

ever, it underplays, in my view, the relevance of Heidegger's thinking for Sartre's approach to Being.

For existential therapists lucid discussion of the concepts of "bad faith" and "unreflected consciousness" are helpful, and we are shown how Sartre conceived of the possibility of an "existential psychoanalysis".

Unlike some more academic publications this book has a useful glossary and a list of the quotations used and where exactly these can be found in Sartre's work. And it costs only £ 6.99.

Donald Palmer has also written a book on Kierkegaard for this series which should be worth looking at.

**Hans W. Cohn**

**\*Mad to be Normal - Conversations with R.D. Laing by Bob Mullan, Free Association Books, London.**

Having recently reviewed a first biography of R.D. Laing by his son, Adrian, I approached this text (Laing speaking for and of himself ) with much interest. For Laing, in the 60's and 70's, had carved out for himself a portraiture of controversy and paradox. The psychiatrist who had radically attacked psychiatry, but always remained "psychiatrist". The psychoanalyst who believed in phenomenology, but always remained "psychoanalyst". R.D. Laing had become a phenomenon not unlike a rock star. What lasting contribution, therefore, did Laing make to the study of human relations and, indeed, psychotherapy? With this in mind I wondered how and where these qualities would manifest in this book of "conversations"; particularly with reference to Laing's own thoughts and ideas on his relationship with existential philosophy, and thereon in his own practice of psychotherapy. Where does Laing place himself in these respects? And, indeed, would he in this series of "conversations" place himself at all?

Bob Mullan tells us in the preface that, in early 1988, he approached Laing and his literary agent "with a request to take on the role of official bibliographer". This agreed, the biography was "making good progress" when Laing unexpectedly died in August 1989. Soon afterwards, it became apparent that I no longer would be afforded the continued generous access to papers, correspondence...." etc. Mullan thereon decided to edit the "hundreds of hours of taped conversations" and publish.

After an introductory sketch giving a synopsis of Laing's life, there follows taped dialogue between Mullan and Laing. This is structured into sections in a somewhat scattered way. A long first section is

devoted to Laing's *Family Life* with following sections providing interesting accounts of the settings in which Laing's work took shape: the early years in psychiatric hospitals where he learned of his ability to empathise with psychotic people; the Tavistock Clinic where he felt out of place; the founding and development of Kingsley Hall, the community alternative to mental hospital; and the 1967 Dialectics of Liberation Congress in London described by him as "a total fiasco". Thereon are sections relating to his books: *The Divided Self*, *Sanity, Madness and the Family*, and *Knots*. And perhaps, of particular interest to the readers of this Journal, interspersed are more self revealing sections on 'Theory and Therapy' and 'Influences'.

Portrayal of Laing's childhood and *Family Life* in Glasgow in many ways replicates his autobiography *Wisdom, Madness and Folly* which had covered his life from birth (1927) to 1957. Childhood was a climate of severe austerity and harsh puritanism, with parents, particularly mother, craving respectability and the social status she felt she lacked. She "by virtue of her marriage to my father ..had sunk down in the world; she just detested all the local environment and the people in it". With characteristic paradox Laing, however, suggests that an experience that sounds to be lonely, isolated, bleak and melancholic was "nothing like that at all".

In the section on 'Theory and Therapy' the author attempts unsuccessfully to draw Laing on his therapeutic approach. He refuses "to package all that in a model, I can't do that for you just now any more than I've been able to do in my own life in writing about this". 'Integral Therapy' is a term he had wondered about using but concluded that "any single term never satisfied me." Refuting formal technique, he offers to clients \patients "the range of my presence and attention and my training, and my hopefully refined ,trained, cultivated intuition, spontaneity and sensibility." Laing further indicates that his consistent mistrust of being misinterpreted by others has led him to silence in these areas. It is noticeable, however, that on occasion in the text he freely uses psychoanalytic conceptualisations - we hear him talk of "projection", "transference", "internalisation", and "phantasy" (spelt ph!).

The section on 'Influences' reveals again a refusal to be pinned-down or to state the specifics of what influence he ascribes to any particular major existential philosopher. Though describing his reading of Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* as "one of the peak experiences of my life", Laing evades any clarification of what in Kierkegaard's work attracted, appealed, and influenced him in his current "conceptual framework". Regarding the influence of

Nietzsche, he is more open, but talks of "Dionysian" and "Apollonian" distinctions of the mind. Intrapsychic phenomena rather than interrelational, and reminding of his American contemporary, Rollo May. No direct questions, unfortunately, are pursued on the influence of Sartre and Heidegger.

In a sense, then, I got the feeling throughout this book of Laing being one-removed. In his own words: "So I'm playing the part in the mythologising of R.D.Laing." The splitting of person and phenomenon he, in part, cultivated through his avoidance of writing about "what life's all about" and any book on existential philosophy or theology. In a way this doesn't surprise, for this book based on taped interviews reveals Laing's opaqueness about which existential philosophers and ideas underpin his approach. He, in a sense, retains the medical/psychoanalytic 'gaze'. An overall impression, however, was that Bob Mullan is too sympathetic to (even daunted by) Laing and fell short of being challenging in his questions. There was a noticeable failure to pursue interesting themes where Laing might have been pushed to be more specific. A corollary to this, however, is that I wondered whether a more challenging approach would have been acceptable to Laing who whilst feeling "so far, very misunderstood" was scathing of any criticism of his work.

This book is worth reading. If not for the informative and illustrative account that Laing gives of the Tavistock Clinic and the world of psychoanalysis, with descriptions of his encounters with several famous psychoanalysts including Klein, Winnicott and Bion; then for his illuminating portrait of the founding and development of Kingsley Hall. Perhaps, more importantly, it highlights the vicissitudes of Laing, the man, himself, and reveals his difficulties with and retreat from being placed in a clear relationship with any of the major existential philosophers. He thereon obscures any conceptual framework to his own practice of psychotherapy refusing to place himself also in this respect.

**Nick Zinovieff**

**\*The Psychology of Existence: An Integrative, Clinical Perspective. Kirk J Schneider, Rollo May. McGraw-Hill, Inc New York (1995).**

This book is perhaps best approached and appreciated as an American Existential Psychotherapy "scrapbook". Like your old scrapbook you can take it off the shelf when the mood takes you and you are assured of finding both a collection of "gems" that you can