



Law's Relations: A Relational Theory of Self, Autonomy, and Law

By Jennifer Nedelsky

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Autonomy is one of the core concepts of legal and political thought, yet also one of the least understood. The prevailing theory of liberal individualism characterizes autonomy as independence, yet from a social perspective, this conception is glaringly inadequate. In this brilliantly innovative work, Jennifer Nedelsky claims that we must rethink our notion of autonomy, rejecting the usual vocabulary of control, boundaries, and individual rights. If we understand that we are fundamentally in relation to others, she argues, we will recognize that we become autonomous with others--with parents, teachers, employers, and the state. We should not therefore regard autonomy as merely a conceptual tool for assigning rights, but as a capacity that can be fostered or undermined throughout one's life through the relationships and the societal structures we inhabit. The political project thus should not only be to protect the individual from the state and keep the state out, but to use law to construct relations with the state that enhance autonomy. *Law's Relations* includes many concrete legal applications of her theory of relational autonomy, offering new insights into the debates over due process, judicial review, violence against women, and private versus public law

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About the Author

Jennifer Nedelsky is a Professor of Law and Political Science at the University of Toronto.

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