



The Politics of the Family and Other Essays

R.D. Laing

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In his 1968 CBC Massey Lectures R. D. Laing discusses how and why we value society's notions of family over our own.

Using concepts of schizophrenia, R.D. Laing demonstrates that we tend to invalidate the subjective and experiential and accept the proper societal view of what should occur within the family.

A psychoanalyst and psychiatrist, Laing worked at the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations. His books include *The Self and Others* and *The Politics of Experience*.

The Politics of the Family and Other Essays Details

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Vicky says

The second classic RD Laing I've actually bothered to read! Pretty unintelligible in first essay, but then really quite bang on the button in my opinion with lots of things. I didn't read this as an attack on the parents of those diagnosed with schizophrenia, rather a critique of the institution of the family as a whole. Interesting stuff, especially to read 50 years on and realise in many ways lots hasn't changed. Of course the man had many faults also.

Ping says

Fascinating insights, though best taken contextually with this article:
<https://www.theguardian.com/books/200....>

Barnaby says

If you're going to major in psychology, read this book.

Lydia St Giles says

This collection of short pieces was originally published more than forty years ago but is still relevant today. At a time when public policy treats Cognitive Behavioural Therapy as the preferred method of tackling non-psychotic mental illness, an approach which looks at the individual in the context of a social unit would be welcome.

It is not an easy read, compressing the idea of "family as system" and referring to concepts such as projection and regression. Some sections read like a mathematical equation - elegant and demanding of the reader.

Very highly recommended.

Liam says

Read The Divided Self instead if you are new to Laing, read this only if you want to read all of his works.

This was a transcript of a radio broadcast, which is why Laing's genius does not shine so brightly here.

Similar to a few other "idealist" writers like Tim Leary, Carl Jung, David Foster Wallace and Friedrich

Nietzsche, he expresses his thoughts in a very abstract, paranoid and polemic way which sometimes trips over itself by getting hung up on recurrences (thinking about thinking about thinking...*ad infinitum*), *authorial bias* (or maybe I am incapable of knowing this from my perspective), or unjustified polarising views (us vs. them).

Laing needs an editor more than most other writers, to ground and cut out some depth and recurrence from his abstractions.

Pros to the essay is that he does try and make a list of psychological coping mechanisms and give examples. Problems with the essay are that it is less focused and strong than any of those in The Politics of Experience and does not bring out any good new frameworks like The Divided Self.

I disagreed with Laing on some points in here. For example, his insistence that disgust for one's own saliva is socially learned and unreasonable made sense to me, but I disagree that it is parallel to that for faeces which for me seems instead to clearly be an instinctive and rational way to avoid disease.

I think hearing this live would be interesting and seem very complicated, but when you have time to read and dissect it, it just does not hold up with the rest of his work.

Sarah says

This book is made up primarily of essays adapted from talks Laing had given over the years. (I could almost hear the Scottish lilt!)

Though I suspect much of the content worked better in spoken form, I adore R.D. Laing and appreciate his ideas. It's so frustrating that decades later people are as resistant to these insights as they ever were.

(I look forward to the film starring David Tennant!)

Dannyblue says

There is some wisdom here, and what appears to me to be some technical obfuscation but is probably just the language of logicians. Most remarkable is how familiar and obvious much of it feels, and the astonishing thing is that this was revolutionary at the time. While Laing's approach has been discredited by the medical mainstream his influence remains. Of particular interest to me was the distinction between what is personally experienced and what society agrees / declares has been experienced and the tensions that arise when they don't match.

Dee Michell says

A pity he doesn't consider non-biological families

John Brooke says

Reading this short book has revealed to me so many feelings I have spent my whole life puzzling over. Tremendous observations on how families unknowilngly affect/invicect the lives of children from their birth. The family influence impacts on all societies not just our western culture. I have read this book through, and I'm set to read it again this weeked.
