

# a critique of R.D. LAING'S SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY part 1

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## Introduction

No-one is an expert on the question as to what madness is, nor on its significance. This is a baffling yet fundamental field not just in theory but in relation to our very lives. Men like R D Laing have attacked the inhumanity of the conventional "illness-entity" models of schizophrenia, which are based on an unspecified variant of the identity-theory of the person (there is, of course, all the difference in the world between "of mind" and "of the person"). This has in practice led to the idea of supplanting the normal 'mental' hospital kind of treatment for disturbed people, with the quite different prospect of trying to meet such people as fellow human beings and so confront their actual life-situation. Such an idea does not commit one to not forcibly restraining a man who is dangerously going to run amok. I mention this latter point just to prevent an unreal objection.

That Laing has been an incredibly valuable and important influence, none can reasonably deny. However, there is a prominent strain of absolutization of the importance of certain experiences, especially of a way-out kind, which militates against Laing's social views being acceptable as a progressive force. The point, as always of course, is not to chuck the baby out with the bath-water. I hope to avoid this in what follows which is an attempt (1) to give a brief résumé of Laing's familial theory of schizophrenia, (2) to connect this with the manner in which the family should be seen as a microcosm of society, and (3) to show that Laing's romanticization of madness is essentially a reactionary stance. Specifically, in relation to the last part, whilst labelling and stigmatism play a large and mystifying part in the plight of a schizophrenic, I do not regard madness as being merely a label. I would also object, for many cases, to the tendency to always isolate a victim inside the family of a schizophrenic. This attitude can notoriously lead to witch-hunting for "schizogenetic mothers" etc... This may sometimes be understandable but often it is heartless and counter-productive.

In a second part, I would like to examine Laing's methodology, especially in relation to Sartre. I would have to use more books than have been relied upon here, but those which have been used for the purposes of this article are, I think, sufficient.

The title is almost certainly too ambitious. We really need a project here, e.g. on the whole history of the concept of alienation from Hegel to (at least) Sartre.

## MADNESS AND SOCIETY

Attempted here is an exposition and criticism of the social theory which Dr R D Laing has constructed from his research in schizophrenia. (1) Naturally we begin with a short account of his theory of schizophrenia (2). First a definition: by 'invalidation' we

- 1 We hope it emerges from this article why it is dangerous to talk of experts in this field.
- 2 Main books used are: *The Self and Others* and *The Politics of Experience* by R D Laing; and *Sanity, Madness and the Family* by R D Laing and A Esterson.

mean a systematic denial of the other person's reality or way of experiencing the world leading on quite inevitably in most cases to the destruction or near destruction of his autonomy. This concept is crucial in the theory of schizophrenia for which Laing, Cooper, Bateson and others are so noted. To this theory we now proceed (3).

Let us refer to the person who is going to be labelled schizophrenic as the victim. Inside his family the victim is subject to a systematic, if not conscious, attempt to completely destroy his autonomy. Let us delay seeking the reasons for this, but for the moment simply follow the process by way of example. A typical sort of case is that in which injunctions, covert or otherwise, are laid on the victims not to go out and lead a normal social life. If a girl, awful warnings will be given of the complete wickedness of the outside world with veiled suggestions that she should not open up her parents to the terrible consequences for them if she acts against their injunctions. Suppose such a girl capitulates, stays in, but quite naturally is upset and hostile to her parents, perhaps staying upstairs all the time. A typical response on the part of the parents would be to say that she should not be so anti-social. She should have more friends etcetera - of course if she tries to act on this, contradictory pressures are brought to bear; that is, the first injunction is repeated. If possible, she is not allowed to comment on this. If she tries to she is met with blank denial but often by the application of the appropriate tone of voice or statement, she is given to understand that it would be disastrous for her parents if she really held to the correct view as to what is going on. Thus she is placed in a position where she can literally do nothing. The process we have been describing is an instance of the famous 'double-bind'. When repeated in any sort of context where the victim might achieve some kind of autonomy, the effect is crippling. Anyone who is subject to this from the formative years onwards will quite naturally find it extraordinarily difficult to know what to do in even the most ordinary surroundings.

To get the full flavour of the double-bind, the sense of helplessness it is bound to induce, the following examples from *The Self and Others* are both typical and vivid:

"A mother visits her son who has just been recovering from a mental breakdown. As he goes towards her

- (a) she opens her arms for him to embrace her, and/or
- (b) to embrace him.
- (c) As he gets nearer she freezes and stiffens.
- (d) He stops irresolutely.
- (e) She says, 'Don't you want to kiss your mummy?' - and as he still stands irresolutely
- (f) she says, 'But dear, you mustn't be afraid of your feelings.'" (4)

- 3 We cannot even give anything like a full account of this theory.

- 4 *The Self and Others*, R D Laing, Penguin edition, 1969, p146.

"Father: But he wasn't always like that, you know. He's always been a good boy.

Mother: That's his illness, isn't it, Doctor? He was never ungrateful. He was always most polite and well brought up. We've done our best for him.

Patient: No, I've always been selfish and ungrateful. I've no self-respect.

Father: But you have.

Patient: I could have if you respected me. No one respects me. Everyone laughs at me. I'm the joke of the whole world. I'm the joker all right.

Father: But, son, I respect you, because I respect a man who respects himself." (5)

What is noticeable about much of the bizarre exchanges which go on inside these families is how familiar sounding they are. The difference between the 'average' family and these very disturbed ones is, it seems, one of degree. Techniques like the double-bind are applied in countless different kinds of contexts. Inside the type of families which Laing etc. study they become the standard method of 'communication'. Before moving on to a more or less formal definition of the double-bind, let us give an example from *Sanity, Madness and the Family* of just how everyday the sort of invalidation we have been describing is.

*"Clair's view was that she had had affection for her parents as a child but had lost it for them very early because she said they did not have any real affection for her, and did not really want her to have any, though they wanted to pretend that they were an affectionate family. Until the present investigation started, mother, father and daughter had never discussed such 'accusations' together. Her parents both dismissed such statements as her 'illness'. Besides, as her mother said, 'We've never been a chatty family.'" (p.64)*

The use of pat formulas to deny and to minimize a situation involving great distress to another person is scarcely limited to contexts such as the above. It constitutes, in fact, one of the most widely spread methods for keeping another person's reality at a distance.

Now we shall give the definition of the double-bind. It will be easier to understand having given examples. The form ation here is from S H Weakland in his paper 'The double-bind: hypothesis of schizophrenia and three-party interaction'.

"The general characteristics of this (double-bind) situation are the following:

- 1 When the individual is involved in an intense relationship; that is, a relationship in which he feels it is vitally important that he discriminate accurately what sort of message is being communicated so that he may respond appropriately.
- 2 And, the individual is caught in a situation in which the other person in the relationship is expressing two orders of message and one of these denies the other.
- 3 And, the individual is unable to comment on the messages being expressed to correct his discrimination of what order of message to respond to, i.e. he cannot make a metacommunication statement."

Laing, Bateson and Cooper show how, armed with the concepts we have described, sense can be made of the chaotic behaviour of the schizophrenic. In general

the inability to achieve a stable sense of identity with all the bizarre things that go with this, is readily understandable on the double-bind hypothesis (6). We have no space to go into the detailed examination of particular cases. Here the reader must be referred to the works of those writers where their attempt is carried out brilliantly. It is perfectly natural that the parents (and sometimes other members of the family too) should invalidate the victims. Inside these families the victims time and time again have projected onto them the frustrations and guilt feelings of the other. Laing and Bateson bring this all out very well. But we also find invalidations of the victim in the wider social arena, and markedly from the supposed experts in this field. At one extreme mad behaviour is made to seem personally unintelligible (i.e. not an expression of the person's life-situation) by simply being seen as the result of a brain disease. That is, the reality of the person vanishes away. The vampirism of the family re-appears in a clinical ambience.

Things do not have to go that far on the theoretical plane, but does this matter so much when in general there is a stubborn refusal to see schizophrenia, in Harry Stack Sullivan's phrase, "as a human process"? In general, schizophrenia is regarded as something which we either 'get someone out of' by electric shock treatment, drugs, etc, or keep someone at cabbage level for the rest of their lives. The idea that schizophrenia represents a total familial situation is still, judging by practice, looked at askance. One simple but vital example can be given here. It is clear that in many cases, the schizophrenic has to, for at least some time, be at a physical distance from his family unless he is to be snuffed out altogether. The conventional approach however, is to keep family unity up at all costs. It is widely held that to disrupt family relationships is to imperil the welfare of the disturbed person. But often we are confronted with the bald alternative: either sterility or, at much personal risk certainly, a chance to be independent. Of course, there are strong ideological reasons for the attitude we are discussing here and we shall go into these later on.

The infringement of another's liberty rising out of a resolute refusal to see his reality (of life situation) constitutes violence, as Cooper, following Sartre, maintains. We can express what is happening in terms of the distinction between praxis and process. Certain events are the result of human intentions; others have no human agent(s). The first type of event is the outcome of what we shall call praxis; the second is the outcome of process. It is clear that schizophrenia is conventionally regarded as a process, much like breaking one's leg or some other kind of accident or disease. The 'illness' model of schizophrenia illustrates this very well. It is better not to be ill; therefore at all costs, we must destroy these schizophrenic symptoms. This might be all right, except that it is to all intents and purposes, taken as an end in itself. Perhaps, however, these 'symptoms' might not be so malignant. They may represent a key to understanding a life-situation from which a person must and can only be saved by changing it. To simply remove the 'symptoms' and think one has 'cured' the person is a tragic mistake. The person has become an object to which things happen (process); the praxis at work, i.e. his reality, is lost sight of. This constitutes alienation.

For both Laing and Cooper, schizophrenia has to be looked at from the broad social spectrum of an alienated society. At this point then, we turn to their social theory. To understand it, however, a few

- 6 The double-bind can be said to put one in a position where there is nothing one can do. Thus, where a person is subject to it constantly, he can be said not to know what to do - i.e. have absolutely no trust in his choices. He is therefore sealed off from the world of genuine, spontaneous action (i.e. is schizoid).

words are necessary on the subject of alienation. We will especially attempt to connect this with two of the most prominent features of the whole schizophrenia situation:

- (a) the complete inability to perceive the independence, and hence the reality of the victim (absolutely no comprehension that he might have an inner world of his own), and
- (b) what makes (a) possible, the irrationally authoritarian nature of the family.

The concept of alienation is, of course, an evaluatively-charged concept. What we are said to be alienated or removed from is our humanity. This seems a paradoxical formulation until it is realised that Marx has a definite idea of what human life ought to be and is trying to show that how people are in fact treated in capitalist, and other systems, amounts to using them in a manner only appropriate to non-human objects. More specifically, human beings have a distinctive need to make choices which emanate from and therefore express their own individual needs and wants. A man is what he does. If his choices are made for him, then, considered as an autonomous individual, his actions are taken away from him. The destruction of independent identity through this volitional robbery constitutes a violence all the more ghastly for not being recognised as such.

Marx's profound insight was to see that the work situation of a man inside a capitalist system is an alienated one and to further show how this disfigures his whole existence. In fact, a position in which I perform a task, often a meaningless and/or incomprehensible one, which (a) is dictated to me by an alien and often hostile power, and (b) where the result of the labour required is taken away from me, its agent, is really the paradigm of alienation. Man's basic activity, what above all else should confer dignity on him, his labour, serves to reduce him to an appendage of a machine - simply another commodity, a mere exchange-value. But it is not just that he is treated in this way - he begins to evaluate himself correspondingly. This becomes more extreme when, as is commonly the case, he basically accepts the system which is distorting him. The consequences of this are obvious from the nature of the values most suitable for the perpetuation of the system.

Let us take an example of overwhelming importance. Since it is the main interest of the capitalist to sell his commodities, the status of possessions is made to assume such proportions that, in fact, a man is largely measured in terms of them. Here we have that perverse transvaluation by which a man disappears into what is external to him, his car, his suits, etc... The other great measurer of human worth is, of course, his job or rôle, so that he is identified completely with either his function or his possessions. In this monstrous externalisation, man is drained away and lost. The rape of subjectivity has the most heart-breaking consequences and it is here that we can begin to see both the societal underpinnings and the expression of a societal situation in schizophrenia.

Capitalism has reduced value so that now it resides in only hard tangible things, and in the rôles which produce them. An invidious, attractively easy way of achieving a spurious feeling of strong identity is thus opened up (no doubt part of its great appeal) but unfortunately men are not tables and chairs. Frustration of human needs can only lead to horror, perhaps unrecognised as such, but horror all the same. The overwhelming stress on the purely material, tangible 'realities' is accompanied by either an underplaying or an ignoring or even extreme hostility to anything to do with highly charged personal emotions. The more complex they are, the worse.

Earlier, when we were discussing the familial theory of schizophrenia, I gave an example of one of the ways in which the reality of a person's inner world

can be denied. What was so striking about that quotation was its familiar ring. The use of an innocent sounding formula to make an unhealthy situation look normal is basically no different in intention and effect from all the "snap out of it" and stiff upper lip injunctions of everyday life, not to mention some of the more unsavoury uses of proverbs and trite sayings to deny pain. Why this mutual invalidation and incomprehension, this starvation of man's inner life which is so much part of "normal" life? It would be implausible to put it down in any superficial way to a merely selfish desire not to be bothered. It takes place in the most 'intimate' relations and assumes quite grotesque though statistically normal forms. The importance of the world of deep feelings is at such a low ebb because such a world is simply irrelevant to capitalist enterprise except as a potent source of exploitation - in which case, of course, inner loneliness and misery becomes something to be maintained at all costs. Inside all this drabness, a man feels a deep and often uncontrollable exasperation at the idea of recognising misery when his own has not been recognised. Because everyone is involved in this game, there is a fear of expressing feelings of deep pain. This means an emotional solipsism in which all too often a man starts to lie to himself about his own needs and misery. This solidifies the prison walls and reinforces the total situation, since whoever denies his own pain, will inevitably deny it in others.

Extreme? On the present context such a question will inevitably be raised by many. The question is itself a symptom of alienation. But let us examine this ferocious denial of inner life from just one more of its multiple angles. A typical example is the following from Jules Henry, cited by Laing in *The Politics of Experience*: (7)

#### AT THE BLACKBOARD

*Boris had trouble reducing "12/16" to the lowest terms, and could only get as far as "6/8". The teacher asked him quietly if that was as far as he could reduce it. She suggested he "think". Much heaving up and down and waving of hands by the other children, all frantic to correct him. Boris pretty unhappy, probably mentally paralyzed. The teacher, quiet, patient, ignores the others and concentrates with look and voice on Boris. She says, "Is there a bigger number than two you can divide into the two parts of the fraction?" After a minute or two, she becomes more urgent, but there is no response from Boris. She then turns to the class and says, "Well, who can tell Boris what the number is?" A forest of hands appears, and the teacher calls Peggy. Peggy says that four may be divided into the numerator and the denominator.*

*Thus, Boris' failure has made it possible for Peggy to succeed; his depression is the price of her exhilaration; his misery the occasion for her rejoicing. This is the standard condition of the American elementary school, and is why so many of us feel a contraction of the heart even if someone we never knew succeeds merely at garnering plankton in the Thames: because so often somebody's success has been bought at the cost of our failure. To a Zuni, Hopi, or Dakot Indian, Peggy's performance would seem cruel beyond belief, for competition, the wringing of success from somebody's failure, is a form of torture foreign to those noncompetitive redskins. Yet Peggy's action seems natural to us; and so it is. How else would you run our world? And since all but the brightest children have the constant experience that others succeed at their expense they cannot but develop an inherent tendency to hate - to hate the success of others, to hate others who are successful, and to be determined to prevent it. Along with this, naturally, goes the hope that others will fail.*

7 This is a larger quote than in Laing, *Culture Against Man*, pp295-7.

*This hatred masquerades under the euphemistic name of "envy".*

*Looked at from Boris' point of view, the nightmare at the blackboard was, perhaps, a lesson in controlling himself so that he would not fly shrieking from the room under the enormous public pressure. Such experiences imprint on the mind of every man in our culture the Dream of Failure, so that over and over again, night in night out, even at the pinnacle of success, a man will dream not of success, but of failure. The external nightmare is internalized for life. It is this dream that, above all other things, provides the fierce human energy required by technological drivenness. It was not so much that Boris was learning arithmetic, but that he was learning the essential nightmare. To be successful in our culture one must learn to dream of failure.*

*From the point of view of the other children, of course, they were learning to yap at the heels of a failure. And why not? Have they not dreamed the dream of flight themselves? If the culture does not teach us to fly from failure or to rush in, hungry for success where others have failed, who will try again where others have gone broke? Nowadays, as misguided teachers try to soften the blow of classroom failure, they inadvertently sap the energies of success. The result will be a nation of chickens unwilling to take a chance.*

Is this sane? It is certainly normal. Here we see the beginning of what is often a great loneliness, an ordinary everyday attempt to make a little boy feel like a martian. The total inability to realise Boris' inner world is appalling. In general, our frenziedly competitive ethics tortures all those who lack the jungle-ability, the pliability and zest for self-abasement of the successful. But it is they, with their purely external evaluations of a man, who have taken over and inject their poisonous perspective on us all. The inner life recedes; skeletons in clothes start to walk the streets.

That which was at the core of the troubled families of schizophrenics (the denial of the reality of the other person's needs and wants), shows schizophrenia in a vital respect to be, when we look at its total meaning, simply a microcosm of society. Further, the kind of invalidation and denial so typical of these families is rooted in the essential practice of our society as a whole. And this is what one would expect. No family, not even the most odd, arises in a void.

We can see also how the reified thinking typical of a capitalist system is peculiarly present inside schizogenetic families. The translation of praxis into process in these families creates a situation in which the possibility of having any awareness of the reality of another person is destroyed. Things which human beings bring about are experienced as events or situations brought about in a manner which is independent of what human beings do. We live in a society where this kind of phenomena is an everyday feature of life. Men create a world of products which then seems to stand over against them, thwarting them and obeying its own course independently of man's endeavour. The artificial assumes the guise of a natural force. This situation is made possible by the position of relative, but very real powerlessness, which the worker has in relation to the products he creates. So too with the victim in the family of a schizophrenic. The irrational power in both the work situation and the family mutually reinforce each other. If we treat as accidental the connection between the ease with which reification occurs in the family and how it does in society at large, we run the risk of violently severing the family from its environment and placing it in a void. This has the attraction of encouraging complacency about reification in the private world. Doubtless this is one reason why the sort of discussion undertaken here is usually labelled as "extreme". At the same time, however, it might be said that for

reification, and for alienation in general to be possible at all, their manifestations must not be obvious or clearly perceptible for what they are, although, in a sense, they are just waiting for that moment of sudden shocked notice when they are truly revealed.

The normal man, or the ideal of capitalist society, is a distorted and crippled being, reflected faithfully enough in some of Francis Bacon's paintings. But again, still a human being who finds it difficult to live with the frustration of genuinely human needs. It is much easier to translate this frustration into cruelty and aggression than simply be overcome by futility or even eventually some kind of despair. Inner deadness in its complete form is simply death. It is no surprise then that in the more advanced countries, which plume themselves in their progressive nature (so that really you either don't have the right to or else you deserve to be unhappy), we see immediately, along with all the sense of futility, the high suicide rate etc etc etc, a notable talent for internal violence, racist, gangster or individual, and the exportation on a large scale of brutality overseas (Vietnam, Aden, The Dominican Republic, Guatemala etc etc). But, coupled with this is a denial of what is really being done - a bland assurance that we are right and holy, that this is a great society with maybe a few minor complaints, but then, that's life (again the schizogenetic family appears as a microcosm of the whole of society as well as a result of it). This is the violence reinforced and its increase made irresistible, the distortions of mind and heart become vice-like.

In relation to internal violence, the position of the man labelled as insane is clear. Society, as it is constituted, needs 'abnormal' or disfavoured minorities in order to give, by way of alleged and favourable contrast, some kind of justification for its all too typical products. Of course, we must not single out the schizophrenic here. The subject of racism could very well be brought up in this context, to mention just one other thing. It is notorious how the victims of racism are made the scapegoat for all the unavowed frustrations of a sick society. In this respect it is very like the situation in relation to the victim of a schizogenetic family (of course, there are profound differences as well - the element of symbiosis in these families, for instance). However, let us stay with the disfavoured 'insane'. To understand what is happening where we have to look into the two key elements of *stigmatism* - labelling and irrational authority.

The trouble with society labelling a man in a certain way is that he's apt to act in a manner appropriate to that label because of the seemingly authoritative voice of society, whether this is delivered by a parent, school master, police officer, doctor or judge. Simply by virtue of the fact that an authority is there, is very powerful and is sanctioned in its act by longevity and success, there is a tendency to regard its dictates as having the status of natural laws, of being as much part of the order of things as trees and rocks. This reification is definitive of irrational authority. It is clear then that labelling by such an authority tends to have the awesome ring of an injunction: "Thou shalt be that because that is what thou art". Society has to rely on this essentialism in order to have its necessary drop-outs and/or scapegoats. Labelling in these cases means "trapping", "rigidifying", "congealing".

A stigma is in intention essentially forever. It turns, or attempts to turn, a man into a stone, something that cannot change, something with an "internal nature" that is cursed (cf. "The Destiny of Europe's Gypsies" - Donald Kenrick and Graham Paxon). The double-natured feature of the concept of normality helps here in relation to the stigmatization of the profoundly disturbed. It can be either a statistical or an evaluative concept. This ambiguity is utilized to slip over from the notion of conformity to

generally established rules or accepted norms of behaviour to the attribution of "normality" in a favourable sense (how would Jesus rate here?). Thus helped on by this hardly subtle but highly successful semantic subterfuge, the "abnormal" person is inevitably looked on with disfavour or hostility. Unless "we" (8) can get him to view himself in the same light, he becomes an actual or potential threat to society as it is alleged to be by the manipulators in the maze - besides making people feel uncomfortable. At the same time, the vicious situation is apparent. Being stigmatized, the "abnormal" man is rebuked for being what he is said to be and at the same time either feels assured by most things around him that he can be nothing else, or, not surprisingly, tries but finds it remarkably difficult to find any bearings to give himself confidence in the forest. In effect, society tries to congeal him forever in an impossible position. Despair and its various consequences follow, cure is needed for this and we're off again (unless the situation is such that the acceptability of the accepted point of view is not accepted but proudly and laughingly rejected).

It might be added here that some of the absurder attributions of "illness" stem from neglecting how features (e.g. extreme guilt, anxiety, jealousy etc) "symptomatic" of "illness" can really only be viewed in the light of the evidence as springing from attitudes in society as a whole. To suppose these attitudes eternal is to be a traitor to one's own intelligence; to incorporate into one's "scientific" judgement a conformist societal and/or political position. An example is the tendency to describe homosexuality as an illness. Suppose that the homosexual, as is often maintained, tends to be more prone than the heterosexual to "pathological" guilt, jealousy etc, what about it? One would hardly be surprised in view of the unfavourable attitude of society towards homosexuality. This is a good example of how orthodox psychiatric views (Empson says somewhere that sadism is the only thing worth calling a sexual deviation) can become the most insidiously powerful of the repressive forces within society.

The violence which is perpetrated on schizophrenics can be understood in the context of stigmatism. Stigmatism attempts to strip a man to nothing by devaluing all he has and is. Hypocritically it also needs the stigmatized there as *something*, else how could the stigmatizer define himself? Therein lies the cowardice, the unfreedom of he who, refusing to be through himself, attempts to be *through* (and thereby *for*) the other (9). I am great because he is nothing. He is unreal (yet has to be real). He doesn't exist (yet has to). Since he has to exist, he will be literally handled. This happens in racism, it happens when a disturbed person is treated *simply* as a set of symptoms. In this case his own reality, the needs emanating from *his* position, is ignored (hence no alleviation, let alone radical change for the better becomes possible unless the charlatanism is seen through). The usual "cure", if successful, would be a shabby replastering into a "normal" (simply defined, apparently in a completely negative way, i.e. one who doesn't hallucinate etc), and institutionalized violence is made respectable *because* institutionalized. Of course, this violence serves the function of completing the segregation of the "abnormals", thereby solidifying the ideals of normality held by a particular society. A seemingly cast-iron, impossible situation is created. It is this which gives point to Laing's contention that "the term 'schizophrenia' is applied to some people who

appear ... to be remarkably unconditioned by the system". "Normality" inside our society almost completely means distortion of one's heart and mind (e.g. witness the stupidity and callousness of the attitude towards internment in Ireland, where torture becomes "ill-treatment" - and this is more or less accepted without a qualm). From this perspective our definitions of "sickness" ("mental", that is) become equivocal. A truncated positivism in the form of an alleged "scientific" approach (what an insult to genuine science!) leads many into the fashionable appalling idea that a whole society cannot be sick since it is only within a society that criteria of normality can be constructed (lots of "language-game" arguments are like this from the point of view of validity). Haven't they ever heard of societies radically changing because of conflicts between different values or between values and practice? How else do they think historical change possible? When we take examples of this we raise issues about that society as a whole rather than asking internal questions about what was, in the main, accepted within that society (10). The conventional psychiatrist would have made a good priest in the middle ages and it would have been left to others to view society as a totality in order to change it. Nazi Germany, even the "law and order" crowd admit, was a sick society, yet again this doesn't stop the moral imbeciles from calling "extremist" those who want to cut off all ties with South Africa (which, of course, can keep Rhodesia going, sanctions against the latter notwithstanding). Leaving moral enormity on one side, the various forms of aversion therapy (11) etc are simply examples of insults to the brain. Let us be consistent. To support conventionally accepted ideas simply *because they're there*, commits one to trading with South Africa, defrauding labourers and all those things accepted through authoritarian training such as deliberate suppression of the news in the *normally available* news media.

Inside this particular system, then, radical inroads are made into everyone's personality in an attempt to destroy his humanity. Needless to say holding to this doesn't commit one to a plot-theory of history. It happens as a result of definite social relations. But this is already splendidly dealt with in the first part of *The German Ideology*. The only weakness of that account, the underplaying of ideas, was, as is well known, forcibly pointed out by Engels.

At this point, it is appropriate to bring up a charge of extreme subjectivism against Laing and Cooper. This centres round their romanticization of psychosis. In *The Divided Self*, Laing bifurcates humanity into the ontologically secure and the ontologically insecure in such a way as to wonder how they can communicate with each other. This is a dangerous reduplication on the social level of paranoid fears of total exclusion on the part of the schizoid person - as if he were not quite a human being (c.f. Osamu Dazai - "No Longer Human"). Put in his extreme way, it is untrue, though no-one would deny that there is a terrible basis for such extremism. From this point of view we see the point behind the quotation used before:

*The term schizophrenia is applied to some people who appear ... to be remarkably unconditioned by the system.*

Some people are unable to acquire the savage competitive skills required to join the Monday Club. But this covers many different types of people. What is, after all, being said? Well, unfortunately amidst

8 It is unnecessary to go into the reified thinking behind the 'we' syndrome since Laing had done it in 'Us and Them', one of the few successful essays in *The Politics of Experience*, and a brilliant example of the influence of the later Sartre.

9 Cf. Hegel: The section on 'Lordship and Bondage' (*The Phenomenology of Spirit*).

10 Cf. Carnap, 'Semantics, Empiricism and Ontology' (*Meaning and Necessity*).

11 All methods of *negative* enforcement of ideas as opposed to rational, non-enforcing influence for positive ends. Needless to say, this doesn't commit one to not stopping the baby putting his head in the fire.

all the confusion of exciting phrases, something pretty dreadful emerges. The schizophrenic becomes the new saviour (another social reduplication of psychotic fantasy). At the same time, a contradiction emerges here with the typical Laingian assertion or insinuation that the only difference between psychotics and the sane is one of labelling. Nixon is sick - but he is not paranoid. The black Americans, the Vietnamese, the Cambodians are his enemies. Why doesn't Laing refuse to use the word "mad" at all? If he's right in his Labelling-Thesis (taken in his extreme version, that is, since there is important truth in it), how can "mad" be equivocal or anything else? The word is simply drained of meaning. Yet Laing has written a very brilliant book (*The Divided Self*) in which people such as Julia ("The Ghost of the Weed Garden") are shown as experiencing the world in a qualitatively different way from many. In general, a man who experiences the world in the all-pervading anxiety-ridden way of the man who is described in *The Divided Self*, the man who hears "Voices", the man who believes his brains are being sizzled up by fantastic electric gadgets, may be experiencing the world in a manner appropriate to, indeed expressive of, his life-situation, but he is experiencing it in a comparatively unusual way. It is the duty of whoever is paid to help him to direct himself or herself to what is being expressed via very harrowing experiences. But "expressing X" ≠ "understanding X". Some people do learn valuable things from abnormal experiences; some even escape from the coils of the system but many, probably most, are wrecked. One may learn a lot from the study of psychosis which casts a larger light but it is rather a leap from this to seeing salvation in people who, on the whole, are almost constantly beset by ontological insecurity so that every moment is a struggle for life, or else are in a state of near total incapacitation. But this is not all. Some aspects of the schizoid character often reveal not insight into, and therefore some kind of freedom from, a diseased society, but rather in an extreme form some of its worst symptoms. One thing which Laing doesn't examine but which is very characteristic of many schizoid people is their narcissism. This is, of course, typical of many other kinds of people too. The tendency to equate narcissism with a withdrawing personality becomes rather odd when encountering many classical extrovert types. However, this isn't the place to go into the conceptual jungle of words surrounding the notion of the self (nor, either, the jungle which the use of words about people can themselves create). The word "narcissism" is here being used in the sense of an obviously developed failure to interpret personal relations in a manner independent of one's own subjective feelings. The failure to see the reality, that is the *autonomy* of the other person is typical of a society based on *tangible*, i.e. sellable, realities. Freedom cannot be grabbed and always flies away. Again, this is all very widespread but this does not lessen the fact that a coveting of another's feelings often follows on in a peculiarly demanding way from both those given everything to make them ontologically secure and those given nothing. As I said, "often", but not always. Many people called "schizoid" strongly keep themselves apart from possessive relationships. The point is that this is by no means always so. Then disastrous equations such as "my loving feelings" = "I love you" are made with all their destructive consequences. The destruction of the power to trust is, of course, tied in here.

Continual subjection to denial of the person's real feelings (invalidation) can assume such cosmic proportions that real trust seems a dream, and with that any genuine mutual relationship. Hovering on the edges of existence, fearing any pitch that would fill them against the night, as though the concrete would destroy them, it is as if ghosts walk forth who are frightened of every human being they meet. It is true that this narcissism is overcome in some cases but it is very difficult for someone in the grip of it to see his way out. Other undesirable things characteristic of many schizoid and schizophrenic people (tied in with narcissism) should be mentioned

such as the presence, in many cases, of psychopathically violent tendencies, sometimes of an acute homicidal nature. Some of Laing's rather sentimental hiccupations appear horrifically absurd in relation, say, to Ronnie Craig who is now diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic (and there is no reason in advance why this shouldn't be a correct diagnosis). This is, of course, not to say that many acutely disturbed people are not charming and highly moral people. It's just that one becomes sickened by any "two-races" theory, whereby, for the feminist for instance, women 'Qua' women are ontologically privileged; black men *qua* black men, for the inverted racist, have somehow uniquely got THE GIFT and schizophrenics etc for Laing, Burroughs etc, somehow have a greater insight than all the others. Let's simply say, so as not to insult anyone, that some schizophrenics are swines and some are good people, some women are etc etc (at times platitudes are necessary). I have insinuated that Laing is insulting to disturbed people, just as the feminist is to women, and so on and so forth. It's also the case that his position can, and does, easily become callous. The gut-thing about schizophrenia is dreadful, dreadful unhappiness. Encouragement to wallowing in some vapid "special status" is like encouraging a compulsive gambler in his solitary romanticization of the betting shop when one has no gambling problems oneself. I regard this kind of weird, surrogate vampirism of another's terrible experience as being gravely immoral. Schizophrenics are often, in many respects, not survivors but amongst the worst casualties of society (again, not all of them). Their often chronically asocial character is hardly a sign of a transformer of society. Apart from the irresponsibility involved in making him into a new hero, the whole position here is extremely negative. Society is not really to be saved. We are to reserve and/or protect a few people who allegedly see through the system but who, in terms of power, cannot alter it. This is pure escapism, the apotheosis of an ill-thought-out esoteric elitism. All that is left is a cry of pain. Passion is necessary but it is not just futile, it is quite horrific to stop at intense emotional reactions. Here despair can only be alleviated by retiring into various cushioned-off situations or states of being. Overindulgence in the subjective leads to excessive importance being placed upon what are regarded as revelatory experiences, mystical or ones produced by drugs. This is very noticeable in *The Politics of Experience*. The world of action is left intact and Laing ends up abreast of all forms of permanent-moment addiction. Illumination is to come from the subjective switch, not from objective reality. Needless to say, this is not at all to deny the importance of certain kinds of subjective experience. Attack is reserved for an abstract thesis which attributes excessive importance to them. Such theses can obviously become callous. The problems of India etc won't be solved by a handful of privileged Nirvana-seekers (which isn't to deny, e.g. the bravery of Buddhist monks in Vietnam; it is simply that political quietism and "all you need is love" seems a feature of Sinhalese and Indian monks, and this in the face of savage social repression. It's better for starving men to eat cows than to perpetuate mystical athletics for their own sake).

To maintain a balanced (i.e. dialectical) view, however, it is supremely important to refer again to Laing's moving emphasis on the tragic manner in which vividly non-utilitarian (inner) experiences such as those in dreams, ones emanating from visions etc, are systematically devalued. Of course, this covers the everyday denial of the importance of emotions not obviously geared in the least troublesome way to purely external tasks, or, at most, to the least disturbing inner feelings. This leads, as in the case of Laing, to the opposite extreme. It would be unreal to deny the inevitability, and therefore large element of value in this.

In conclusion, a few words about the family. The familial studies of schizophrenia both here and in America are obviously of very great importance. Inside



our kind of society people are taught to completely obey their parents simply in virtue of biological status, which by itself is no guarantee of wisdom. Injunctions from whatever source should only be considered reasonable if they are means to some rational end and this is something not at all determined by mere authority. The family as constituted at the moment then, is the prototype of all later kinds of irrational authority (Let's not forget that Goebbels was a firm believer in family authority). We are being trained to be nice, decent collies who will obey someone simply because he whistles and his name is "teacher", "boss" etc - the confusion between "someone being called 'x'" and "being 'x'" sets in and we accept as an element of nature something magically brought into being by man himself and that in a way no less weird than any of Humpty-Dumpty's word-into-thing extravaganzas. Thus the influence of the present family set-up goes far beyond making the disturbed type of situation in the families of schizophrenics possible. It is right at the root of the reification made possible by an authoritarian society. Authoritarian, that is, in as much as and so far as it is an economic structure in which the producers of wealth do not participate as controllers of that wealth. But it is clear, having said that, that we must therefore primarily argue the other way round. That is, the present family set-up is only made possible given the present societal set-up. This involves taking up a political position fundamentally opposed to the capitalist "status quo". Not to do so is to drop the

family into a social void and thus create for the family a fashionable individualism which is so abundantly met with in relation to theories about the particular person, e.g. disturbed families from the most deprived parts of the working-class cannot be fully understood save in terms of ideas of respect defined in relation to their chronically exploited status. This example shows that one would have to go into the appallingly truncated rôle of the woman in a sexually non-egalitarian wage-structure (and the rôle of prostitution); the rôle of violence; the rôle of army recruitment, the rôle of gambling and drinking and so many other things. One would have to tie all this together with the desperate desire of someone from this background to be something, and the ways in which this identity search can end in what Blake would call "chaotic non-identity" (i.e. schizophrenia), and often "success" where "success" means pretty dreadful adaptations to bourgeois society (such as joining the paratroppers to torture people in Ireland, Aden and Vietnam; prostitution, etc). But all this clearly demands, as said above, a revolutionary stance which is not just *not* evident in Laing, but ultimately, by an emphasis on sheerly personal insight, he in fact does succeed in dropping the family back at the theoretical level into the no-horizons trap which the present society has so cruelly locked it up in. Class-division shows up the cosmic callousness of pantheistic mysticism. The state is not the veil of Maya. The Laingian stance is ultimately a safe revolt which can only reinforce the power of the pimps and Blimps.

# TEACHING PHILOSOPHY ~ TO WHOM?

## Roger Waterhouse

Many of the people who count themselves radical philosophers either are, or aspire to be, professionals. They would agree that professional philosophers should recognize that they are agents in a particular socio-historical context, and would accuse the orthodox academicians of obscuring this, mystifying their students, and effectively shoring up the bankrupt capitalist system. At this point they usually turn their attention to doctrine, and either launch into a critique of prevailing orthodoxies, or expound the alternatives. These are important exercises, and I do not in any way wish to deride them; but I do want to draw the attention of radical philosophers in another direction, because the theoretical discussion *within* philosophy can provide only part of the answer to the question, 'What should the professional philosopher do?'

What he does do a lot of the time, and will continue to do, is teach. But the question, 'What should the philosopher teach?' admits of no simple answer even when the internal theoretical considerations are sorted out, because it is unanswerable in vacuo - we must first decide, *To whom?* This is the question that I want put, and put in its proper context - namely, the present and future work situation of the professional philosopher.

First, a few facts which tend to be forgotten when identifiable groups of professionals get together:

- 1 The largest group of students taking 'philosophy' as part of their course are found in Colleges and Institutes of Education. What passes for philosophy on many of these courses may well be derided by university academics - but it should not be ignored.
- 2 The second largest group are students in universities. Although in general university

courses tend to be quite highly specialized in subject terms, the vast majority of these students are not taking specialist philosophy degrees - philosophy is merely a *part* of their course.

- 3 The third, and at present much smaller group, are students in Polytechnics and Colleges of Technology. Hardly any of these are specialists in philosophy, and few take the subject as a major part of their course.

I rehearse these well-known facts because there is a tendency to overestimate the importance of, say, getting a Hegel and Marx option added to an M.A. philosophy programme - as far as the consciousness of the masses is concerned we may as well forget it!

Second, some general features in the context of higher education within which we work. Like most other advanced capitalist countries we have (for very good economic reasons) been moving away from a higher education system which produced a few graduates for the heights of power, a larger number of engineers and middle managers to keep the wheels of industry turning, and a small army of workers in schools to turn out factory fodder to appropriate specifications. This process, which has been transforming both the structure and the nature of higher education, has been recognised at least since 1944. Its progress is staked out in a long series of Government reports which have usually been more effective in summing up the stage reached than in influencing the future direction of the process. Lest we forget that philosophy too is involved, it might be interesting to compare the number of people who make their living by it today, with the number in, say, 1946.

As with any long-term process, it has become a way of life. We are used to expansion, because most of us have always lived with it. We notice the