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Relational Being: Beyond Self and Community

Kenneth J. Gergen

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This book builds on two current developments in psychology scholarship and practice. The first centers on broad discontent with the individualist tradition in which the rational agent, or autonomous self, is considered the fundamental atom of social life. Critique of individualism spring not only from psychologists working in the academy, but also from communities of therapy and counseling. The second, and related development from which this work builds, is the search for alternatives to individualist understanding. Thus, therapists such as Steve Mitchell, along with feminists at the Stone Center, expand the psychoanalytic tradition to include a relational orientation to therapy.

The present volume will give voice to the critique of individualism, but its major thrust is to develop and illustrate a far more radical and potentially exciting landscape of relational thought and practice that now exists. Most existing attempts to build a relational foundation remain committed to a residual form of individualist psychology. The present work carves out a space of understanding in which relational process stands prior to the very concept of the individual. More broadly, the book attempts to develop a thoroughgoing relational account of human activity. In doing so, Gergen reconstitutes 'the mind' as a manifestation of relationships and bears out these ideas in a range of everyday professional practices, including family therapy, collaborative classrooms, and organizational psychology.

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