which complementarity can be destructive of identity development. In discussing these, we will show that if self is not confirmed or granted significance as self, or if his actions toward others and experience of others are invalidated or negated, then he will be unable to find a tenable position in his nexus of others and to develop a secure sense of identity.

Every person needs to be confirmed as the person he feels himself to be. Whatever identity a person comes to embrace, this must be given some measure of recognition and approval by at least one other significant person. Confirmation of self as self is essential for identity development. Although total confirmation of one person by another is seldom realized, every human interaction implies some measure of confirmation - even if it is only of the physical bodies of the participants. The slightest sign of recognition from another at least confirms one's presence in the world. No more fiendish punishment could be devised, as William James once wrote, than one should be turned loose in society and remain absolutely unnoticed by all the members thereof. In discussing this idea of confirmation and disconfirmation, Laing quotes from a paper by Martin Buber :

In human society, at all levels, persons confirm one another in a practical way, to some extent or other, in their personal qualities and capacities, and a society may be termed human in the measure to which its members confirm one another.The basis of every man's life with man is twofold, and it is the one - the wish of every man to be confirmed as what he is, even as what he can become, by men; and the innate capacity to confirm his fellow-men in this way.⁻¹²⁻

At different periods in one's life, the need for confirmation varies

(12) M. Buber, 'Distance and Relation', Psychiatry, 20, 1957. Quoted in R.D. Laing, Self and Others, Op. Cit., p. 98.

both with respect to the mode by which this is given and the area of the person's being to which this is directed. As one grows older, the confirmation that a person gives and receives varies in a similar manner. Thus, a response that is adequate for a child may be embarrassing or insulting if directed at an adult. At any age, different aspects of personal endeavour require more confirmation than do others. The qualities and capacities of one person that are confirmed or disconfirmed by different others may differ widely - with one aspect of self being negated by one person and endorsed by another.

Action and interaction can be thought of as more or less confirmatory or disconfirmatory. A confirmatory response accords recognition to the evoking action and accepts its significance for the evoker, if not for the respondent. It is direct, to the point, or 'on the same wavelength' as the initiatory action. An action can be confirmed at one level and disconfirmed at another. A confirmatory response need not signify acceptance. Thus, one person may reject the advances of another, but if this is done directly and in a way which recognizes the significance of the rejected person, the rejection can be confirmatory. Those types of disconfirmatory actions which are particularly destructive of identity, Laing calls "schizogenic".⁻¹³⁻ He argues that people who are too sensitive to recognition or who need to give or receive too much confirmation, stand a good chance of being diagnosed as schizophrenic. This diagnosis is indicative of the person's incapacity to give or receive love in an adult manner. He gives the example of a schizophrenic woman who had come to visit him for counselling. She entered his office and sat in a chair about ten feet from him. After about ten minutes, during which she had neither moved nor spoken, his

(13) R.D. Laing, Self and Others, Op. Cit., p. 100.

attention to her began to drift. He then heard her say in a small voice, "Oh please don't go so very far away from me". At that moment Laing felt the most important thing for him to do was to confirm the fact that his patient had correctly registered the withdrawal of her presence for him. The only thing he could say to her then was "I am sorry." Many patients, like this woman are very sensitive to desertion, but are not sure of the reliability, much less of the validity, of their sensitivity. They do not trust their perception of themselves or of other people and can not trust their own mistrust. In this regard Laing writes:

One of the most important questions is whether a person's mistrust of his 'feelings' and the testimony of others arises from persistent inconsistencies within the original nexus - between the evidence of empathetic attributions about others, his experience of himself, the testimony of others about their feelings, and the constructions they place on his experience of, and intentions towards, them. -14-

These considerations on confirmation and disconfirmation are especially relevant to interpersonal action within the family. Laing notes that one finds family interactions that are characterized by pseudo-confirmation or confirmation which masquerades as genuine but which is counterfeit. Sometimes parents or other family members will actively and persistently confirm the identity of one child which he does not recognize or accept as his own. This may take the form of relating to a fiction they take the child to be while, at the same time, invalidating or simply ignoring the self the child feels to be his. With some children, the quality of being human, of being an agent in one's own right, is never confirmed by the original significant others. Although the child is provided with all the biological necessities, he never develops a sense

(14) Ibid., p. 105.

of himself as a person. He may grow up relating to others and the world in a mechanical or stereotyped way, or with the feeling that he has no right to exist at all. This persistent depersonalization or invalidation is usually not obvious from within the family nexus. But it can and has been studied objectively. Indeed, what these studies show is that often neither the extent nor even the presence of this type of family interaction is recognized, or if it is, it is usually not made explicit. Therein, Laing argues, lies the schizogenic potential of the situation. He writes:

The characteristic family pattern that has emerged from the study of families of schizophrenics does not so much involve the child who is subject to outright neglect, or even to obvious trauma, but the child who has been subjected to subtle but persistent disconfirmation, usually unwittingly.-15-

Inasmuch as confirmation and validation are requisite to identity development, the behaviour of the person in this family situation can be understood as response to threats which he perceives to his identity.

Basic to a person's development of a sense of identity is his need to be given a certain amount of significance by others in his nexus. This need for acknowledgement continues throughout life. Laing writes:

Every human being, whether adult or child, seems to require significance, that is, place in another person's world... It seems to be a universal human desire to want to occupy a place in the world of at least one other person.-16-

Everyone seeks a position in the eyes of another, a place in the other's world that offers room to move. Laing is not referring here to physical space but to a person's existential position. If neither recognition nor significance is granted a person, no measure of freedom of interpersonal action is of any value. It is illuminating to compare observations on the way a person is treated as a child with the 'delusions' of a neurotic

(15) Ibid., p. 100.

(16) Ibid., p. 136.

or psychotic person concerning his self-importance. Thus, a person who comes to feel that his existence has gone unnoticed by those around him may constantly complain that he is the unwilling object of their scrutiny. Laing explains these paranoid ideas of reference in terms of the human need for significance. Accordingly, a paranoid person is someone who feels others have not given him a place in their world. This may stem from his original sense of place, that is, from the amount and kind of attention he was given as a child. Such a person will complain that others are talking about him from behind his back, that he is being followed or that his phone is 'tapped'. In fact, he is hardly noticed by anyone. Indeed this haunting anxiety of being at the centre of everyone's world stems from his real fear that he is of concern to no one. He may appear to be self-centered, but is trying to compensate for his insignificance. He feels alone and neglected and is envious of attention shown others. The paranoid person is haunted not by the presence of the other, nor with the other's absence, but with the absence of his own presence as other for the other. Unable to experience himself as significant for any other, he develops a delusionally significant place for himself in the world of others. Often he is seen as living in 'a world of his own'. In one sense this is true; but, ironically, it is also false. The paranoid lives not so much in his own world, but in the empty space he supposes he does not occupy in the others' world.

There are many ways in which the other can invalidate or otherwise negate both the behaviour and experience of self, and in so doing, threaten his sense of identity. These include the other: (a) ignoring entirely the actions and remarks self directs at him, (b) accepting actions of self in a way that is not intended, (c) treating actions of self as reactions or effects of some cause whose origin is not in the doer, (d) taking credit

for self's achievements and thereby questioning his very capacity to act, (e) belittling the significance of what self feels to be important, (f) shifting the modality of self's experience, eg., from memory to imagination ('It's all in your imagination'), (g) denying the content of self's assertions ('It never happened that way'). Finally, other can invalidate not only the significance, agency, modality and content of self's actions, assertions and experience, but his very right to exist at all and, on top of all this, make self feel guilty for simply being. In addition, other can deny that he is acting toward self in this way ('How could you think such a thing?' or 'You must be paranoid.'). Other's prolonged and constant invalidation and negation of self, coupled with the mystification of his denial, may have the effect of self not knowing 'where' or 'who' he is.

Interpersonal action that is destructive of identity need not only be directed against self alone; it can be 'two way'. This is to say that self and other may, by their interrelations, confirm each other in false or ingenuine ways by conferring on each other counterfeit identities. Laing refers to this type of false complementarity as collusion: "a game of mutual self-deception".⁻¹⁷⁻ Collusion is a means of avoiding interpersonal conflict and is engaged in especially if self lacks confidence in himself and trust in the other. One essential feature of this game is that neither party admit to one another, or to himself, that it is a game. As such, collusion involves pretense and elusion.⁻¹⁸⁻ It is often effected by playing

(17) Ibid., p. 108.

(18) Elusion is a way of avoiding or denying one's identity by pretending or imagining one is someone else and then pretending one is not pretending or imagining. Laing writes that "elusion counterfeits truth by a double pretence." (Self and Others, Op. Cit., p. 50.)

off the modalities of imagination or phantasy against that of waking perception. Through collusion, each person finds in the other the other needed to complement the identity each wants for himself. It is clinched when self finds in the other someone who will confirm him in a false self that self is trying to make real. The ground is then set for prolonged mutual evasion of truth, responsibility and true fulfillment.

Collusion usually involves some degree of phantasy since the need for complemented false appearances arises from the phantasies of each person of himself and of the other. This implies not that both are hiding their 'true' selves, but that neither has arrived at a genuine realization of his own identity or of the other's. Collusion goes beyond phantasy in that it involves both parts of the (dyadic) cycle of interaction and interexperience. Self does not use the other merely as a hook on which to hang his projections, but strives to induce the other to become the very embodiment of his phantasies, and requires the other's cooperation to complement the phantasy identity he himself feels impelled to sustain.

In succumbing to the other and becoming a willing party to collusion, a person may feel a sense of guilt from self-betrayal which Laing thinks is peculiar to this disjunction. He call this true guilt and distinguishes this from the false guilt a person may feel from betraying the other by refusing to collude with him and put on a false front in order to confirm his phantasy identity. Under pressure of false guilt, one may become an unwilling partner in collusion; but fear of losing one's identity or of being used by the other works counter to this. There are, however, better reasons for *being true to oneself!*

Laing stresses that, in practice, it is difficult to determine whether, or to what extent, a relationship is collusive. Thus, if one person is repeatedly the passive victim of a trick or manipulation, the relationship

will not be called collusive. But a person can be victimized for not playing the victim and thus become involved in a collusive relationship by adopting the role of 'the victim' in order not to be victimized. A third party is always a danger to a two-party collusive alliance. Laing writes that in Huis Clos, Sartre "depicts an infernal round of collusive twosomes in impossible triads ... with a geometric precision reminiscent of Spinoza."¹⁹⁻ In this play, three dead people, one man and two women, are 'trapped' in a room together. They have been told they have been sent to hell. The man is a heterosexual coward, one woman is a homosexual bitch and the other, a clever lesbian. He feels he is a coward, but can 'see' himself as brave if someone complements this phantasy identity. Both women fear they are unattractive to their sexual opposite. To justify herself, the lesbian needs to see all men as cowards; the other woman needs a man for whom she has meaning. But all collusive alliance is stymied. The man is prepared as far as he can to collude with either woman if she will 'see' him as brave. But to the lesbian he is a coward who can offer her nothing, and to the other woman he is only a sexual object. The lesbian can get nothing from a man and an aggressive heterosexual woman, nor can she offer either anything. Finally, since she will not endorse his masculinity, the other woman does not 'interest' the man. In this triad, each person does not accept his/her own identity, but cannot sustain his/her 'bad faith' without the other's collusion. Laing writes, "each remains tormented and haunted by anxiety and despair. In this situation, 'l'enfer, c'est les autres',"⁻²⁰⁻

(19) R.D. Laing, Self and Others, Op. Cit., p. 112.

(20) Ibid., p. 112.

A person's sense of identity is related to his 'position'; to the amount of 'room' he feels he has and to the quality of this life-space. The quantity and quality of a person's existential position is governed by his original sense of place, the 'space' he gives himself and the 'space' he is given by others in his interpersonal relationships. In discussing these ideas, Laing distinguishes between a tenable and an untenable existential position. Thus, if a person is given genuine confirmation by others, if he is accorded a certain amount of significance, then his position in the nexus of others will be tenable. But if his identity is disconfirmed, invalidated or negated, over a period of time he may be put into a false and, ultimately, untenable position therein.

In discussing the idea of an untenable position, Laing considers the work of two authors who were among the earliest contributors to literature on this subject. The first is a paper by H.F. Searles⁻²¹⁻ in which the author lists six techniques of driving a person crazy by "tending to undermine (his) confidence in his own emotional reactions and his own perceptions of reality."⁻²²⁻ Laing formulates these techniques as follows:

1. p repeatedly calls attention to areas of the personality of which o is dimly aware, areas quite at variance with the kind of person o considers himself or herself to be.
2. p stimulates o sexually in a situation in which it would be disastrous for o to seek gratification.
3. p simultaneously exposes o to stimulation and frustration or to rapidly alternating stimulation and frustration.
4. p relates to o simultaneously at unrelated levels.
5. p switches from one emotional wavelength at another while on the same topic (being serious and then funny about the same thing).
6. p switches from one topic to another while maintaining the same emotional wavelength.⁻²³⁻

(21) H.F. Searles, 'The Effort to Drive the Other Person Crazy - an Element in the Etiology and Psychotherapy of Schizophrenia', Brit. J. Med. Psychol., 32, 1, 1959.

(22) Ibid., quoted in R.D. Laing, Self and Others, Op. Cit., p. 139.

(23) Ibid., p. 139.

In his paper, Searles draws the conclusion that any kind of personal interaction that tends to "activate various areas of a person's personality in opposition to one another tends to drive him crazy."⁻²⁴⁻ In Laing's opinion, this conclusion does not do justice to the data the author has compiled. He argues that Searles has confused interpersonal conflict that may sharpen a person's sense of being with that which may sabotage or destroy self. Going crazy is only one way of dealing with conflicting courses of action. Laing writes:

What is more specific is interpersonal action which tends to confuse or mystify... This makes it difficult for the person to know 'who' he is, 'who' the other is, and what is the situation they are 'in'.⁻²⁵⁻

In support of this criticism Laing gives the following example. This involves a girl who, in asking her teacher's advice on a personal problem, has confided in someone other than her mother for the first time in her life. Her decision to go to someone beyond her family is potentially beneficial toward the development of her own autonomy. Instead, the incident served only to sabotage her growth toward independence. When the girl told her mother about confiding in her teacher, she was reproached since, as she had been taught, everyone outside her family was a stranger who could not be trusted. The girl came to believe that she could not afford to lose the close relationship with her family, and that any intention to upset this was an expression of selfishness and ingratitude. In Laing's opinion the conflict between mother and daughter could only serve to weaken the girl's sense of self because she did not have a clear-cut realization of the choice between autonomy and a childish attachment to her mother. Instead, the girl saw selfishness and ingratitude on the one hand and family

(24) Ibid., p. 140.

(25) Ibid., p. 140.

loyalty on the other. Faced with these options, she was stymied and unable to choose between them. This false conflict served only to confuse the girl and therein lay its schizogenic potential. Eventually she came to feel that any desire to leave the family was an act of either suicide or murder. For this psychotic expression of her fear of autonomy, the girl needed psychiatric therapy.

In this situation, the real choice before the girl was shrouded in the phantasy system shared by her family. For the daughter to confide in the teacher represented to the mother an act which threatened to break up the family unity. The mother's reproaches were a similar threat to the daughter. Neither wanted this to transpire. While the context of this shared phantasy (the family as a unit) is known to both mother and daughter, neither realize its modality as phantasy. Since both experience the family as real, this threat to its unity could not be made explicit within the nexus. Instead both cherished family security and both saw the act of confiding in the teacher as selfish and ungrateful.

To prevent false conflict from arising, Laing stresses that efforts must be made that enable the true issues to be seen by all those concerned. This would entail making explicit the assumptions made on the basis of the shared phantasy system and involve the "emergence from a shared phantasy dread of separation."²⁶⁻ In this example, the possibility of psychosis is not generated by conflict itself, but by the confusion or mystification which arises because the true issues of choice are not realized and faced. False conflict is muddling and detrimental to identity; true conflict is clarifying and beneficial to a person's development of his sense of self.

(26) Ibid., p. 143.

A person's relations with his significant others may be such that no matter how he acts or feels, his actions are deprived of their motives, intentions and consequences, and his feelings are denied their validity. To illustrate this, Laing gives the following example. Taken by itself, it appears as an unimportant incident. But if understood as typical of frequent, recurrent, interpersonal situations, this can result in a total undermining of a person's sense of identity. In this example, a mother is visiting her son who has just been recovering from a mental breakdown. As he goes toward her, she opens up her arms for him to embrace her and/or to embrace him. As he gets closer she freezes and stiffens. He stops, unsure of what to do. She says, 'Don't you want to kiss your mommy?' - and he still stands irresolute. She says, 'But dear, you mustn't be afraid of your feelings'. This situation is virtually composed of confusion. The boy can not make a correct move. He begins to respond to his mother's invitation to kiss her, but her posture simultaneously tells him not to do so. She appears to be afraid of a close relationship with him but can not openly admit this to him. He responds to this unspoken message by stopping, unsure of what to do next. When she asks if he doesn't want to kiss her, she is implying that the reason why he does not want to do so is not because he has perceived her anxiety lest he do so, or is heeding her command not to do so, but because he does not love her. When he does not answer, she implies that he fears his own feelings towards her. By her actions and words the mother conveys in effect: 'Do not embrace me or I will punish you' and, at the same time, 'If you do not do so I will punish you. The punishment will itself be secret.'

This situation, in which the boy is caught in a tangle of paradoxical injunctions and attributions having the forces of injunctions, is called a double-bind. It was first characterized by Gregory Bateson

and his coworkers in 1956.⁻²⁷⁻ This involves at least two persons, one of whom is called 'the victim'. Laing sums up Bateson's thesis as follows:

One person conveys to the other that he should do something, and at the same time conveys on another level that he should not, or that he should do something else incompatible with it. The situation is sealed off for the 'victim' by a further injunction forbidding him or her to get out of the situation, or to dissolve it by commenting on it. The 'victim' is thus in an untenable position. He cannot make a move without a catastrophe... Bateson and his associates propose that it will be difficult for a person to be sane who has been exposed to such a situation repeatedly, and put forward the hypothesis that 'there will be a breakdown in any individual's ability to discriminate between Logical Types whenever a double-bind situation occurs'⁻²⁸⁻

The existential position of the 'victim' in the double-bind situation is, in Laing's terminology, "untenable".⁻²⁹⁻ An untenable situation is one from which it is impossible to leave and in which it is impossible to stay. "The more untenable a position is", Laing writes, "the more difficult it is to get out of it."⁻³⁰⁻ This tautology, he adds, is worth pondering. Bateson's 'double-bind' theory revolutionized the concept of 'the environment' and helped render obsolete most earlier discussions on the relevance of the environment to the origins of schizophrenia.⁻³¹⁻

(27) G. Bateson, D.D. Jackson, J. Haley and J. Weakland, 'Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia', Behavioral Science, I, 251, 1956.

(28) R.D. Laing, Self and Others, Op. Cit., p. 145-146 (emphasis in original).

(29) Ibid., p. 41.

(30) Ibid., p. 41.

(31) Ibid., p. 148.

In his paper, Bateson stresses that if double-binds are imposed during infancy, escape from the field is, naturally, impossible. If this situation occurs with sufficient frequency, it comes to govern the person's whole experiential structure, and almost any part of the sequence will be sufficient to put the 'victim' into a state of panic or rage. Although the extent to which double-binds go on in families generally is not known, Laing argues that such 'modes of communication' "certainly occur frequently"⁻³²⁻ in families of schizophrenics. He writes:

The possible strategies for living out this untenable position that Bateson and his colleagues deduce from it, match the types of behaviour identified clinically as schizophrenia.⁻³³⁻

What is called psychosis may be the 'victim's' attempts to hold onto something he regards as certain amidst the radical uncertainty and confusion of the double-bind situation. It is not surprising that others in the nexus may refer to this something as delusional.

(iii) Conclusion: The Minimal Personal-Identity Requirements

In this chapter we have discussed Laing's ideas on some of the ways in which interpersonal relations can contribute to and enhance, or threaten and destroy, a person's sense of identity. At one extreme, the relationship between two people is based on honest mutual assessment and perception, both of self and of other, and on mutual acceptance. Self confirms other in a genuine way and in so doing complements him authentically. When conflict or disjunction arise, this is faced openly and dealt with in a manner that is instructive to both persons. At the other extreme, neither person

(32) Ibid., p. 148.

(33) Ibid., p. 147.

recognizes himself nor the other as he 'really' is. In such a relationship, self complements other in an ingenuine or false manner, or not at all. By attributing characteristics to him that he does not recognize or accept as his own, other disconfirms self as the person he (truly or falsely) takes himself to be, or confirms in him an identity based on his (other's) attributions, projections or phantasies. In extremo, other disconfirms self as an autonomous person and relates to him as if he (self) were a thing. By invalidation or negation of self's actions, assertions or experience, other denies him significance and eventually can put self into a false or untenable existential position. We also discussed how, through mutual self-deception or collusion, both self and other can enter into an inauthentic relationship.

In the former, authentic, type of interpersonal relationship each person is able to be himself and to confirm the other as the person he is. The relationship is constructive of each person's sense of identity. The latter, inauthentic, type of interpersonal relationship is based more on each person's phantasies, projections and attributions than on 'reality'. Neither person is able to be himself, nor even to 'see' himself. Both remain strangers to each other and to themselves. Such an interpersonal relationship can only be destructive of each person's sense of identity. As will be discussed in following chapters, it is precisely this inauthentic, dishonest, self-destructive type of interpersonal relationship that is characteristic of the world of the 'mad' person.

These considerations also apply to a nexus of more than two persons. In this instance, interpersonal relations that tend to be constructive of a person's sense of identity are reflected in a consistency between the language and the behaviour of persons in the nexus: between what is said and what is done. On the other hand, inconsistency between nexal language

and behaviour is evidence of the interpersonal relations in the nexus being destructive of personal identity.

These considerations on the connection between interpersonal relations and personal identity suggest a set of seven Minimal Personal-Identity Requirements: the conditions that must be fulfilled in any interpersonal relationship in order that a person establish and maintain a secure sense of identity. These requirements are: (1) Complementarity. Every person requires another who attributes to him certain characteristics, and through whom this defined identity becomes actualized. For complementarity to be genuine a person must receive (2) confirmation by the other as an autonomous person - as the person he feels himself to be. That is to say, his actions, assertions and experience must receive (3) validation and (4) affirmation as being worthwhile, useful, self-creative, good, etc. Through this confirmation, validation and assertion, a person will be granted (5) significance in the world of others in his nexus and thereby be put into a (6) tenable position in the nexus.

The most basic Minimal Personal-Identity Requirement has yet to be mentioned. This requirement is itself presupposed by the six identity requirements listed above, and indeed by this entire discussion on personal identity in the nexus. Although its ramifications are interpersonal, strictly speaking this basic identity requirement is intrapersonal. For these reasons, it is mentioned here for the first time, at the conclusion of this chapter on interpersonal identity considerations.

Those who engage in interpersonal relations are, naturally, persons. Being a person presupposes the capacity to experience oneself as a person, that is, the ability to have an identity or a sense of oneself. This capacity or ability is fundamental to being human. One's identity could not be enhanced or threatened by others if one could not have an identity

or was unable to have a sense of oneself as an individual, autonomous, person. This capacity to experience oneself as a person or to have a sense of identity is the seventh Minimal Personal-Identity Requirement.

Based on a consideration of these seven identity requirements, the following can be said: If a person's interpersonal relationships are such that some or all of the Minimal Personal-Identity Requirements #(1) through #(6) are not fulfilled, then this person will not be able to establish or maintain a secure sense of identity. If Minimal Personal-Identity Requirement #(7) were lost, then eo ipso, the individual would cease to be a person.

Through one's interpersonal relations, one can, to a greater or lesser extent, lose one's sense of identity or have this sabotaged. But as a person, one can never lose the ability to have a sense of personal identity. To do so is to cease to be human.

In this thesis, we will show that insofar as madness can be understood in terms of these Minimal Personal-Identity Requirements, then it is intelligible in existential terms. That is to say, we will show that to the extent to which the behaviour and experience of a 'mad' person can be shown to be his response to a crisis in his personal identity, then the 'mad' person never ceases to be a person. In order to do this two tasks remain. We must turn our attention to specific cases of madness in order to assess the existential intelligibility of each case in terms of some aspect of a quest for personal identity. Finally, by an examination of the existential structure of madness, we will elucidate the specific nature of the 'mad' person's sense of himself as a person. With the completion of these two tasks, the solution to the Question of Intelligibility

will be completed and we can discuss some of the implications of Laing's existential understanding of madness.

CHAPTER #4: Case Studies of Madness

(i) Introduction

In this chapter, the case studies of four 'mad' persons are presented. All of these are taken from Laing's own files and are discussed in his books. The first two cases involve a discussion of the person's family nexus from the point of view of the person himself as well as from an 'objective', third-person, viewpoint. In the second two cases, the focus is on the intrapersonal: the schizoid organization of the person's being. The aim in each case, is to assess the existential intelligibility of the person's madness. That is, by an examination of the experience, behaviour and inter- and intra- personal world of each person, we will develop and elucidate the existential terms in light of which his/her madness becomes intelligible. This intelligibility centres around the person's attempt to deal with a crisis in his/her personal identity arising as a result of his/her interpersonal relations. Each case is followed by an elucidation of the Issues of Intelligibility: the ideas in terms of which the person's madness is made intelligible. The 'symptoms' of the person's illness dissolve in the social intelligibility expressed in terms of these ideas.

The case of Brian is taken from Self and Others, (pp. 88-95).

The case of Maya Abbott is taken from Sanity, Madness and the Family, (pp. 31-50). It is based on forty hours of tape recorded interviews with Maya and her family. In their preface to the eleven cases presented in their book, the authors stress that they were not trying to test the hypothesis that the family is a pathogenic variable in the genesis of schizophrenia, but that "the behaviour and experience of schizophrenics is much more socially intelligible than has been supposed by psychiatrists."¹

(1) R.D. Laing and Aaron Esterson, Sanity, Madness and the Family, Op. Cit., p. 27.

The cases of David and Peter are taken from The Divided Self , (pp. 69 - 75 and 120-133). The discussion of these brings out the way in which the schizoid and schizophrenic person organizes his being and the consequences of this for his interpersonal relations. Inasmuch as this discussion involves ideas which have not been hitherto presented herein, the elucidation of the Issues of Intelligibility for these two cases will follow a study of The Divided Self (Chapter #5).

Case #1: Brian

At the age of twenty-nine Brian was admitted to a mental hospital in a state of confusion and despair. He had expressed a desire to kill himself. At this point in his life he had been married, apparently happily, for ten years. Then he suddenly began to drink heavily and to beat his wife insisting, as he put it, 'there could be no greater wickedness than to inflict gratuitous suffering on a person who loved you and whom you loved'.

Brian spent his infancy and early childhood with his mother and had grown up believing his father was dead. His memory of his mother was that she was 'good, sweet, kind and innocent'. When he was four he remembers that his mother took him on a long journey to a house where he met a strange man and woman. There his mother burst into tears, kissed him and ran out. Brian never heard of or saw her again. The man and woman told him they were his parents. He remembers he was confused and that this permeated all his feelings - including his grief for his mother. All his energies went into vain efforts to find out what had happened to her. He desperately wanted to know who his mother was and who he was. To answer the second question he had to answer the first. His foster parent told him nothing. Brian felt he had lost his 'old' self in losing

his mother. The only way he could accept this was to tell himself that she had abandoned him to two 'strangers' because he was bad. Laing notes that this thought added everything up for him; it was his one certainty. Brian did not know who he was but he did know what he was. And if he was wicked he would be wicked. He remembers that he came to this decision just before his fifth birthday; he could not remember any wicked act he had committed - he just knew he was wicked and that his primary task was to act wickedly.

Brian's foster parents had two children of their own: Jack and Betty - respectively eighteen and sixteen years older than himself. He was brought up as their younger brother. He remembers that Jack had tried to be friends with him, but he was too engrossed in his own confusion to respond. A few years later Jack went to live in Canada.

Living up to his self-imposed identity, Brian became a bad boy. When he was reproached for being naughty he was triumphant: he was being confirmed in his chosen identity. He was particularly nasty to a little girl in his class at school whom he felt was 'good, sweet, kind and innocent'. Laing notes the close comparison between this girl and Brian's memory of his mother - a comparison which was not then apparent to Brian.

When Brian was nine a decisive event occurred. Unknown to his foster parents, he discovered his adoption papers and learned he was not 'one of them'. This revelation made him feel only scorn and contempt for the people who had raised him since childhood. He felt they were hypocritical, deceitful and cowardly in hiding the truth from him. He was sure that he really meant nothing to them. Every time he had been scolded for being naughty was 'evidence' for this conviction. At this point Brian's thinking took a radical turn. He now came to believe that his foster parents were trying to drive him to be bad by telling him that he was

bad. Feeling that if he came to a bad end he would be giving them satisfaction, he began to work hard in school. If he was a failure in their eyes, the best way to spite them would be to be successful. But any praise he got he felt was insincere. Brian felt he had simply called his foster parents' bluff and was forcing them into hypocritical expressions of pleasure at his achievements. His hatred of them remained, undisclosed. By his teens, Laing notes, Brian had elaborated and perfected intricate levels of self-deception. At the age of sixteen, under the impression that he had forgotten his mother, his foster parents broke the news that he was adopted. Brian pretended to be shattered by this; but inwardly he was full of contempt for them.

On finishing school Brian went into business. Pushed on by a desire for revenge he became very successful. In his early twenties he married a girl who was good, 'sweet, kind and innocent'. For the first years their marriage was happy. They had a son. But near the child's fourth birthday Brian's behaviour changed. He began to drink heavily and quarrel with his wife. When he began to beat her compulsively and unjustifiably she left him and sought psychiatric help for her husband.

In his discussion of this case, Laing writes that "Brian's life seems almost diabolically contrived for comical effects. His story is exceptional, but just for this reason we may begin to see some general truths with particular clarity."² His behaviour must be understood in light of the effect of certain pivotal events in his life on his sense of identity. With the disappearance of his mother, Brian lost his 'old' identity; with the discovery of his adoption papers he found his 'new' identity to be false. To these must be added a third event which occurred

(2) R.D. Laing, Self and Others, Op. Cit., p. 93.

just prior to his sudden breakdown . Brian was home for Christmas visiting with his foster parents. By this time he had come to terms with the fact that he was adopted, He had accepted the fact that he was not 'one of them', and that he did not belong. He was no longer bitter and indeed, with a wife and child, felt genuine happiness for the first time in his life.

The final blow to his identity was struck in a conversation he had with his stepsister Betty. During his visit he spoke to her for the first time in his life of the hatred and resentment he had felt for his foster parents while he was growing up. Brian told her he could only now understand why it was best for them not to tell him of his adoption until his sixteenth birthday. His only regret, he added, was that he never knew who his natural father was. "But didn't you know?" Betty said, "I thought my parents had told you that Jack was your father." Jack, the 'brother' who had made a special effort to be friends with him when Brian was a boy, had recently died in Canada. Laing writes of Betty's revelation:

This was one too many turns of the screw. It was 'beyond a joke'. His most prized secret possession had been that he knew he was not 'one of them'. The structure of the meaning of his life was destroyed. He was torn to shreds. He had been fooled completely. Unsuspectingly, he had grown up where in fact he had belonged.-3-

All of his life Brian had tricked people into believing in his self-imposed identity. But with Betty's revelation the tables had turned. The final trick was on him. Thus Brian reverted to a course of action which would indelibly stamp him as 'bad'. He would remove all possible doubts, both his own and others, as to who he 'really' was. Just after his Christmas visit home, Brian began to drink heavily and beat his wife until she finally left him.

(3) Ibid., p. 92.

The Issue of Intelligibility in this Case:

The existential issue around which Brian's 'madness' can be understood is that of his lack of complementarity. His story brings out very clearly the consequences of the absence of a significant person to complement one's identity in a genuine manner. With the unexplained loss of his mother, Brian lost his sense of who he was; throughout his life, he was never able to develop within himself a sense of his own identity. Instead of this, indeed because of this, he defined himself in terms of conditions outside his control. As a child, he was a 'bad boy'. Upon discovering his adoption papers, he became 'not one of them'. When his step-sister told him the truth about Jack, this identity too was negated and Brian suddenly became part of a family he had never accepted as his own. Even his wife's identity-for-him was built around someone other than herself. Laing writes that Brian had "fused his 'mother' with his wife"⁻⁴⁻ and cherished the idea that she, too, was 'good, sweet, kind and innocent'.

Ultimately, however, Brian never really believed the story he told himself of who he was. His sense of himself was never 'real', but based in phantasy. He was himself unaware of the extent to which his life had come to pivot around a phantasy identity. But the "long concealed phantasy infrastructure"⁻⁵⁻ on which his life was based was revealed in his drinking and his attacks on his wife. Laing writes that Betty's revelation "removed a lynch pin that had been holding (his) whole world together."⁻⁶⁻ The whole meaning of his reality crumbled. At this point Brian had two options. He could again redefine himself by reconstructing his view of others and the world, or he could take his stand on what he

(4) Ibid., p. 92.

(5) Ibid., p. 91.

(6) Ibid., p. 93.

believed and ignore reality. Brian could only choose the latter. Because he had finally come to accept his non-attachment, his not being 'one of them', his whole "hierachy of intentions and projects, whom and what he loved, hated and feared, and his sense of success and failure"⁻⁷⁻ were pivoted around this identity. When his wife left him, this showed that she too was bad since she did not love him unconditionally. He devised a plan whereby, at one and the same time, he could 'pay her off' and bind her to him forever. He would kill himself so that she would inherit his money. She would then never be able to leave him, because she would never be able to forgive herself. Before he was able to carry this out, Brian was hospitalized. Laing writes:

There is nothing more real and indubitable than pure phantasy; nothing more obvious; nothing less necessary and more easy to prove.... The need to pivot one's life around a complementary identity betokens a dread of phantasy and hatred of what one is.⁻⁸⁻

Case #2: Maya Abbott

Maya Abbott is a tall, dark, attractive woman of twenty-eight. As an only child, she lived with her parents until she was eight. A psychiatric case worker described her parents as quiet, ordinary people. Her father ran a general store. During the second world war Maya was an evacuee with an elderly, childless couple. At age fourteen she returned to live with her parents. Retrospectively, this is when her parents noticed the first signs of her 'illness'.⁻⁹⁻ When she was eighteen Maya was admitted to a mental hospital. She was diagnosed as a paranoid

(7) Ibid., p. 93.

(8) Ibid., p. 93.

(9) Inasmuch as Laing and Esterson deny the fact of the illness schizophrenia, the term "illness", as well as "schizophrenia" are written in single quotation marks in the appropriate contexts. see p. 1 of the introduction to this paper.

schizophrenic and spent nine of the next ten years as an in-patient.

From the point of view of her parents and her doctor, the incident precipitating Maya's hospitalization was sudden and inexplicable. She had been worrying about her school work for about one month, and one afternoon came home telling her parents she had been expelled by her headmistress. As her worry was not usual, her parents dismissed her story as false. Maya however would not change it. For the next few nights she was unable to sleep and became convinced that burglars were trying to break into the house. A sedative was prescribed which Maya at first refused to take; when she finally did it had no effect. This continued for a few nights until, one evening, Maya rushed out of the house and told a neighbour her father was trying to poison her. When her parents located her, Maya came home voluntarily and discussed the matter calmly with them. She was not afraid of her father but refused to be convinced he was not trying to kill her. At this point a psychiatrist was called and, after hearing this story, had her committed. Maya was more than willing to be helped in this way and entered the mental hospital as a voluntary patient.

Her behaviour, both at home and in the hospital, gave rise to the following clinical attributions, that is, symptoms of her 'paranoid schizophrenia'. She was depersonalized, and exhibited affective impoverishment. She tended to be withdrawn and showed signs of catatonia. She was paranoid and was subject to ideas of influence and auditory hallucinations. She exhibited confusion of ego boundaries and was occasionally impulsive. The authors note that this diagnosis was made by observing Maya's behaviour without any reference to its context: the process and praxis of her family. It is socially senseless, and is not intended to be. They argue that if this same behaviour is examined

within the context of her family, it will become more socially intelligible. This is to say that from the social phenomenological perspective from which Laing and Esterson have studied this case, these "clinical signs and symptoms will become dissolved in the social intelligibility"¹⁰ of the interpersonal relationships of the Abbott family.

In the discussion that follows of Maya's 'schizophrenia', what is most important is the radical difference between the parents' view of their daughter's 'illness' and Maya's own view of it. Thus what Maya saw as attempts to exercise autonomy and independence, her parents saw as symptoms of her disease. The authors point out that this normal desire of Maya to assert her independence was taken by her parents as signs of rejection, although they never expressed this to her. Instead of telling Maya that she could not be herself, they gradually convinced her (and themselves) that she was not herself - i.e.; that she was ill.

According to Mr. and Mrs. Abbott, Maya had completely changed when she returned home after the war. She had always been 'their little girl' and was especially close to her father. Now, at fourteen, she no longer 'fitted in' with the family. She wanted to spend all of her time alone in reading and objected to her father's trying to kiss her. At first her parents felt Maya was being deliberately difficult. But as soon as the diagnosis of schizophrenia was made, her constant attempts to cross them made sense: she was sick and could not control her behaviour. Only concerned for her daughter's welfare, they were willing to do anything for her so long as she would get better. Thus, Mrs. Abbott told the interviewer:

(10) R.D. Laing and A. Esterson, Sanity, Madness and the Family, Op. Cit., p. 32.

I'm so absolutely centered on one thing - it's to get her well. As a child, and as a teenager, I could always sort out whatever was wrong, or do something about it... but since this illness... our relations have been completely different. Since she's been ill she's never accepted anything any more. She's had to reason it out all for herself, and if she couldn't, then she didn't seem to take my word for it - which of course is quite different to me. -ll-

Yet to get her daughter to realize how ill she really was, Maya's mother frequently questioned her daughter about her memory and pointed out the numerous times she'd been amnesic or had confused memories with what had only been imagined. Mrs. Abbott told the interviewer (in Maya's absence that after her cure she prayed Maya would not remember her illness because she (mother) thought it would upset her to do so. Indeed she said she felt this so strongly that it would be 'kindest' if Maya never remembered her illness even if this meant she had to remain in hospital.

Maya herself did not feel she was suffering from some illness. She realized her main difficulty, her main task in life, was the achievement of autonomy. Maya was very aware of how much her parents tried to control her and prevent her from becoming her own person. But she was not strong enough to stand up to them directly and tried to gain independence by indirect means. Thus she became an avid reader and would spend long hours reading alone. This her parents regarded simply as negative behaviour. When Maya continued her preference for solitary behaviour in the hospital, the doctors saw this as one symptom of her psychosis. In clinical language, she was said to be 'withdrawn'.

Despite her timidity, Maya was sometimes belligerent and emphasized other people's faults. But this brashness was simply a front, a means of regaining what she called her 'self-possession'. Her infrequent impulsive behaviour can also be understood in this sense. Most of the time however,

(11) Ibid., p. 34-35

she was not very sure of her feelings and was painfully aware of her acute lack of autonomy. She told the interviewer:

Mother's always picking on me. She's always getting at me. She's always trying to teach me how to use my mind. You can't tell a person how to use their mind against their will. It's always been like that with mother. I resent it. ⁻¹³⁻

But even this appraisal of the situation was not held with much conviction; often she doubted its validity. She said:

She doesn't pick on me, but that's how I look at it. That's how I react to it. I've got to calm myself. I always feel I've got to pick back at her - to stand up and get my own back - get back my self-possession. ⁻¹⁴⁻

Maya had never been allowed to do anything on her own. When she was young, everything had to be strictly controlled by her parents ideas of order and correctness. As a result she was always extremely precise and tidy; but this did not come from any inner discipline. It was a means of survival. Change disturbed her precarious sense of identity. But years of dutiful obedience had had their toll. Maya told the interviewer:

I was never allowed to do anything for myself, so I never learned to do things. The world doesn't seem quite real. If you don't do things then things don't seem quite real. ⁻¹⁵⁻

This lack of autonomy extended beyond what she did. Although she knew what fear was, Maya repeatedly disclaimed having any other feelings of her own or of being the agent of her own thoughts. She said: "I don't think, the voices think." These phantom utterances echoed her reading or made criticisms of people she was too terrified to make herself. Maya's auditory hallucinations are intelligible when seen in this light. In the authors' viewpoint, this detachment from her actions, thoughts and

(13) Ibid., p. 44.

(14) Ibid., p. 44.

(15) Ibid., p. 45.

feelings was done largely to evade criticism and invalidation - something which was never lacking at home. As her feelings of self-confidence wained, Maya came to feel that, as she said, "the whole lot is out of my control." Eventually she gave up trying to make sense of anything or anyone. She told the interviewer:

I can see only one side of the question - the world through my eyes and I can't see it through anyone else's eyes like I used to. (To her mother) I can't make out your kind of life. I don't live in your world. I don't know what you think or what you're after and I don't want to.-16-

Maya came to see no point in even trying to try. It is no wonder that, in clinical language, she 'showed signs of catatonia'.

In order to understand more fully why Maya was unable to achieve autonomy it is necessary to examine her family situation more closely and bring out the factors which contributed to her failure to develop a strong sense of self. In light of these factors the symptoms of Maya's illness will become intelligible in terms of the praxis of her family nexus. We shall refer to these factors as the Issues of Intelligibility in the case of Maya Abbott.

In the hospital Maya was said to be 'depersonalized' and that she 'exhibited impoverishment of affect'. In terms of a phenomenological view of Maya as a distressed (dis-eased) person, this clinical description of these symptoms of her 'illness' translate into the following. She experienced herself not as a person but as a machine - that is, she lacked a sense of her own motives, agency and intentions and felt it necessary to speak and act with studious and scrupulous correctness. Seen in the context of her home life, this cold, mechanical way of acting is intelligible as Maya's reaction to what she felt was her parents' overall regard of her.

(16) Ibid., p. 46.

Thus Maya told the interviewer that her parents did not think of her or treat her as a person - as, in her words, "the person I am". Ever since she was fourteen her parents had told her that she had no feelings. They continued to maintain this despite the fact that she would become flushed and angry when these attributions were made. Maya told the interviewer that she felt she had never been shown any genuine affection and that her parents did not know, and did not want to know, what she felt. She was not allowed to spontaneously show her feelings as this was not part of 'fitting in' with the family. In a word, Maya's parents treated her as if she was a thing. It is not surprising that, after years of this, she began to act like one. Yet in the hospital Maya's depersonalized behaviour and affective impoverishment were only evidence of an organic pathology.

The exasperation and frustration that Maya felt as a result of this depersonalization at the hands of her parents is dramatically illustrated in her recounting of the following incident - one which occasioned her readmission to the mental hospital (where she remained for nine years). Maya remembers that she was preparing dinner in the kitchen and, as usual, her mother was behind her telling her how to do things right. Maya felt 'something was going to snap inside' unless she acted. Whirling around, she brandished a knife and then threw it on the floor. Maya remembered that although she did not fully understand her action, she wanted to. However she was quite sure that she was responsible for this and that it was not due to her illness. In the interview in which this incident came out the following exchange occurred:

Maya: Well, why did I attack you? Perhaps I was looking for something I lacked - affection, maybe it was greed for affection.

Mother: You wouldn't have any of that. You always think it's sippy.

Maya: Well when did you once offer it to me?

Mother: Well, for instance, if I wanted to kiss you, you'd say, 'Don't be sippy'.

Maya: But I've never known you let me kiss you. -17-

This lack of affection frightened Maya and she hit back at her parents in self-defence. They saw no sense in her retaliation however, since they did not understand her original fear. "It is not surprising, the authors write "that in psychiatric report after report Maya was described as "apathetic, lacking in affect, hostile and emotionally impoverished. Her parents also saw her in this way." -18-

Maya's feeling that her parents did not treat her as a person was reinforced by their constant negation and invalidation of her. This is to say that they told her that she did not, or could not, do, remember, or think what she (in fact) did, remembered, or thought. The authors write that they were not able to find "one area of Maya's personality that was not subject to negations of different kinds." -19- Given this constant and thorough negation and invalidation, it is no wonder that while in the hospital Maya preferred to go off alone and, on occasion, ceased activity altogether. But seen outside the context of her interpersonal family relations this behaviour can be accounted for only in terms of her 'mental illness'. Thus, in clinical terms, she was said to be 'with-drawn' and 'to show signs of catatonia'.

(17) Ibid., p. 36 (emphasis in original).

(18) Ibid., p. 36.

(19) Ibid., p. 41.

Mr. Abbott's light regard of his daughter was typical of this invalidation. In her childhood Maya and her father were especially close. But when she was a teenager Maya's father would often laugh off or simply ignore what she thought to be important or serious. For example, when she was fourteen Maya told the interviewer that she first began to imagine 'sexual things' and would lie in bed and wonder if her parents had intercourse. This would get her sexually excited and she would masturbate. Maya remembers that she was frightened by this. But when she tried to tell this to her parents they told her that she did not masturbate or have these thoughts. The authors write that "what happened then is of course inferred, but when she told her parents in the presence of the interviewer that she still masturbated, her parents simply told her that she did not!" -20-

In addition to outright negation, Maya was frequently confused or mystified by her parents equivocal or ambiguous attitudes toward various aspects of her life. We have already seen this in connection with her 'illness'. Her parents also displayed equivocation toward Maya's studious ways. Although proud of her scholastic achievements, at the same time they begrudged the time she spent away from them in study or reading. Maya told the interviewer that they often told her that she was 'perhaps too bright' and that she got no enjoyment out of reading. Yet when she repeated this in front of her parents, they amusedly denied it. It is not surprising that with all this ambiguous praise, pseudoconfirmation, invalidation, and outright negation, that Maya "sought refuge in her private world, her shell". -21- This was preferable to having her plans and

(20) Ibid., p. 42 (emphasis in original)

(21) Ibid., p. 44.

projects, her fears and worries, treated as if they were insignificant or non-existent. But in the eyes of her parents she was just 'negative'; in psychiatric jargon, she 'withdrawn'.

The effects of her home life were not limited to Maya's mistrust of others. She was unsure of her own feelings and perceptions. Indeed the diagnosis of her illness included the symptoms of 'confusion of ego boundaries', 'auditory hallucinations', 'paranoia' and the clinical attribution that she 'suffered from ideas of influence'. In phenomenological terms this is to say that Maya did not have a clear idea of who she was, that she was needlessly afraid - especially of things she alone could hear, and that she felt others were influencing her in strange ways or that she was unintentionally influencing others despite her efforts to counter this. Once again these 'symptoms' become socially intelligible if the behaviour that gave rise to their diagnosis is examined in the context of her family life - especially with respect to the ways which her parents tried to influence and control her.

Maya's attempts to create her own life were resented and challenged by her parents. They felt that she was shutting them out of her life. Their response to this blow to their pride, although quite interesting, could only have been very mystifying to Maya. Mr. and Mrs. Abbott came to feel that their daughter had exceptional mental powers - so much so that they convinced themselves that she could read their thoughts. This did not in any way seem to contradict their attribution that, because of her illness, Maya did not know what she herself thought, remembered or did. Unknown to Maya, Mr. and Mrs. Abbott conducted experiments: by using a prearranged set of signals they would test their daughter's supposed extrasensory powers. It is very significant that this did not come to light until a full year after the interviews had begun.

The authors note that during the first interview involving the whole family, Mr. and Mrs. Abbott kept exchanging a series of nods, winks, gestures and knowing smiles with each other. This became so obvious that the interviewer questioned why this semi-clandestine communication was going on. The parents both denied they were exchanging any secret signals, but continued doing so as frequently as before.

The mystifying way in which Maya's parents exerted control over her extended to what she felt, wanted and imagined. One instance of this concerns Maya's hospitalization. Maya felt that her mother was trying to keep her in the hospital even though she felt there was no need of her continuing as an in-patient. When Maya recounted this to the interviewer in the presence of her mother, Mrs. Abbott replied:

I think Maya is - I think Maya recognizes that - er - whatever she really wanted for her own good, I'd do. - Wouldn't I - Hmm? (no answer) No reservations in any way - I mean if there are changes to be made I'd gladly make them - unless it was absolutely impossible.-22-

This, the authors note, couldn't have been farther from what Maya recognized at that moment. But what Maya wanted was qualified by 'really' or 'for her own good'. Exactly how her parents exercised this control over Maya was very mystifying - even for the authors - since, as they note, Mr. and Mrs. Abbott were arbiters of : (i) what Maya recognized, (ii) what Maya 'really' wanted (in contrast to what she might think she wanted), (iii) what was for her own good, (iv) what was a reservation or a change, and (v) what was possible.

The parents' secret experimentation, private communications and mystifying control over their daughter continued over a period of ten years both at home and while she was hospitalized. During this time Maya felt that her parents were relating to her in some strange way.

(22) Ibid., p. 43.

But she was never sure if they were doing this, let alone how it was being done. If she tried to clarify her confusion, her parents ignored her or simply denied the existence of anything odd. To add to this mystification, it must be remembered that Maya's parents were actively and openly trying to influence her in other ways throughout this period of her life. Maya gradually became unable to distinguish between what she perceived and what she imagined to be going on between her parents. Unsure if some innocuous action was intended to convey an unspoken message between her parents, Maya found it difficult to distinguish between meaningless gestures and the many subtle nuances of expression that are part of human communication. Thus she became over sensitive to what others were saying - frightened to miss a small but significant detail. As a result of this confusion was that Maya became unsure of who, if anyone, was influencing her, as well as of the nature and extent of her own influence on others. In this sense, Maya was not able to develop a sure sense of where 'she' stopped and the other began. In light of this uncertainty, the clinical attributions that she suffered from 'ideas of influence' and 'confusion of ego boundaries' are socially intelligible.

Because of her parents' constant negation and invalidation of her, and their failure to recognize her as a person in her own right, we saw how Maya tried to live in a 'world of her own'. But these attempts to live her own life, to develop a sense of herself and a feeling of autonomy, were short-circuited by the control her parents exerted over her. Convinced that their daughter was not able to make her own decisions. Mr. and Mrs. Abbott 'ran' their daughter's life. Indeed, because of her failure to develop a sense of independence, Maya required her parents' support constantly. The circle is indeed vicious. Unable to be herself or to 'go it alone', but at the same time finding it increasingly difficult

to live with her parents, Maya's position in her family nexus was becoming untenable. This was no different while she was in hospital. Although as a patient she had more opportunity to go off alone, this behaviour only indicated to the doctors the extent of her 'illness'. When she told her parents she felt ready to leave the hospital, her mother recognized the validity of her daughter's feelings, but considered only herself able to make such decisions. The doctors probably did not give Maya even that much credit.

Sometimes Maya was able to comment fairly lucidly on her existential position and the various domestic factors responsible for this. But this was very difficult for her to do since she did not know when to trust her own perceptions and memory, and could not trust her mistrust. From the authors' detached viewpoint however, the social realities of the Abbott family were easier to pin down. But these were no less ambiguous or equivocal. They write:

The close investigation of this family reveals that her parents' statements to her about her, about themselves, about what they felt she felt, and even about what could be directly seen and heard, could not be trusted.-23-

The Issues of Intelligibility in this Case:

In this presentation of the case of Maya Abbott, it has been demonstrated that Maya's failure to achieve a sense of autonomy can be understood in terms of the (1) depersonalization, (2) negation, (3) invalidation and (4) mystification to which she was constantly subjected both at home and in hospital, and the resulting (5) untenable position 'into'

(23) Ibid., p. 43.

which these interpersonal actions placed her. In light of these five issues of intelligibility, her 'illness' becomes intelligible in existential terms. Maya was not treated as a person, but as an unfeeling thing unable to act on her own. Any display of emotion on her part was either ignored or dismissed as 'soppy'. She was rigorously supervised and her achievements were given equivocal praise, if any at all. Maya's attempts to understand her parents or herself were played down or confounded by their secret domestic 'new-speak'. As she became increasingly unable to rely on her own judgements of herself and others and, at the same time, unable to live under her parents' constant disconfirmation, her position in the family nexus became untenable. It is no wonder that she was unable to develop a sense of her own identity. Her only comfort in all of this, if not her parents' as well, was that, at the age of eighteen, she was certified schizophrenic, and admitted to a mental hospital where she spent nine of the next ten years.

Far from being signs of some organic pathology, Maya's symptoms are simply her way of living with and relating to her parents given their attitude and behaviour toward her. To argue that the Abbotts were relating in an abnormal way in the presence of an abnormal child is to ignore the data presented here. Indeed what most concerned Maya's parents was not her gradual loss of self, but her attempts at developing and realizing herself. Maya's 'symptoms' are her way of being-in-the-world. The authors conclude their case history by writing:

In respect of depersonalization, catatonic and paranoid symptoms, impoverishment of effect, autistic withdrawal and auditory hallucinations, confusion of 'ego boundaries', it seems to us, in this case, more likely that they are outcomes of her inter-experience and interaction with her parents. They seem to be quite in keeping with the social reality in which she lived.-24-

Case #3: David

David was eighteen when he first came to Laing for psychiatric counselling. The following history was compiled. As an only child, David lived alone with his father since his mother's death when he was ten. He studied philosophy at university. Although his father saw no reason for David seeing a psychiatrist, the boy first visited Laing on the advice of one of his tutors. This man was upset by his student's unusual mannerisms, his theatrical get-up, and particularly by the fact that his whole manner was entirely artificial and his speech was made up largely of quotations. In addition, David seemed to be hallucinated. Laing's own picture of David was that:

he was a most fantastic looking character, an adolescent Kierkegaard played by Danny Kaye. The hair was too long, the shoes too big, and withall he always wore a second hand theatre cloak and carried a cane. He was not simply eccentric: I could not escape the -25- impression that this young man was playing at being eccentric.

David's father regarded his son as perfectly normal and attributed his eccentricities to an adolescent phase. He remembered David as having been a good child who never caused any trouble. He had been very devoted to his mother and, after her death, more or less took after her by carrying out the wifely duties. He cooked, did the housework, and even showed his mother's flair for embroidery and interior decorating. The father only spoke highly of this.

(24) Ibid., 47-48

(25) R.D. Laing, The Divided Self, Op. Cit., p. 70.

This part or role that David played came very naturally since, by his own account, he had been playing one role or other all of his life. As a boy he had been simply 'what his mother wanted him to be' and her death did not make it any easier for him to be himself. Laing notes that David grew up taking it entirely for granted that what he called his 'self' and his 'personality' were two, quite separate, things. Indeed he assumed that everyone else operated in this way: living by playing parts. This fundamental assumption governed his life. It made it very easy for him to be anything his mother wanted since all his actions belonged to the part he was playing. Only to the extent that his actions belonged to a false self - a self which, at first, acted according to his mother's will - could they be said to be 'his' actions at all.

David said that his aim in life was to make this split between what he was and what people saw him to be, to be as complete as possible. It became his ideal never to reveal himself to others but, at the same time, to be as frank and honest toward himself. Sometimes he played the part of himself - but he could not simply and spontaneously be himself. To achieve his ideal necessitated the most torturous equivocation. But through years of practice David had become a very convincing actor. Indeed he had 'fooled' his father and, most likely, his mother. This modus vivendi had, he said, the additional advantage of alleviating his anxiety. He had always been very shy and self-conscious; by playing these roles he was able to overcome his discomfort and could get along with others fairly easily. For most of his schooling he said he had concentrated on playing one part: a 'precocious schoolboy with a sharp wit - but somewhat cold'. When he was fifteen however, he realized that this part was becoming unpopular because, as he put it, 'it had a nasty tongue'. Accordingly, he modified the role into a more likeable

character. First this had good results, but as time went on his efforts to sustain this organization of his being had become threatened in two ways. The first was the risk of being spontaneous - of giving himself away. This did not worry him too much; because of his confidence in his acting ability, David felt he was master of the situation. The second threat was more real and indeed was beginning to disrupt his whole technique of living. It was chiefly about this that he complained to Laing. Throughout his life, David had always avoided becoming caught up in the parts he was playing - that is to say, he was never spontaneous. The parts he played at home, in front of a mirror, were always woman's parts. He dressed himself up in his mother's clothes and rehearsed female parts from the great tragedies. As this went on however, he found he could not stop himself from playing the part of a woman. David caught himself compulsively walking and talking like a woman, even seeing and thinking as a woman might see and think. This part was beginning to engulf or take over his own self and rob him of his cherished mastery of his being. His present theatrical get-up was contrived as the only way he was able to arrest this takeover of his true self.

Playing a role of his own choosing had been his whole life - indeed his means of life. But David could not understand why he was driven to play a part he hated and which he knew brought him ridicule. But this "schizophrenic" role was, in Laing's words, the "only refuge he knew from being entirely engulfed by the woman who was inside him and always seemed to be coming out of him!"⁻²⁶⁻

(26) Ibid., p. 73.

Case # 4: Peter

Peter was a large man of twenty-five who looked the picture of health. He visited Laing complaining that there was a constant unpleasant smell coming from the lower part of his body and his genital region. It was the smell of something burning, or of something old and rancid that was decaying. Although he took several baths a day he could not get rid of it. He was not sure if it was the 'sort of smell' that other people were aware of.

The following ~~de~~ life history was provided by Peter's father's brother. He came from a very poor family. His parents were not happy but stuck very close to each other. Peter was an only child and was born after his parents had been married for ten years. His uncle said that Peter's birth seemed to make no difference to his parent's life. He slept in the same room as them until he left school. While they were never unkind to him, or left him alone, his parents treated Peter 'as if he wasn't there'. While he was well-fed and clothed, his mother never played with or cuddled him. As a baby he was always crying. Peter's childhood and adolescence passed without any noticeable peculiarities except that, just as an infant, he was hardly ever taken notice of. The uncle said that, although he felt Peter's father was very fond of him, something seemed to stop him from showing this affection. Instead he tended to be gruff, pick on his faults and belittle him by calling him 'useless Eustace' or 'just a big lump of dough'. When Peter did well in school and subsequently got a good job, his father was 'terribly proud' of his son. Although he never concealed his pride for his pretty wife, and brought her expensive clothes whenever he could afford it, Peter's father never praised his son's achievements.

Peter was a lonely child, and was always very good. When he was nine a little girl of his own age who lived next door was blinded in an air raid that killed both her parents. For several years he spent most of his time with this girl Jean. He had inexhaustible patience and kindness, taught her how to get around the district and took her to shows and pictures. Later she partially recovered her sight. She told Peter's uncle that she owed her life to that little boy who was the only one who befriended her in her time of need.

After his schooling Peter's uncle helped him get a position in a solicitor's office. Peter left this job after a few months because of lack of interest, but again through his uncle, got a job in a shipping office. He stayed with that firm until he was drafted. In the army, at his own wish, he looked after patrol dogs. After serving for two years without unusual incident Peter returned to civilian life and took a job as a racetrack kennel man. His father regarded this as his literally 'going to the dogs'. Peter had been the first in his working class family to get a 'good' job, but he left even this job after less than a year. He worked at odd jobs for five months and then did nothing for seven months. It was at this time that he went to his family doctor complaining of his smell. There was, in fact, no smell coming from him so his doctor sent him for psychiatric counselling.

Peter described himself to Laing in the following way. He felt that neither his father nor mother had wanted him, and indeed had never forgiven him for being born. His mother had resented him because he spoiled her figure in pregnancy and hurt her in childbirth. He said she frequently held this up to him when he was young. As for his father, Peter always felt that he resented his son's simply existing at all and that he probably hated him for the misery and pain he had caused his mother.

It was during Peter's second visit to Laing that the following exchange occurred.

- Peter: Ever since I can remember I was sort of aware of myself as sort of self-conscious, obvious in a way, you know.
 Laing: Obvious?
 Peter: Well, yes, obvious. Simply being there...It was just being aware of myself.
 Laing: Being there?
 Peter: Oh, just being at all, I suppose. He (his father) used to say that I had been an eyesore since the day I was born.
 Laing: An eyesore?
 Peter: Yes, Useless Eustace was another name for me, and a big lump of dough.
 Laing: You felt guilty about just being there.
 Peter: Well, yes, I don't know really...it was simply for being in the world in the first place, I suppose.⁻²⁷⁻

Peter remembers that when he was four or five his mother scolded him for playing with his penis. When he was seven or eight there were a few episodes of a sexual nature with a girl his own age. He did not start masturbating until he was about fourteen. These incidents were very important to him and served to intensify his self-consciousness. He told them without any warmth. Peter could remember nothing else of his early life. Indeed it was only after many months of therapy that he mentioned, in a casual way, the little blind girl Jean.

Peter told Laing that at secondary school his feelings about himself began to crystallize. He felt under an obligation to his teacher and parents to work hard and make something of himself. Because he felt at the same time that he was really a nobody, these demands seemed both impossible and unfair. When his teacher praised him for doing good, or held him up as a model student, and had him, the 'secret masturbator', read bible lessons to the class, this simply convinced him of how good an actor he was. Beyond this he did not know who he was or what he wanted

(27) Ibid., p. 122.

to be. Along with these feelings of worthlessness he had an idea that he was somebody special sent by God on a special mission. This however remained unclear. As long as he was able to comply with other people's wishes he did not fear them. Thus he was able to deal with the anxiety which, Laing supposes, must have made him so complacent.

By the time he had taken his second office job he began to experience anxiety at what he felt was being true to others and false to himself. This is to say that he was no longer able to convince himself that he was fooling others into thinking he was worthwhile. Fears of being discovered began to haunt him. The greater these grew, the more he felt he had to separate what he regarded as his real feelings and thoughts from what he did. But this strategy also served to potentiate his feeling of being transparent and he was constantly scrutinizing others to see if they had 'seen through' him. He was able to deal with this anxiety and carry on in an outwardly normal way by the use of two techniques he called 'disconnection' and 'uncoupling'. By the former he meant widening the existential distance between himself and the world; by latter he would sever any connection between his 'true' and his reputed 'false' self. He was ill at ease with others until he could get himself into a role or part that was not him. Then he could uncouple his self from his actions and function smoothly.

But this self-splitting also had its disadvantages. Peter gradually began to act with everyone on the basis of this compliance -with-the-other. This required constant vigilance, and so long as he could maintain this he could avoid the extreme embarrassment of giving himself away. But the more his life came to be run in this manner, the more he came to hate both others - to whom he was being falsely true, and himself - to whom he was being truly false. He felt himself shrinking 'inside' and becoming

more and more vulnerable to self-disclosure. Not putting himself into his actions, he began to feel bored and useless. Moreover, his defence was not foolproof. From time to time he would be caught off guard and felt a look or remark to penetrate to his very being. Gradually Peter completely lost confidence in his ability to conceal his true self and to shield it from the threat others represented to him. It was at this point that he quit as a kennel man and began to wander from job to job throughout the country. He would take different names and tell no one about his past. So long as no one knew him he was able to be himself; he could relax and even be free and spontaneous. Uncoupling was no longer necessary. Incognito, he could be embodied. As soon as he felt he was becoming too familiar, or known by someone, he would move on. He was going from nowhere to anywhere; he had no past and no future, no possessions and no friends. Laing writes:

By being nothing, knowing nobody, by being known by nobody, he was creating the conditions which made it easy for him to believe that he was nobody. -28-

After a few months, even this nomadic existence proved to be an unsatisfactory means of alleviating his sense of worthlessness. Ultimately it simply enhanced his conviction that he was a nobody. He felt it was pointless to pretend to others or himself any longer. He told himself, 'I am a nobody, so I'll do nothing'. He dropped out as completely as he knew how and did nothing but the most basic chores required for physical survival. He became bent on completely dissociating himself from his false self and destroying all outward appearances. Peter even derived a certain sardonic satisfaction out of being less than others, and even he himself, wanted him to be.

(28) Ibid., p. 132 (emphasis in original).

But as he withdrew from the interpersonal world and became 'closed up' within himself, the world withdrew from him. A sense of deadness settled over his being; he told Laing it permitted his experience of his 'uncoupled self' and his 'disconnected body'. Everything began to come to a stop. The world began to lose reality for himself and he found it hard to believe it had existence for others. When he gave up masturbating, his feeling of worthlessness intensified to such an extent that he began to smell a foul odour emanating from his body. The more inactive his life became, the worse this odour became. When he really set out to do nothing, and to be nothing, this smell became intolerable; he stank so badly in his own nostrils that he could hardly endure it. Although he did not 'really' smell, this odour had phenomenological validity. For Peter, it represented his existential reality.

The Issues of Intelligibility in the Cases of David and Peter:

The discussion of the issues in terms of which the 'mad' behaviour and experience of David and Peter can be made intelligible in existential terms is contained in the conclusion of the following chapter on Laing's The Divided Self. These issues will be summarized in the conclusion of this chapter.

CHAPTER #5: Intrapersonal Identity Considerations - The 'Mad' Person's Sense of Himself

(i) Introduction and Synopsis of The Divided Self

To this point in the paper, we have discussed those aspects of Laing's writings dealing with the intelligibility of interpersonal relations, and developed the requisites that must transpire in a personal relationship for a person to form and maintain a secure sense of identity. These were the Minimal Personal-Identity Requirements. In applying these ideas toward an existential understanding of madness, the emphasis was on the various ways in which a person's sense of his own identity can be sabotaged or threatened in his relations with others. These identity considerations became the focus in the case studies of Brian and Maya Abbott. By examining their behaviour and experience in light of their interpersonal family relationships, we explicitated the Issues of Intelligibility: the ideas in terms of which their madness became socially and existentially intelligible. In order to bring out the Issues of Intelligibility in the cases of David and Peter, and to fully elaborate our idea of madness as a crisis of personal identity, it is necessary to turn to intra-personal identity considerations. In this chapter, by a discussion of The Divided Self, we examine the ways in which the 'mad' person organizes his being and the consequences of this "schizoid" existential organization. With both these inter- and intra-personal identity considerations, the existential structure of madness, as it is set down in Laing's books, becomes fully elaborated, and we may proceed to the final step in the solution to the Question of Intelligibility.

The "basic purpose" of The Divided Self, Laing writes in his preface to the original edition, "is to make madness, and the process of going mad, comprehensible."⁻¹⁻ In this, his first book, Laing "tries to show that

(1) R.D. Laing, The Divided Self, Op. Cit., p. 9.

there is a comprehensible transition from a sane schizoid way of being-in-the-world to a psychotic way of being-in-the-world."⁻²⁻ In tracing the development from sanity to madness, Laing does not present us with a sequence of impersonal it-processes. He does not, as would the clinical-medical psychiatric model against which this book is implicitly directed, follow through the pathological progress of some organically based disease. Rather, he discusses madness in human terms, from the point of view of the 'mad' person himself. To this extent, as its sub-title indicates, The Divided Self is "an existential study in sanity and madness". Indeed Laing spends most of the first third of the book setting down the "existential-phenomenological foundations" for an understanding of all persons: sane and mad.⁻³⁻

In this book, Laing provides us with an account of persons who, rather than living with a unified, embodied sense of themselves, feel their being to be composed of a disembodied self and a deanimate body. Laing argues that this existential split is utilized as a basic defence against a world which is experienced as threatening to their very sense

(2) Ibid., p. 17. Although Laing retains the clinical-medical terms 'schizoid' and 'schizophrenic' for the sane and psychotic persons respectively, his use of these terms is qualified. Laing writes in the preface to The Divided Self "I shall not, of course, be using these terms in their usual clinical psychiatric frame of reference, but phenomenologically and existentially." Ibid., p. 17.

(3) See Chapter #1, Section (ii) "Definition of the Context of the Question of Intelligibility".

of identity. It is a strategy of living despite the pervasive anxiety of "primary ontological insecurity".⁻⁴⁻ By identifying with this 'inner' self, the schizoid person tries to preserve a sense of identity without relating directly to persons or things. All behaviour, all interpersonal relations are mediated through an 'outer' "false-self system"⁻⁵⁻ which is centred in the person's body. This can be said to be 'his' body only insofar as it is part of his false-self system. Depending on the degree of consistency displayed by the false self, this existential split may go unnoticed by others for years. Indeed with some ontologically insecure people the strategy works: the self-body split serves to alleviate their anxiety and they are able to live relatively normal lives. But in the cases with which Laing is chiefly concerned, this retreat into a private, intrapersonal world only potentiates the threat felt to self. What is clinically viewed as psychosis or schizophrenia is, according to Laing's existential viewpoint, the ultimate failure of the schizoid defence system to effect a viable, socially acceptable way of being-in-the-world.

The schizoid person desperately wants to be himself - to express his self. But at the same time this is what he most dreads. He hates and fears the other person. But only by complying with the other's will while pretending to be himself, is he able to live and not reveal himself. But often this existential strategy backfires and the schizoid person comes to hate himself for being true to the other and false to himself. Eventually, out of frustration and hatred, he may end all compliance and withdraw totally into himself. Paradoxically, this may involve feigning death in order to survive. The ever-present danger is that this pretense

(4) R.D. Laing, The Divided Self, Op. Cit., p. 39.

(5) Ibid., p. 79.

can be carried too far. And herein lies the personal-identity crisis that is madness: "(The schizoid individual)", Laing writes, descends into a vortex of non-being to avoid being..."⁻⁶⁻

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(ii) Ontological Insecurity:

In The Divided Self, Laing's understanding of madness and of the world of the 'mad' person is centred around his idea of ontological insecurity. He writes:

This study is concerned with the issues involved where there is the partial or almost complete absence of the assurances derived from an existential position of what I shall call primary ontological security: with anxieties and dangers that I shall suggest arise only in terms of primary ontological insecurity; and with the consequent attempts to deal with such anxieties and dangers.⁻⁸⁻

In Laing's view, the 'mad' person is one for whom the normal conditions of living represent a threat to his sense of identity. Despite this primary ontological insecurity, he must continue to live.

To bring out this idea of ontological insecurity Laing sketches the following two contrasting existential positions. On the one extreme is the person who experiences his being as real, alive and whole. His identity and autonomy are, in most circumstances, never in question.

Aware of who he is, he does not feel his identity to be threatened;

it is relatively

stable throughout time. Life for him began with his birth and will end with his death. Such a person has "a firm core of ontological security".⁻⁹⁻

(6) Ibid., p. 93.

(7) In a footnote on the use of the term 'ontological' Laing notes that he does so as an adverbial or adjectival derivative of the term 'being' (Ibid., p. 39).

(8) Ibid., p. 39.

(9) Ibid., p. 42.

At the other extreme is the person who is never certain of his autonomy. Under ordinary circumstances he may feel more unreal than real - in a literal sense, more dead than alive. He feels conspicuously different from those around but, at the same time, lacks any firm idea of his own identity. At best this weak sense of self is precariously maintained; he feels he may at any time tumble unnoticed into the mass of others and be obliterated. Such a person may lack the experience of his own continuity in time, or be without an overall sense of personal togetherness. He feels that his life began some time after birth and that it may end any time - without this being consequent on bodily death. Unable to feel that the stuff he is made of is of any worth, he identifies with the insubstantial part of his being. That is, he feels his self to be (to some extent or other) divorced from his body. Such a person's existential position is characterized by "primary ontological insecurity".⁻¹⁰⁻

The basic mode of being-in-the-world of the ontologically insecure person is radically different from that of the person who is secure in his sense of self. Thus, the ontologically secure person, who is in good health and assured of the biological necessities, will seek to gratify himself through his work and play - through his interpersonal relations. Although he is not always satisfied, other people and things remain a source of potential gratification. Even if he is assured of biological security, the ontologically insecure person is, on the other hand, "pre-occupied with preserving rather than gratifying himself".⁻¹¹⁻ The ordinary circumstances of living present a continual and deadly threat in the face of his low threshold of security. Unable to take for granted

(10) Ibid., p. 39.

(11) Ibid., p. 42.

that he is real, autonomous - even that he is alive, his whole life involves establishing and preserving what for the ontologically secure person is simply the basis for living. As one such person put it, "I must prevent myself from losing myself."

For the ontologically insecure person, the elements of the world take on a radically different hierarchy of significance. Events no longer affect him in the same way as they do other people. What to do most people are insignificant or routine occurrences may be deeply significant to the ontologically insecure person insofar as they strengthen or threaten his precariously established sense of being. Laing notes that it is not true to say, without careful qualification, that this person is losing contact with reality and withdrawing into himself. He stresses, rather, that his world of experience comes to be one which he can no longer share with other people, and to this extent he may be said to be living in a 'world of his own'.

This difference is seen in the interpersonal world as well. To the extent that a person can share his experiences with another, their lives merge and both are mutually enriched. As we have shown, a person's sense of identity can not be separated from the idea of himself he attributes to other people with whom he comes into contact. But no matter how 'close' two people may grow toward one another, the depth of their interpersonal commitment or the contribution each makes to the other's sense of self, each feels a sense of his own individuality and autonomy. If one should go away or die, a bond of attachment or memory may remain; but each is able to continue to exist without the other. The ontologically insecure person, on the other hand, can neither experience his separation from nor his relatedness to another person in this 'normal' way. His interpersonal life oscillates between utter detachment and isolation and

a clam-like dependence-as if the other person's life-blood is necessary for his survival. Either the other is seen as a threat - simply by virtue of his very existence - or, if a relationship is established , the ontologically insecure person feels bound up with the other "in a sense that transgresses the possibilities within the structure of human relatedness."⁻¹²⁻ Rather than making his contribution to a mutual sharing and growth, the ontologically insecure person comes to depend on the other for his very sense of being.

It is important to realize that in contrasting these two modes of being-in-the-world, Laing is not so much concerned with whether someone actually lives 'at' either extreme, as he is with characterizing the existential position of primary ontological insecurity. For he feels that it is very difficult for a person with a strong and unified sense of himself, who appreciates bothhis autonomy and his relatedness to others, and who takes for granted the reliability of things and events, to transpose himself into the world of the person who is utterly lacking in anything unquestionable and self-validating.

The ontologically insecure person feels perpetually exposed and vulnerable. His life is characterized by omnipresent anxiety. He lives in constant dread of the "engulfment", "implosion", or "petrification"⁻¹³⁻ of his self, this is to say, of the total and utter annihilation of his identity. To ensure against this terrible fate he must, just as a man trying to save himself from drowning, exercise the most vigorous and strenuous effort. Engulfment describes the dread of being absorbed by the other: enclosed, swallowed up , obliterated by him. Any and every

(12) Ibid., p. 53.

(13) Ibid., p. 43 ff.

interpersonal relationship represents this threat. The other's love, understanding or even gaze is enough to precipitate a desperate fear. To be alone or hated comes to be preferred. Implosion describes the dread that the world is about to crash in and smother all sense of identity - just as a toxic gas would instantaneously obliterate a vacuum and all ^{life} therein. Although the ontologically insecure person longs for his emptiness to be filled, at the same time he dreads this for this would bury all of him there is. Laing notes that all of us are but four or five degrees fahrenheit away from a feeling of this impinging, crushing character of reality. Petrification describes the fear of having one's subjectivity drained away as one becomes a mere thing in the eye of the other. To forestall this possibility of reification the insecure person must have constant confirmation of his subjectivity - either by himself or by the other. Yet to the extent to which the other is seen as an experiencing being, the risk of petrification remains.

Because of these anxieties, the ontologically insecure person's feelings towards relating to other people is, necessarily, ambivalent. Insofar as the other represents a threat, he dreads a relationship with him. But at the same time, he is not able to sustain a feeling of his own existence without the other. His crisis is indeed desperate. In attempting to deal with it, he develops a strategy which seems to follow the general law that the threats most dreaded are themselves utilized against the other to forestall their actual occurrence. Thus the person will dominate others lest they overpower him; before he is engulfed by his surrounding or robbed of his subjectivity, he will withdraw from all contact with the world or 'just pretend' to be a mannequin. As a last resort he will safeguard his own autonomy by foregoing it, preserve aliveness by feigning death. Ultimately these schizoid defences serve

only to potentiate the feelings of insecurity and vulnerability which they were designed to alleviate.

The consequences of these self-protection strategies will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent sections. In the following section, the mechanics of this schizoid defence system is discussed.

(iii) Schizoid Strategy of dealing with Ontological Insecurity:
the Embodied and Unembodied self

The person acutely lacking a sense of his own identity feels persecuted by reality itself. Nonetheless life must go on. In an attempt to deal with his prevasive feelings of anxiety the person dissociated his self from all parts of his being through which he relates to other people and things. By identifying only with this unembodied self, he seeks to transcend the world. Laing writes:

I shall try to show how such (ontologically insecure) persons do not seem to have a sense of that basic unity...but seem rather to experience themselves as primarily split into a mind and body. Usually they feel most closely identified with the 'mind'. This split will be seen as an attempt to deal with the basic underlying insecurity.-14-

Instead of meeting the world as an integral person, the "schizoid"⁻¹⁵⁻ individual, as Laing refers to him, disavows part of his being along with the avowal of immediate attachment to things and people in the world. By adopting this dualistic mode of being-in-the-world, he is afforded protection against the hostile world, to some extent or other.

The schizoid person regards his inner, disembodied, self as his real or true one. It is experienced as a mental entity. Rarely is it given behavioural expressions; to do so would be tantamount to attempting suicide. All gestures, actions and words are part of an outer mask or

(14) Ibid., p. 65.

(15) Ibid., p. 73, 75 ff.

persona with which he is able to relate to other people and the world without revealing the inner self. As the schizoid person perfects this defence and the split in his being develops, a number of these false 'outer', selves may emerge. None of these is so fully developed as to have a complete personality. For this reason, Laing refers to the 'outer' self of the schizoid person as a "system of false selves"⁻¹⁶⁻ or a "false-self system".⁻¹⁷⁻ All spontaneous behaviour ceases and inter-personal relations are played out in deliberate roles which, together, comprise the false-self system. The body effects all mediation between the 'inner' self and the world. It is regarded by the schizoid person as one object among the many objects in the world, and may be seen with love, tenderness, amusement, hatred, as the case may be. It is 'his' body only insofar as it is the core of his false-self system. The functions of the inner self are restricted to observing, judging and controlling the body's actions and to engage in operations which are usually spoken of as being purely 'mental'.

In a schematic representation contrasting the being-in-the-world of the embodied and disembodied person, Laing represents the former as: (self/body) \rightleftharpoons other, and the latter as: self \rightleftharpoons (body-other).⁻¹⁸⁻ As with the ideas of ontological security and insecurity, embodiment and disembodiment form an existential basis for two radically different orientations toward life. If embodiment or disembodiment were complete in either direction we would have, as Laing puts it, "two different ways of being human". He continues:

(16) Ibid., p. 73.

(17) Ibid., p. 73.

(18) Ibid., p. 82.

What we have are two different existential settings. The difference in setting does not preclude every basic issue, good and bad, life and death, reality and irreality, from arising in one context as in the other, but the radically different contexts in which they occur determine the basic ways in which these issues are lived.-19-

In The Divided Self, Laing examines some of the ways in which a person whose basic existential setting approximates disembodiment, experiences his relatedness to himself and to other people and the world. It is important to realize that Laing is not concerned whether or not there are persons who are completely embodied or disembodied - as if either extreme is humanly possible. Nor is he arguing that embodiment is, in itself, a guarantee of a strong sense of self, or a safeguard against feelings of hopelessness or meaninglessness. The person whose sense of individuality is genuinely based in his body may in other ways not be a whole and unified person. Although most people would regard embodiment as normal and healthy and disembodiment as abnormal and pathological, Laing stresses that in his study such an evaluation is irrelevant, He argues that disembodiment is no more an index of psychosis than is total embodiment an index of sanity. His point is that the self-body unity of the person who feels himself to be more or less embodied, provides an integral starting point from which the person's perceptions of and relations with himself and other people can be understood. It is precisely this unity that can not be presumed when one is trying to make the behaviour and experience of the schizoid person intelligible.

In some cases, the strategy of the schizoid split proves effective and the person is able to live a relatively socially harmonious life despite his underlying ontological insecurity. In The Divided Self however,

(19) Ibid., p. 67.

Laing does not consider the outcomes of living in this existential position that do not bring the person to the psychiatrist as a patient. He follows through, in some detail, the consequences of this schizoid strategy that result in a severe disruption in the individual's being and which lead, therefore, to psychosis. By first discussing ideas on the 'inner' self of the schizoid person and on the false -self system, and then by considering the possibilities that arise out of this existential position, Laing makes intelligible the development from schizoid sanity to schizophrenic 'madness'.

In this discussion of these ideas, which follows immediately, extensive references are made to the cases of David and Peter.

(iv.) The 'Inner' Self of the Schizoid Person:

Because of his basic ontological insecurity, the schizoid person feels himself to be more or less disembodied, and in this way hopes to sustain and protect a sense of identity in the face of threats to his autonomy represented by people and things. He identifies with his 'inner' private self. Cut off from relatedness with others, the 'inner' self endeavours to become its own object: relating directly only to itself. The schizoid person becomes increasingly preoccupied with a phantasy world which can neither be experienced by anyone else, nor communicated to them. In interpersonal relations he relates not to the other himself, but to his images, phantasies and memories of the person. This may not be evident to the other person, especially if his own view of himself has a high phantasy coefficient. -20-

In this phantasy world, anything is possible. In this sense the schizoid person sometimes feels omnipotent. But at the same time he is

(20) For a discussion of this idea see Chapter #2 p. .

haunted by a feeling of inner uselessness and emptiness. He is unable to distinguish between this phantasized feelings of omnipotence or worthlessness and his real value as a person living with others. Referring to the case of Peter (pp. 139 - 144) it will be recalled that in school he was a good student. He dressed well, spoke properly and was held up by his teacher as an example to the others. But in himself Peter was convinced that he was 'a nobody and worthless' and felt that he had simply fooled his classmates into believing he was otherwise. Indeed he joked of this disguise sardonically and told Laing "It just showed them what a good actor I was." But at the same time Peter had a feeling that he was somebody special, someone with a "mission and purpose sent by God to Earth". Laing notes that this empty omnipotence and sense of mission were frightening to Peter, and he set them aside as "a sort of mad feeling". He sense that if he gave into this feeling, there lay "madhouse and the whole thing there". -21-

Unable to be spontaneous or to act with any commitment toward any success or failure that might come through the deeds of his false-self, the schizoid person is, in reality, impotent. For to commit himself to anything real would be to suffer humiliation, not from failure, but simply from being subjected to the necessity and contingency of the real world. More and more, the schizoid person is 'at home' in the world of his imagination. He prefers the imaginary not only because of its quality - a richness and beauty lacking in the real world - but because of its nature. In making this point, Laing quotes from Sartre's Psychology of Imagination:

(21) Ibid., p. 133.

We must understand what a preference for the imaginary signifies. It is not at all a matter of preferring one sort of object to another. For instance we should not believe that schizophrenic and morbid dreamers in general try to substitute an unreal and more seductive and brighter content for the real content of their life, and that they seek to forget the unreal character of their images by reacting to them as if they were actual objects actually present. To prefer the imaginary is not only to prefer a richness, a beauty, an imaginary luxury to the existing mediocrity in spite of their unreal nature. It is also to adopt 'imaginary' feelings and actions for the sake of their imaginary nature...It is not only an escape from the content of the real...but from the form of the real itself, its character of presence, the sort of response it demands from us...-22-

But the 'inner' world of the schizoid self contains the seeds of its own destruction. The schizoid person tries to find an identity for himself in the isolation and uniqueness, the richness and omnipotence of his 'true' , 'inner' self. But this costs a price he can not afford to pay. The autistic, private, intra-individual, imaginary world is not a viable substitute for the shared, public, inter-individual, 'real' world - the world. Were the schizoid's project feasible, Laing argues, there would be no need for psychosis. In order to maintain a sense of his identity, the schizoid person must work constantly at keeping the real and the imaginary separate lest the full weight of reality implode in on and obliterate his 'inner' world. But ultimately this effort boomerangs and comes to be directed against the schizoid person himself. Cut off from real contact with people and things, the schizoid person comes to feel empty and alone. He contrasts his own emptiness, worthlessness and desolation with the abundance, warmth and companionship he imagines is everywhere elsewhere. Uncorrected by direct experience, the worth of 'outer' reality grows to fantastically idealized proportions.

(22) Jean-Paul Sartre, Psychology of Imagination, London, Rider, 1950, p. 165-166. Quoted in R.D. Laing, The Divided Self, Op. Cit., p. 84-85.

Self-worth is felt to decline proportionately. Feelings of intense impoverishment alternate with ones of immense richness. Laing writes:

These opposing feelings evoke a welter of conflicting emotions, from a desperate longing and yearning for what others have, to a frantic envy and hatred of all that is theirs and not his, or a desire to destroy all the goodness, freshness, richness in the world. These feelings may, in turn, be offset by counter-⁻²³⁻attitudes of disdain, contempt, disgust, or indifference.

If the feelings of envy 'win out', then the person may crave, more than anything else, participation in the real world. But aware of the potentially 'fatal' consequences of giving into this desire, the person may try to get at this 'richness' indirectly by stealing it. But this, too, is not without its hazards. Thoughts of acquiring wealth potentiate fears of being robbed - not simply of what he has, but of what he is. Peter was able to overcome his feelings of inner emptiness and be himself with others only if they knew nothing about him. Thus, he would wander about the country staying in one place for only a few weeks. As a 'stranger' he did not need to 'uncouple' his self from his body; he could be free and spontaneous. But as soon as he felt he was becoming 'known' or too familiar, his anxiety would return and he would move on to another strange town. If the schizoid person does enter into a relationship with some other person, he will want to be completely taken over and dominated by him. Laing writes that "there is no half-way stage between radical isolation and complete absorption in all there (is)."⁻²⁴⁻ Having to choose between these two equally untenable positions ultimately serves to perpetuate and potentiate the anxiety that the schizoid person's defence was designed to alleviate. Yet it may be that only through this

(23) R.D. Laing, The Divided Self, Op. Cit., p. 91.

(24) Ibid., p. 91.

anxiety that the schizoid person feels that he is able to participate in life. For this reason he would not be without it.

The schizoid person is acutely self conscious. As he is using the term, Laing means that the person has an enhanced and somewhat compulsive awareness of himself, both in his own eyes and as an object of someone else's observation. Frequently he feels tormented by this scrutiny of not only his body, but his 'inner' self. Such a person, for example, may feel he has to 'steal' by a theatre queue, or he may feel that people can see into his mind or soul. In fact the schizoid person is much less the object of others' attention than he feels himself to be.

Commonly, heightened self-consciousness is explained in terms of a person's feeling of embarrassment or guilt (at the fact that e.g. he masturbates). But as Laing points out such an explanation is inadequate since one can show guilt in ways other than being self conscious. Nor can this phenomenon be explained in terms of fear of self-criticism, since people who are usually extremely self-conscious will often lose their embarrassment when performing in front of an audience. In the case of the schizoid person, Laing argues that this compulsive preoccupation with himself must be understood in terms of his underlying ontological insecurity. Thus the schizoid's self-consciousness serves to compensate for temporal discontinuities in his self-awareness. Haunted by the unreality of his own 'inner' world, the schizoid person can not depend on his perception of his self as an object in this world. He therefore exaggerates his presence in the eye of the other, as well as for himself, in order to continually remind himself that he is real. Laing notes that this should not be mistaken for a form of narcissism. The schizoid 'inner' self hates the false 'outer' self to which he must draw attention. He does not

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"bask in the warmth of a loving self-regard" but, as one schizophrenic put it, "... is scorched under the glare of a black sun"⁻²⁶⁻ of her own self-scrutiny.

This is illustrated in the case of Peter. He was preoccupied with being seen. Ever since he could remember, he told Laing, he was aware of himself as 'sort of obvious'. Indeed, he felt guilty for occupying space in the world. Throughout his life, Peter never felt that he was loved or respected as a person. He was persecuted by a feeling that all love was disguised persecution since it tried to turn him into a thing of the other. With this compulsive awareness of his body, Laing writes:

...it seems that he was contending with a primary gap in the two-dimensional experience of himself of which his parents' handling, or rather failure to handle him, had deprived him. His compulsive preoccupation...with being touchable, smellable, etc., to others was a desperate attempt to retain that very dimension of a living body: that it has being-for-others.⁻²⁷⁻

It was not simply an accident that the only deep personal relationship Peter was able to develop was with someone who was not able to see him - the little blind girl Jean. Laing comments that this was one of the most significant things in his life and may well have prevented him from becoming openly schizophrenic in his teens. It is also significant that Peter only told Laing about Jean after many months of therapy, and then only in a casual way. It is quite characteristic of this type of person, Laing notes, that any deeply personal relationship is most concealed from others.

As an object for others in a world fraught with danger, a person

(25) Ibid., p. 113.

(26) Ibid., p. 131.

(27) Ibid., p. 131.

becomes an exposed target. In this sense the schizoid person's heightened self-consciousness can also be understood as his apprehensive awareness of himself as potentially exposed to danger simply because he is visible. As a defence, the person can make his 'self' invisible. But unseen by others because of this camouflage, the person may once again feel unable to believe in his own existence. If this feeling of reality becomes unbearable, he may be drawn to the company of others. But there he can never be himself. The more he keeps his 'inner' self in hiding, the greater his need becomes to prevent a false front, and the more compulsive this role playing becomes. He acts aggressively, dresses ostentatiously, speaks loudly and insistently. He is constantly drawing attention to himself, and away from his secret self. All his thoughts are occupied with being seen; his longing is to be known, but this is also what is most dreaded. If he should accidentally give himself away he is panic stricken. Only in isolation can he drop the equivocation and role playing - but not without a sense of emptiness and futility. If Peter did things that were worthwhile or an expression of self-affirmation, he told himself: 'this is a sham. You are really worthless'. But if he listened to this false counsel of consciousness and withdrew from the world, he became haunted by a sense of futility - he felt unreal and began to smell in his own nostrils. Ultimately, a deadness permeated his entire existence: even his existence for himself became unbearable.

Oscillation between feelings of omnipotence and impotence, wealth and worthlessness, and between hatred or scorn for others and envy of an open life, leave the schizoid person with a sense of guilt that puts the final seal of enclosure on the autistic world of the inner self. Like these ambivalent feelings, the person does not have an unambiguous sense of guilt. At one and the same time he feels guilty simply for existing

and guilty for not being himself. The former sense of guilt arises directly from his acute ontological insecurity: he feels that he has no right to even exist. The latter stems from his capitulation to this. Terrified of being himself, he splits his being and relates to the world behind a false self. Laing writes:

The schizoid person has two antithetical and opposed senses of guilt. One urges him to life, the other urges him to death. One is constructive, the other destructive... What one might call his authentic guilt is that he has capitulated to his unauthentic guilt and is making it the aim of life not to be himself.-27a-

Peter felt guilty for being in the world at all. This unauthentic guilt was not directed at anything he had thought or done. He felt he had no right to even occupy space and had a deep-seated conviction that the stuff he was made of was rotten. Laing notes that Peter's phantasies of anal intercourse and of children made of faeces were expressions of this. But he also felt guilty not at the thought that he had these phantasies, or from the fact that he masturbated, but that he did not have the courage to do with others what he imagined himself in phantasy to be doing with them. And when he had some success in trying to curb these phantasies, he felt guilty at repressing them. When Peter finally set out to do nothing and thereby to be nothing, the guilt he felt was endorsing by his own decision the feeling that he had no right to life and in denying himself access to the possibilities of this life.

The schizoid inner self is in a dilemma: it is trapped inside a body which has failed to provide the protection originally hoped for; it is compulsively preoccupied with the other's attention and at the same time longs to escape this potentially deadly vigil. For Peter this dilemma

(27a) Ibid., p. 130, 132.

had become desperate - although he had not lost his hold on sanity. Indeed Laing writes that with this man, as with David, "we have considered schizoid manifestations that have come perilously close to frank psychosis."⁻²⁸⁻ His pretense at death in order to preserve some sense of life had gone too far . Peter had "severed himself from his body by a "psychic tourniquet"⁻²⁹⁻ and both his unembodied self and his 'uncoupled' body had developed a form of "existential gangrene."⁻³⁰⁻ He told Laing:

I've been sort of dead in a way. I cut myself off from other people and become shut up in myself. And I can see that you become dead in a way when you do this. You have to live in the world with other people. If you don't something dies inside. It sounds silly. I don't really understand it, but something like that seems to happen. It's funny.⁻³¹⁻

(v) The false-self system of the schizoid person

For the schizoid person, relationships with other people and the world are mediated through his false-self system (or system of false selves). Laing writes that the false self is "one way of not being self... one way of living unauthentically."⁻³²⁻ Although a 'man without a mask' is rare, the false self of the schizoid person serves a radically different function from the mechanical or stereotyped behaviour exhibited, to a greater or lesser extent, by most sane people. Thus, while an outer persona is necessary in order for a person to get along in present-day society, this does not preclude spontaneous action or self-expression.

(28) Ibid., p. 137.

(29) Ibid., p. 133.

(30) Ibid., p. 133.

(31) Ibid., p. 133.

(32) Ibid., p. 94n.

For the schizoid person however, the actions of the false-self system are so against his grain that he will deny them as his own.

Laing characterizes the false-self system as:

compulsively compliant to the will of others. It is partially autonomous and out of control, it is felt as alien, the unrealness, meaninglessness, purposelessness which permeate its perceptions, thoughts, feelings and actions, and its overall deadness are not simply productions of secondary defences, but are direct consequences of the basic dynamic structure of the individual's being.⁻³³⁻

The development of the system of false selves is gradual and, as with the normal personality, may take years. Indeed a long time may elapse before it ultimately proves socially maladaptive or ineffective in alleviating the anxiety of ontological insecurity. The false-self system is 'false' only with respect to the schizoid person himself. For others, to whom the 'inner' self has never been revealed, the false-self is the person. As we have seen, both David and Peter were able to have relatively normal lives by developing various false persona. It was eighteen and twenty-five years respectively, before their schizoid mode of existence proved socially inadequate and they began to exhibit psychotic tendencies. In both cases, an explanation of this psychosis in terms of behaviour alone would be an account only of the false self of each man. Precisely because such an account would ignore the whole modus vivendi of the true, 'inner' self, it would not contribute to an existential understanding of their 'madness'.

Laing suggests that the schizoid character seems to have its initial structuralization early in infancy. At this nascent stage of development of the personality of the schizoid person, there is an insecurity in laying down the basic elements: self and non-self,

(33) Ibid., p. 96

phantasy and reality, temporal continuity, etc. But by rigorously complying with the will of its mother, the young child, lacking these essentials of self, can be someone without being himself. In the absence of a firm ontological base on which a certain degree of personal spontaneity can develop, the schizoid false self is rigid and totally obedient. Indeed Laing has come to regard parental accounts of unusually trouble-free children as ominous—especially when the parents see nothing amiss in this. Of course the child himself is unaware of anything abnormal in this basic split in his character — indeed he is probably relieved that he has found a 'safe' way to be himself. Thus David grew up taking it entirely for granted that his 'personality' was quite distinct from his 'self'. He thought it was so with everyone and had neither reason nor means to discover otherwise.

As the schizoid child grows, he behaves in strict accordance with its mother's (parents') will — not out of a positive desire to be good, but out of a fear of what might happen if he was to be himself. Inwardly the child maintains a rigorous distinction between who he is and what 'he' does. As the person develops his false-self system, compliance may become imitation of the other. But since the inner self has never been given behavioral expression, this mode of living may not be apparent to anyone else. Thus David's father was unaware of the extent to which his son had taken over his late wife's role. Far from regarding this as abnormal, he was proud of David's domestic talents. In order to carry on in a socially acceptable way and at the same time to not give oneself away, the schizoid person must often develop a number of false selves. The feminine-domestic role David practised at home would not do at school; for that setting he took on the part of a witty, precocious schoolboy. Laing notes that by the time he was fourteen David had developed a most

complex system of false selves.

The schizoid self needs the system of false selves but at the same time hates this for disguising the person he feels himself to be. As noted earlier it also feels an ambiguous sense of guilt toward this person. As the disguise based on compliance or imitation of an other person develops, the danger of this characterization becoming complete identification increases. With this possibility, the identity of the 'inner' self would be engulfed and thus the person comes to fear the false-self and the person on whom this persona is based. To give this feeling direct expression is felt to be fatal; but this can be done indirectly by turning the imitation into a parody. If this reaches the point of a caricature of the most hated aspects of the other it is sure to bring ridicule - not of the self, but of the person being portrayed. With David's fear that female persona were taking over his entire being, his impersonation of his mother became the characterization of a 'vicious queen'.

Throughout this long charade, the schizoid person is haunted by a sense of the futility of not being fulfilled or even actualized by the actions of the false self. Yet he prefers this to the "frank experience of frightened helplessness and bewilderment"⁻³⁴⁻ which would inevitably follow if he were to try to be himself. Ultimately the schizoid person may not be able to maintain his system of false selves in a socially acceptable manner. If this is the case, as his behaviour becomes increasingly composed of imitation and impersonation of others, as it tends to be more wooden and stereotyped, the false self becomes just a thing in the eyes of the 'inner' self. Thus David told Laing that he had to

(34) Ibid., p. 104.

modify his role as a witty, precocious schoolboy because 'It had a nasty tongue.' In addition to multiple personalities or false selves that develop over years of role-playing, transitory behaviour fragments tend to creep into the system of false selves. The facial expression, gesture, saying, etc., of some other person or persons begin to threaten the person's mastery of his outward behaviour. These tend to be compulsive and add to the overall bizarre appearance of the schizoid person. But the greatest danger to the 'inner', schizoid self is the threat of the 'inward' spread of the false-self system. The person may have to resort to increasingly desperate and socially unacceptable means to forestall this spread and thus alleviate the terror of incipient engulfment. These 'security operations' (to use H.S. Sullivan's phrase) take priority in the schizoid defence system. They may mark the transition from sanity to psychosis as all other more socially conventional behaviour becomes secondary to the overall aim of protecting the autonomy of the 'inner' self. Thus David found himself compulsively behaving like a woman. This was the specific complaint or problem for which he sought Laing's help. He could not understand why he was driven into playing this role which he hated and which he knew everyone laughed at. But this schizophrenic role, Laing writes, "was the only refuge he knew from being entirely engulfed by the woman who was inside him, and who always seemed to be coming out of him."

of him. "-35-

(vī). Psychotic Developments

In Laing's attempt to make the transition from sanity to psychosis intelligible, the point of transition is not always critical. In some

(35) Ibid., p. 73.

cases, the change from the sane, schizoid state to the psychotic, schizophrenic condition is so abrupt that there can be no doubt about the onset of the latter, or of the clinical diagnosis of schizophrenia. But often there are no sudden, qualitative changes, but a transition extending over years during which it may not be clear at all whether any critical point has been passed. Thus Laing discusses psychosis by considering the psychotic possibilities that arise out of the schizoid existential position that we have describe above.

The schizoid person may, out of daring or in a fit of desperation, suddenly drop his facade of adjustment and despite everything try and be himself. If he does escape from his "shut-upness"⁻³⁶⁻ and lets himself be known without equivocation, this is likely to appear as a sudden and inexplicable psychosis. His schizoid split may have never been apparent, especially if the false-self system has maintained a degree of consistency. But the 'inner' self has been living in its own time and space and this may bear little if any resemblance to the real, interpersonal, public world. When he emerges from his diguise, the person is likely to find himself in territory that is very alien.

On superficial examination, these cases of sudden psychosis are most baffling. The 'objective' history may not reveal, even in retrospect, any precipitating distresses or obvious indications that a dramatic and abrupt change was immanent. Only when one is able to gather from the individual himself the history of the false-self system, does this psychosis becomes explicable. This first-person history will not emerge from a detached, third-person account. Laing reports the case of a man in his

(36) Ibid., p. 125.

early fifties who had lived a normal family life for years. One day, while on a picnic with his wife and children at a busy public beach, he undressed fully and entered the water. Wading waist-deep, he began to throw water on himself and refused to come out saying he was baptizing himself for the sin of not loving his family. He refused to leave the water until he was 'cleansed' and eventually had to be dragged out by the police and admitted to a mental hospital. This incident marked the beginning of a manifest psychosis.

It is not uncommon for the depersonalized person, whether or not he is schizophrenic, to speak of having murdered his self. This is usually called a delusion. Laing writes that such a claim, although obviously false, "contains existential truth".⁻³⁷⁻ From the point of view of the individual himself, this statement is literally true. Indeed his 'symptoms' may be evidence of this. Peter was, by his own admission 'sort of dead'. His decaying self smelled so badly in his own nostrils that he could not bear it. From the clinical psychiatric point of view his 'phantom smell' would be evidence of an organically based schizophrenic deterioration. From the existential point of view this can be understood as the result of an attempt at self-suicide. His life had become a systematic attempt to destroy his own identity. As he grew older he increasingly avoided any activity whereby he could be defined as a person, and eventually he 'dropped out' entirely. He had come to feel that it was a mere pretense to be somebody and that his only honest course of action was to become nobody since that was all he could 'really' feel himself to be.

Schizoid or schizophrenic 'self-suicide' is, in Laing's words,

(37) Ibid., p. 149.

"the ultimate and most paradoxically absurd defence(s)" employed by the disembodied person. It is the limit to which his magic defences can attain. In his phantasized omnipotence such a person probably conceives of his 'self' as indestructable - virtually immortal. Indeed, given his self-body split, it would be a non-sequiter for him to actually slit his throat. But in one of its many forms, this strategy is "the basic defence...in every form of psychosis". Laing continues:

It can be stated in its most general form as: the denial of being as a means of preserving being. The schizophrenic feels he has killed his 'self', and this appears to be in order to avoid being killed. He is dead in order to remain alive.-38-

Although the schizoid person on the brink of psychosis may appear to be normal, he is maintaining this false self by increasingly desperate means. The inner self is trying to preserve an identity without any direct relation to people and things; without the latter, the former becomes impossible. There is a loss of "vital contact"⁻³⁹⁻ with the world as the person becomes wrapped up in a world of mental objects and in observing the false-self system. More and more a participant in phantom relationships and less and less in real ones, the inner self becomes filled with hatred and envy. Feelings of omnipotence are based on impotence, any freedom operates in a vacuum. He is anybody in phantasy, nobody in reality. The inner self itself becomes split and any remaining sense of identity is fragmented. As one psychotic patient told Laing of herself "She's an I looking for a me."

In order to sustain life, the inner self has feigned death. But the defence system has backfired the pretense has been carried too far. The false-self system has failed to alleviate the anxieties precipitated by contact with reality. The body has become a prison from which the

(38) Ibid., p. 150.

(39) Ibid., p. 138.

self can not escape - except by the most desperate means. The false-self system becomes increasingly autonomous and extensive and plagued with compulsive behaviour fragments. As it makes deeper and deeper inroads into the 'inner' self everything is felt to belong to the false-self system. The schizophrenic has rejected all that he appears to others to be. But in so doing he has rejected himself. His true self becomes a vanishing point. The schizophrenic disavows not only 'his' actions and words, but his thoughts, memories and phantasies. The false-self system is seen as "enemy-occupied territory"⁻⁴⁰⁻ and becomes a breeding ground for paranoid fears. Unable to give expression to his 'true' self for fear of the consequences, his behaviour is bizarre and in many cases, socially unacceptable. He is able to sustain a feeling of reality only with the greatest effort. Eventually all perception and action lose their meaning and the person may be able to feel alive only by subjecting himself to extreme pain and terror. But even this may prove futile: as one psychotic said: "everything I touch, everything I meet, becomes unreal as soon as I approach". In the last resort, Laing notes, it is perhaps never true to say that the self has been utterly lost or destroyed. The 'I' that remains has not ceased to exist, but it is totally without substance, sense of realness or identity. Without this last shred of self, an 'I' therapy of any kind would be impossible. If, to quote W.B. Yeats, "Things fall apart, the centre can not hold..." and neither self-experience nor bodily experience can retain identity, integrity, cohesiveness, or vitality, the person becomes precipitated into a condition, the end result of which

(40) Ibid., p. 168.

Laing describes as a state of "chaotic non-entity"⁻⁴¹⁻. This has no verbal equivalents. In its final form, Laing writes, "such complete disintegration is a hypothetical state...(which) is perhaps not compatible with life."⁻⁴²⁻

(vi) Conclusion: The Issue of Intelligibility in the Cases of David and Peter

As has been illustrated in the cases of both David and Peter, the schizoid person does not experience himself as a unitary, whole person, but as split into a deanimate body and disembodied mind. Only in terms of this schizoid split can his behaviour and experience be made intelligible. This existential split is not caused by the person's interpersonal relations - although its effects and is affected by these - but by his underlying ontological insecurity. We saw that this split was utilized as a strategy for dealing with the anxiety occasioned by this insecurity. For this reason, the basic Issue of Intelligibility in the cases of David and Peter is primary ontological insecurity.

David grew up taking entirely for granted the split between his 'self' and his 'personality' and made it the aim of his life to keep this as complete as possible. To achieve this, he perfected certain roles and for about sixteen years he was able to live an 'outwardly' relatively normal life at home and in school. Peter, on the other hand, always felt that he had no right even to occupy space. Throughout his life he deliberately put on a front in order to fool others into thinking he was worthwhile. But he was never able to fool himself. Outwardly, David's various persona and Peter's techniques of 'disconnection' and 'uncoupling' were effective in that they were able to get along with others despite their

(41) Ibid., p. 162.

(42) Ibid., p. 163.

basic insecurity and lack of a sense of identity. For a time at least, their strategies served to alleviate the anxiety. But gradually both men had to resort to increasingly abnormal and anti-social behaviour to achieve a minimal state of well-being. David's witty-schoolboy role gave way to a fantastic theatrical guise and mannerisms, and it was this that led his tutor to refer him for psychiatric help. Peter left job after job, able to sustain a facade of adjustment for increasingly shorter periods, until finally he turned to drifting around the country knowing and being known by no one. But even this pretense became too difficult, and in his eyes, too dangerous, to sustain. He 'dropped out' entirely with the aim of becoming nobody. With both these men, it is as if their outer persona was a drug to which each became addicted and without which they could not live. Both built up a pharmacological tolerance to this 'false' reality and required greater and greater doses to effect a tolerable level of anxiety. But neither man could control his habit. David felt that he was being taken over by the female parts of his life-repertoire and pleaded with Laing to help him from being entirely engulfed by "the woman who was inside him and always seemed to be coming out of him." With Peter, who came to Laing complaining of the putrid odour of his 'dead' self, the dose of his false self had, in an existential sense, become lethal.

With these intra-personal identity considerations, the description of the schizoid strategy for dealing with the anxiety of ontological insecurity, and the specification of this as the seventh and final Issue of Intelligibility, we can proceed to the conclusion of this paper: the final step in the solution to the Question of Intelligibility.

CHAPTER #6: Conclusion: Final Step in the Solution to the Question of Intelligibility

To conclude this paper on Laing's writings on the existential intelligibility of madness it remains to take the final step in the solution to the Question of Intelligibility:

To what extent do the writings of R.D. Laing make madness intelligible in existential terms?

This step involves a comparison of Laing's ideas on the role of interpersonal relations in personal identity formation with his ideas on the understanding of madness. In terms of what has been developed in this paper, this is effected by a comparison of the Minimal Personal-Identity Requirements with the Issues of Intelligibility.

In chapter #3 we saw that the Minimal Personal-Identity requirements are the conditions that must be fulfilled in any interpersonal relationship if the persons therein are to develop and maintain a secure sense of identity. These requirements follow from the chapters on Laing's theory of interpersonal relations and on personal identity formation in the nexus. Here we discussed the phenomenological intelligibility of interpersonal behaviour and assessed the importance of a person's relations with others in his identity development. The Issues of Intelligibility emerged from our discussion of four case studies of madness. We saw that these issues were the ideas in terms of which the behaviour and experience of the 'mad' person became socially intelligible given the way this person experienced and related to other persons and things in his social nexus. The aim, in each case, was to assess the existential intelligibility of the clinical symptoms of the person's disease. The first two cases those of Brian and Maya Abbott, focused on interpersonal issues by examining his/her interpersonal relations in the context of his/her family nexus. In the

discussion of the cases of David and Peter the stress was on the intra-personal; the schizoid organization of each man's being was seen as a strategy for dealing with the anxiety of his primary ontological insecurity.

By way of reiteration of the Minimal Personal-Identity Requirements (Chapter #3), we stated that in order for a person to establish and maintain a secure sense of identity, he must, in his interpersonal relations, have a genuine complementary other who confirms him as the person he feels himself to be. That is, his actions, assertions, and experience must receive validation and affirmation as being worthwhile, useful, self-creative, good, etc. He must be granted a certain amount of significance and, through this positive validation, affirmation, confirmation and signification, be put into a tenable position in his social nexus. If some or all of these identity requirements are not met for any person, then he will not be able to develop or maintain a secure sense of his own identity. In presenting the seventh Minimal Personal-Identity Requirement, we argued that the development of person identity presupposed the ability to develop a sense of identity or the capacity to have a sense of oneself as a person. This requirement is basic to the other six; without it an individual can not become a person.

Given these Minimal Personal-Identity Requirements, a set of the types of interpersonal actions that tend to be destructive of personal identity can be compiled. This includes: (1) persistent disconfirmation of self as the person self feels himself to be, (2) persistent negation of self's actions, assertions and experience, (3) persistent invalidation of self's actions, assertions and experience, (4) self is granted little or no significance in his social nexus, and (5) self is put into a false or untenable existential position in his social nexus. To these can be added a sixth, more general, consideration: the necessity of self to

have another person to complement his identity in a genuine way. Thus, the next element of this set is (6) lack of genuine complementarity. These six factors were discussed in the chapter on interpersonal identity considerations (Chapter #4). A seventh type of interpersonal action implied in this chapter, can be added here. This is (7) persistent action of other that tends to mystify or confuse self. This arose, in the discussion of false existential position, with Laing's criticism of H.F. Searles paper on the ways of driving the other person crazy. In discussing Searle's conclusions, Laing writes:

What is more specific (to self's identity destruction) is interpersonal action which tends to confuse or mystify. This makes it difficult for a person to know 'who' he is, 'who' the other is, and what is the situation that are 'in'. He does not know 'where he is' any more.-1-

It follows from the above considerations that if an individual is persistently exposed to some or all of these interpersonal actions, or if his interpersonal relations are characterized thereby, he will be unable to develop or maintain a secure sense of identity. This presupposes that this individual does not lose the fundamental ability to have a sense of identity - for to do so is to cease to be a person. Thus we may say that for any individual, insofar as he can be considered to be a person, if some or all of #(1) to #(7) above characterize his interpersonal relations, then his life becomes devoted to the development and maintenance of a sense of identity.

In presentation of the four case studies of madness, we demonstrated that the behaviour and experience of each person could be made intelligible in terms of his/her inter- and intra-personal relationships. In the case of Brian, we showed that his sudden drunkenness and attacks on his wife could be understood in terms of the lack of another significant person

(1) R.D. Laing, Self and Others, Op. Cit., p. 140.

to complement his identity in a genuine way. The clinical symptoms of Maya Abbott's schizophrenia became socially intelligible in terms of the depersonalization, negation, invalidation and mystification to which she was subjected, both at home and in the hospital, and the resulting untenable position into which she was placed in both these situations as a result of her interpersonal relationships. Both David's unusual appearance and mannerisms and Peter's anti-social behaviour and phantom smell became existentially intelligible in terms of the failure of their schizoid self-persona split as a strategy of dealing with the anxiety of primary ontological insecurity. Although these case studies comprise only a fraction of Laing's therapeutic work, we feel justified, given the theoretical nature of his books, in generalizing from the results of these studies. Thus, from this discussion of madness, we conclude that the behaviour and experience of a 'mad' person, viewed as a person, can be made existentially or socially intelligible in terms of some or all of these seven Issues of Intelligibility.

For the final step in the solution to the Question of Intelligibility, it but remains to compare the ideas which emerged from our discussion of the cases of madness with the ideas emerging out of our discussion of Laing's ideas on how identity is effected by interpersonal relations. This is facilitated by a comparison of the seven Issues of Intelligibility of madness with the set of interpersonal actions or interpersonal relations which tend to be destructive of personal-identity development.

<u>Interpersonal Actions/Relations destructive of personal identity</u>	<u>Issues of Intelligibility of madness</u>
(1) self lacks a (genuine) complementary other	(1) lack of a genuine complementary other
(2) persistent disconfirmation of self as self	(2) depersonalization
(3) persistent negation of self	(3) negation
(4) persistent invalidation of self	(4) invalidation
(5) persistent mystification of self	(5) mystification
(6) self placed in a false or untenable existential position	(6) being placed in a false or untenable existential position
(7) self granted little or no personal significance	(7) Primary ontological insecurity
(1) - (7) being destructive of personal identity presuppose:	
(8) self's capacity or ability to develop a sense of identity	

It can readily be seen that the first six issues of intelligibility are identical to the first six types of interpersonal action/relations that tend to be destructive of personal identity development. Since these Issues of Intelligibility can be expressed in terms of these general personal identity considerations we may advance the preliminary conclusion: the behaviour and experience of a 'mad' person, insofar as he can be considered to be a person, can be made intelligible as the attempt of any

person to establish or maintain a secure sense of personal identity.

To complete the comparison between the general personal identity considerations and the Issues of Intelligibility of madness, we must consider the clause "insofar as (the 'mad' person) can be considered to be a person" contained in our preliminary conclusion. That is, we must answer the question 'To what extent can the mad person be considered to be a person?' In the discussion of personal identity, we noted that the ability of the other to destroy or sabotage self's sense of identity (by any of the interpersonal actions/relations listed above) presupposed self's ability or capacity to develop a sense of identity. To the extent to which an individual retains this ability, he never ceases to be a person. To what extent, then, does the 'mad' person retain the capacity to develop a sense of identity? To what extent can his sense of self be sabotaged or destroyed? To answer these questions we need only consider the seventh Issue of Intelligibility: the 'mad' person's primary ontological insecurity.

In our discussion of The Divided Self, we saw that the schizoid person was not able to relate to others as a unitary, whole person, but developed an existential split between his 'inner' self and his 'outer' body. This split was a strategy of self-survival designed to alleviate the anxiety of his primary ontological insecurity. It was a means of defence against the possibilities of implosion, engulfment, or petrification which his interpersonal relations represented to him. To the extent that this schizoid strategy is employed, despite its bizarre manifestations or in many cases, its ultimate contradiction, the schizoid individual retains the capacity to have a sense of identity. Indeed, it is precisely the haunting anxiety which characterizes his ontological insecurity that is his sense of self. Insofar as the anxiety remains, or is overcome by this strategy, the 'mad' person never loses the capacity to experience

himself as a person or the ability to have a sense of identity. His sense of self, unlike that of most people who are secure in their sense of identity, can never be taken for granted. His whole life, conducted in the absence of this basic self-assurance, is a project of self-preservation.

With this final argument, we are able to express all of the Issues of Intelligibility of madness in terms of the personal-identity considerations developed from a general examination of Interpersonal relations. Thus the Question of Intelligibility: 'To what extent do the writings of R.D. Laing make madness intelligible in existential terms?' can be finally answered in the following conclusion:

R.D. Laing's writings demonstrate that the behaviour and experience of the 'mad' person can be made intelligible as the attempts of any person, insecure in his sense of self, to establish and maintain a secure sense of personal identity.

This conclusion suggests ideas on the responsibility that the 'mad' person has for his behaviour as well as on his sense of responsibility to himself. These ideas are discussed briefly in the epilogue to this paper.

EPILOGUE: Discussion of Ideas Implied by an Existential Understanding of Madness

From the notion that madness is intelligible in existential terms, it follows that the 'mad' person is, in one sense of the word, responsible for his actions and that he feels a sense of responsibility to himself. A full discussion of these ideas on madness and responsibility would require a second major paper. At this point, however, they will be merely introduced as corollaries to Laing's ideas on man and madness.

Throughout this paper we have stressed the parallel between the sane and the 'mad' person. This parallel can be applied in drawing the implication from the idea of the existential intelligibility of madness to the idea of the 'mad' person's responsibility. In considering the sane person, one is able to judge if he is acting responsibly by evaluating his behaviour in respect to his duties and obligations as a husband, parent, christian, employee, friend, neighbour, etc., as may be the case. A person's responsibility can be assessed in terms of the intelligibility of his behaviour given his social, cultural and existential milieu. The degree of responsibility that the 'mad' person bears for his actions can, likewise, be assessed by determining the intelligibility of these actions given his existential and social setting. However in his case this milieu is radically different from the prevailing norm. To bring out this difference a phenomenological investigation of the mad person's life is required. In this paper, by an examination of Laing's ideas on the phenomenology of interpersonal relationships, we have elucidated this structure of madness. In so doing the behaviour of the 'mad' person has been made intelligible in existential terms.

From the perspective of the sane person, the 'world' of the 'mad' person appears very narrow. His actions seem to be overly self-centered or to be directed at solving problems which do not exist 'in reality'. In many cases, the behaviour of the 'mad' person is condemned as socially unacceptable or bizarre. From an objective viewpoint this idea of madness is correct. But this ignores the perspective that contributes most to an existential understanding of madness: the perspective of the 'mad' person himself. In arguing for the existential intelligibility of madness we demonstrated that madness could be understood as an attempt at a solution to a crisis in personal identity. We saw that the 'mad' person is one for whom self-preservation is a project which permeates his whole life. His relations with other people represent a potentially deadly but necessary evil. Thus his interpersonal and intrapersonal action can be understood as attempts at establishing or preserving a sense of identity.

With this existential understanding of madness the behaviour of the 'mad' person can be seen not as compulsive or as being out of his control - the immutable effect of some organic pathology. Rather, his actions are purposeful and deliberate attempts to establish and maintain a secure sense of himself. In this limited sense of the word, the 'mad' person is responsible for his behaviour. His choice of action is often restricted by his concern for self-preservation. His personal freedom may therefore be drastically curtailed. Yet insofar as his actions can be understood in term of his basic insecurity and his attempts to deal with this, the 'mad' person can be said to be acting responsibly.

From the idea that the 'mad' person is, in one sense of the word, acting responsibly it follows that he feels a certain sense of responsibility to himself. Every human being, qua human,

feels this sense of self-responsibility. With most people this is inimically tied up with a sense of responsibility felt toward others. With the 'mad' person, however, the sense of social responsibility is low or totally absent. Indeed other people represent a threat to him. This lack of a sense of responsibility to others is offset by an exaggerated sense of responsibility to himself. The 'mad' person is continually unsure of his sense of self; but as a person he retains a sense of responsibility to himself. This remains as a stable foundation of an unstable existential superstructure.

Laing does not explain the behaviour of the 'mad' person as being out of his control - the result of some brain or neural pathology. He understands this behaviour as a human response to a world experienced as threatening. As we have seen, the response of the 'mad' person may serve only to potentiate his terror. Yet he continues to respond; he insists on responding. So long as his behaviour can be understood as a deliberate attempt to maintain or preserve a sense of identity, the 'mad' person can be said to feel a sense of responsibility to himself, and, in this sense of the word, to be acting responsibly. In a passage from The Politics of Experience, Laing alludes to this connection between intelligibility and responsibility. He writes:

How much human behaviour, whether the interaction between persons themselves or between groups and groups, is intelligible in terms of human experience?
 Either our inter-human behaviour is unintelligible in that we are simply passive vehicles of inhuman processes whose ends are as obscure as they are at present outside our control, or our behaviour toward each other is a function of our experience and our intentions. In the latter case we must take final responsibility for what we make of what we are made of.⁻¹⁻

(1) R.D. Laing, The Politics of Experience, Op. Cit., p. 24.

The response of the 'mad' person, this indication of his sense of responsibility to himself, is only human. It is essentially human. Laing's existential understanding of madness points to a basic human characteristic. But insofar as madness becomes intelligible because the 'mad' person is considered to be a dis-eased person, and not a diseased organism, this existential understanding of madness is possible only in light of the essential meaningfulness of man's being-in-the-world-with others. In this paper, a dialectical relationship has been explored. This is the relation between the meaningfulness of human interrelations, an existential understanding of madness structured in terms of this interrelation, and the essential human characteristic of a person's responsibility, implied by this understanding. A clinical-medical explanation of madness does not suggest these, essentially human, considerations.

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Appendix # 1

R.D. Laing: A Biographical Sketch. ⁻¹⁻

Ronald David Laing was born in Glasgow, Scotland on October 7, 1927, the only child of working class parents. He attended a state-supported grammar school in Glasgow. In 1951 he graduated with a Doctor of Medicine from the University of Glasgow where he specialized in psychiatry.

Between 1951 and 1953 Laing served as a conscript psychiatrist in the British Army. He then worked at the Glasgow Royal Mental Hospital and taught at the Department of Psychological Medicine of the University of Glasgow. In 1956 Laing went to London where he received psychoanalytic training and continued his research at the Freudian-oriented Tavistock Institute of Human Relations. From 1962 until 1965 Laing served as director of the Langham Clinic - a Jungian Psychiatric Centre. Here he began to experiment with the effects (on himself and his patients) of certain consciousness-expanding drugs such as mescaline and lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD-25). During this period he was also doing research into families and schizophrenia as a fellow of the Tavistock Institute. In 1965 he founded the Philadelphia Association and, with the help of others, set up Kingsly Hall - a therapeutic community where doctors and patients lived together without hierarchal distinction. This broke up after five years, but offshoots from it ('Gateway' and 'The Network') still⁻²⁻ exist in and around London. Laing spent most of 1971 and early 1972 meditating under Buddhist and Hindu spiritual masters in Sri Lanka, India and Japan.

Laing and his second wife, Jutta, live with their two children in London.

(1) Compiled from Current Biography, Charles Moritz, ed., New York, H.W. Wilson Co., 1973. For a first-person account of his early life see R.D. Laing, The Facts of Life, Op. Cit., especially the prologue.

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Appendix #3 - Abstract

The writings of the Scottish psychiatrist R.D. Laing have contributed much to the existential psychiatric tradition of trying to understand madness in human terms. This tradition stands opposed to the clinical-medical school of psychiatry which explains madness in terms of physiological pathology. Laing contends that madness, far from being a mental disease is human dis-ease and, as such, is one mode of human being-in-the-world.

Implicit in Laing's position and basic to this is the presupposition that the mad person can be understood, first and foremost, as a person. This paper is an attempt to make explicit, and therefore to justify Laing's presupposition of the mad person's essential humanness. Through a discussion of Laing's writings on the intelligibility of human behaviour in general, we develop ideas in terms of which the behaviour of the mad person becomes intelligible. We argue that to the extent to which the mad person can be understood in terms of ideas applicable to all persons, Laing's fundamental presupposition of the mad person's essential humanness is justified.

The question to which this paper is addressed is: 'To what extent do the writings of R.D. Laing make madness intelligible in existential terms?'. This is referred to as 'The Question of Intelligibility'.

This paper is divided into two main parts. The first deals with Laing's ideas on interpersonal relationships and develops an assessment of the effects of a person's relations with others on his sense of personal identity. In the second part we discuss Laing's ideas on madness, focusing on the mad person's interpersonal relations and his sense of self. Ideas developed in the first part are applied toward making madness intelligible in existential terms. Ultimately we show that madness can be understood

as a crisis of personal identity and as the attempts of a person to deal with this crisis.

Laing's study of persons and the relations between persons - both mad and sane - is phenomenological. This is to say that he sees the key to understanding interpersonal action as lying in an understanding of interpersonal experience. For Laing, experience and not behaviour is primary. He argues that in order to understand why a man behaves in a certain way in a certain situation, one must know his experience in that situation - including his experience of himself, of others with him and of things around him. This phenomenological perspective is especially important in the study of madness. For if the behaviour of the mad person, however inappropriate, bizarre or socially unacceptable this may be, is to be made intelligible, his 'world of experience' must first be described and understood.

The kind and nature of a person's relations with others has a continued effect on his sense of identity. We can know who a person is only by understanding his behaviour with and his experience of others around him. These others contribute to and enhance or detract from and destroy the person's sense of himself, as may be the case. By restricting our discussion to those types of interpersonal actions which are detrimental to or destructive of a person's sense of self, we develop a set of seven 'Minimal Personal-Identity Requirements': the conditions that must transpire in any interpersonal relationship if each person therein is to develop and maintain a secure sense of identity.

These personal identity considerations provide the bridge between the discussion of interpersonal relations and a consideration of the existential intelligibility of madness. We begin the second part of this paper with a discussion of the cases of four persons. Each person is

regarded by his family and his psychiatrist as psychotic or to be suffering from schizophrenia. Can he, we ask in each case, be understood in other than clinical-medical categories? We attempt to understand each person's behaviour and experience in social terms by presenting a phenomenological account of his interpersonal relations in his social nexus. From this account we develop ideas in terms of which the person's madness becomes socially intelligible. These ideas are called the 'Issues of Intelligibility'. Although different for each case study, these seven issues point to some factor (or factors) in the person's interpersonal life which serve(s) as an obstacle to his developing a secure sense of identity.

To fully understand a person's failure to develop a secure sense of himself, we must go beyond his interpersonal life and explore his intra-individual existence - his relationship with himself. To the person lacking a sense of identity, no aspect of his life is free from the terrible anxiety of the potential loss of self. This feeling is especially acute in his relationship with others. In attempting to minimize this anxiety, indeed as a means of 'getting through' life, the "ontologically insecure" person - as Laing refers to him - splits his own being into what he regards as a true, inner, private self and a false, outer, public body. He identifies only with the 'inner' self; his body serves as a mediator between this the 'outside' world. This split is used as a strategy by which the ontologically insecure person can be himself without exposing his 'self' to the risk of being annihilated or taken over by others. For some ontologically insecure people this strategy works and they are able to live behind their socially viable 'outer' persona. But with others, those with which Laing is chiefly concerned, the relief from their anxiety effected by this self - body split is only temporary. The person comes less and less able to sustain a sense of his 'inner', secret identity and is driven to seek the company of others simply to feel real

or alive. Yet at the same time the anxiety of identity loss remains and this socializing potentiates the threat of self-annihilation. As his existence alternates between these equally untenable extremes, the person adopts increasingly desperate means of retaining some sense of self. At some point this crisis manifests itself as psychosis.

With a phenomenological account of both the inter- and intra-personal world of madness, we arrive at the final stage in the solution to the 'Question of Intelligibility'. To assess the extent to which madness can be made intelligible in existential terms, a comparison is made between ideas developed on our general consideration of personal identity and the issues with which the four case studies of madness became socially intelligible. That is, the 'Minimal Personal-Identity Requirements' are compared to the 'Issues of Intelligibility'. This comparison shows that the latter can be expressed in terms of the former. It but remains to argue that insofar as the world of the mad person can be characterized by the anxiety of ontological insecurity, then he never completely loses the capacity to have a sense of himself - and, as such, always remains a person.

With this, we conclude by saying that with Laing's writings, madness is made intelligible as the response that any person, extremely insecure in his sense of self, would make in order to establish or maintain a secure sense of identity. His writings do make madness intelligible in existential terms.

As a corollary following from the demonstration of the existential intelligibility of madness, we argue that the mad person acts out of a sense of responsibility to himself and, in one sense of the word, is 'responsible' for his actions. This is to say that his behaviour is a function of his experience and represents a deliberate attempt to find a solution to his crisis of identity.