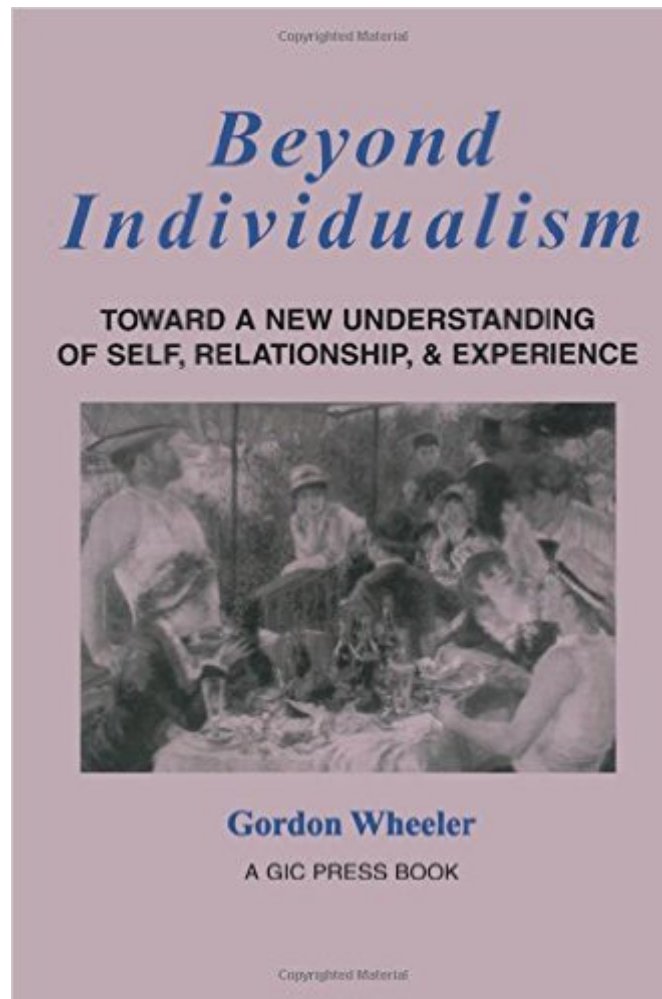


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Beyond Individualism: Toward A New Understanding Of Self, Relationship, And Experience



Synopsis

In this pathbreaking and provocative new treatment of some of the oldest dilemmas of psychology and relationship, Gordon Wheeler challenges the most basic tenet of the West cultural tradition: the individualist self. Characteristics of this self-model are our embedded yet pervasive ideas that the individual self precedes and transcends relationship and social field conditions and that interpersonal experience is somehow secondary and even opposed to the needs of the inner self. Assumptions like these, Wheeler argues, which are taken to be inherent to human nature and development, amount to a controlling cultural paradigm that does considerable violence to both our evolutionary self-nature and our intuitive self-experience. He asserts that we are actually far more relational and intersubjective than our cultural generally allows and that these relational capacities are deeply built into our inherent evolutionary nature. His argument progresses from the origins and lineage of the Western individualist self-model, into the basis for a new model of the self, relationship, and experience out of the insights and implications of Gestalt psychology and its philosophical derivatives, deconstructivism and social constructionism. From there, in a linked series of experiential chapters, each of them a groundbreaking essay in its own right, he takes up the essential dynamic themes of self-experience and relational life: interpersonal orientation, meaning-making and adaptation, support, shame, intimacy, and finally narrative and gender, culminating in considerations of health, ethics, politics, and spirit. The result is a picture and an experience of self that is grounded in the active dynamics of attention, problem solving, imagination, interpretation, evaluation, emotion, meaning-making, narration, and, above all, relationship. By the final section, the reader comes away with a new sense of what it means to be human and a new and more usable definition of health.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I'm a psychologist with a private counseling practice. This book has totally changed my perspective towards what I do both professionally and in personal relationships. I would totally recommend this book to every social professional.

I'm very grateful to Gordon Wheeler for his insightful deconstruction of the individualist paradigm and introduction of the new relational paradigm. Taking full advantage of the work done by post-modern philosophers and psychologists Wheeler demonstrates the limitations of seeing ourselves and the world through the lens of a separate "I" versus an objective "other". We are taken on a journey from the early Greeks through the work of Freud and even Fritz Perls to help us see all the implications of identifying with this now outdated view. In contrast, the new paradigm is intersubjective and relational, constructing meaning and self at the boundary of where we have contact with ourselves, others, and the world and we find the boundaries are fluid and overlapping. As paradoxes and polarities are resolved in a larger field view, we find hope for a world that is suffering, if not in peril, due to the rigid and repeating polarities that separate us and too often end in conflict, if not war. Whether we find our selves too alone in our work or with our problems, or feel shame from concluding that we have no place in our lives just now, or whether we observe the bifurcation in our congress, between the sexes, or between countries, it is clear that we need a new, more revealing, and healing vision to connect us all at a deeper, more meaningful level. Thanks to Gordon Wheeler for his contribution to us through constructing and elucidating this healing (wholing) view. I'd like to note that this work is not only theoretical but makes use of illustrative exercises completed in training groups which we can participate in as well. This brings the theoretical work directly into our own experience which is grounding and supportive of our own insights and growth.

I was torn between tearing through the chapters and slowing down enough to savor and try on the concepts as they applied to my own life. Loved how the real world people and their reports clarified what the author was saying. I have a new understanding of self as a result of reading this book and I am much enriched as a result.

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