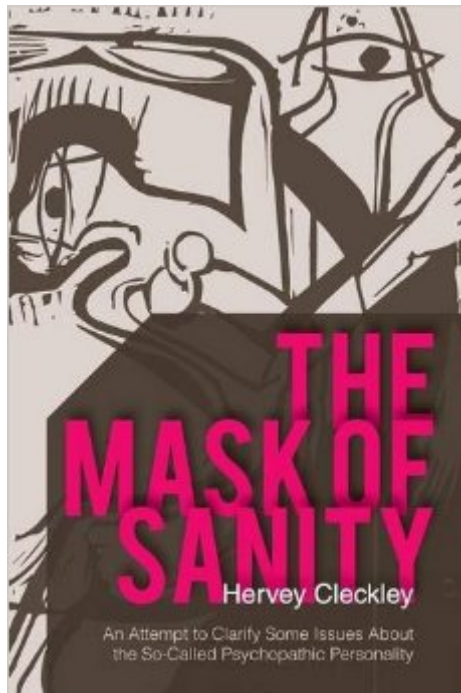


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# The Mask Of Sanity: An Attempt To Clarify Some Issues About The So-Called Psychopathic Personality



## Synopsis

Although highly controversial, Hervey Cleckley's *Mask of Sanity* provides one of the most influential clinical descriptions of psychopathy in the 20th century. At the crux of his argument, Cleckley claims that many psychopathic personalities go undiagnosed because they maintain a social mask that conceals their mental disorder and enables them to blend in with society. Furthermore, many of these affected individuals appear to function normally in accordance with standard psychiatric criteria. Intent on detecting and diagnosing the elusive psychopath, Cleckley has compiled an assortment of case studies and offers suggestions for palliative care. This ambitious work aims to define and examine every aspect of this abstract state of being. Ultimately, Cleckley refines the term "psychopath" and strips it of stigmatization. This classic has transformed the psychiatric definition of sanity and continues to provide insight on American society and psychological introspection.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Cleckley first wrote this book in 1948, and it still reads as fresh as ever. He was a therapist in a mental hospital who found that criminals sent there were excellent at playing the therapy game but were actually conning him. From this he developed perhaps 20 definitive characteristics of a type he called "psychopath", a term that had a variety of unclear meanings up until this point. The term has since been changed to sociopath and changed in the last two DSMs to "anti-social personality disorder". Whatever they are called their principal characteristic as far as society and the individuals who have to deal with them are concerned is that they do not have a conscience (a lack that is hard

for some people to conceptualize and that is hard to measure). Cleckley's work is a classic because of its impact, yet he is too often forgotten. For example, from his experiences in the same hospital, Samenow authored the widely regarded *Criminal Personality* in the 1970s, yet does not acknowledge his debt to Cleckley. The most amazing thing about Cleckley's book is that it is so well written. It is a good read and has literary merit. Cleckley underestimated the dangerousness of psychopaths because of the sample he was dealing with, but his *Mask of Sanity* is still very much worth reading for anyone who is interested in psychopaths or criminals. Indeed, it is far superior to Hare's popular 1990's book on psychopathy, and Robert Hare is the author of the DSM diagnostic criteria for psychopathy (which he ignores in his popular book).

I really recommend this book to anyone interested in the subject. His case histories are a book in themselves and capture the soul of a psychopath so well. A very thorough book that examines every aspect of the condition, I am impressed by his attempt to even explore historical and literary references. Ahead of its time because his conclusions cannot be shaken even now. A much better book than Hare's *"Without Conscience"*. Hare even lifts phrases directly out of the book eg. "trivial, impersonal affairs". Astonishingly accurate portrayal of psychopaths without sensationalizing the subject. I like how he gives different types of psychopaths; these are men and women in the street, 'ordinary' individuals but so disturbed (hence the very apt title). His analysis is spot-on: he really knows his subject. More thorough than Hare's. He doesn't fudge any details. Really all you need to know about the topic. Still the best book about psychopaths.

I first read this book in a psychopathology class; it has always stayed in my mind. Everyone should read it. The author's defining characteristics of the psychopath are still as relevant today as they were over 50 years ago: the psychopath (today usually called an "anti-social personality") is much like a gourd; there's an outside (the "mask of sanity"), but inside there's nothing there. No conscience, no guilt, no remorse. They're great actors, though. In their more disturbed forms they're the serial killers, such as Ted Bundy. Cleckley suspected these people were literally monsters, lacking whatever made them human. A must-read for those involved in law enforcement.

Several other good reviews explain what this book is about but I can add a personal note. Some years ago I was describing to an older lawyer a bizarre, frightening man who had filed suit against my clients. "They guy's obviously a psychopath," he said. "Haven't you read Cleckely?" He gave me a copy and after reading it I understood what I was dealing with. A judge had recommended it to him

many years before when he had his own first encounter with a psychopath (nowadays a person suffering from "anti-social personality disorder"). Those who work with people in stressful circumstances -- doctors, lawyers, social workers, etc. -- owe it to themselves, and to their patients and clients, to know this book.

This is, in my opinion, far and away the best text ever written on Psychopathy. Please note, however, that this is a reprint of the 1955 Third Edition and not the final 1982 Fifth Edition. I have notified of this, so hopefully the correct description will be posted shortly. In the meantime, I just wanted to forewarn other potential buyers as this is a fairly expensive book. It is still of great interest but I, for one, wished to purchase the final edition. The quality of the printing is also fairly poor.

Cleckley wrote the definitive book on psychopaths. This is a complex subject which is not easy to explain, but Cleckley's writing style makes it very entertaining and easy to read. He describes each of his criteria for psychopathy, then he presents a brief vignette, which is often very amusing. His examples are so real that you start to recognize people in your life in these descriptions (Pretty scary). The only book which compares with this is Robert Hare's "Without Conscience," which is also brilliantly explained and easy to read. Understandable, since Dr. Hare based much of his work on Cleckley's work with psychopaths.

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