

Book Review

## Psychological Treatments for Personality Disorders I and II

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Personality disorders (hereafter referred to as PD) are the key to all psychological problems, the litmus test for the validity of each psychotherapeutic approach, the phenomena that, because they are perplexing, pervasive, and resistant to change, should most attract the attention of academics and practitioners seeking to understand the principles of human behavior.

Their very nature is still under discussion, and, in yet another of the paradoxes that surround them, PDs are the problems that seem least likely to conform to biomedical logic in their functioning, while at the same time being the ones that seem most resistant to the abandonment of such logic.

For this reason, the arrival of the academic manual *Psychological Treatments of Personality Disorders (vols. I and II)* is to be received with considerable interest, which is confirmed and increases as one goes through the table of contents and proceeds to read it. From the very first pages it is clear that this is not just another manual—those typical texts whose abundance is inversely proportional to their contributions—but a volume (well, two actually) that directly addresses the problematic nature of these disorders instead of avoiding it by taking it for granted. Not surprisingly, several of its coordinators and the authors of its chapters belong to some of the most conceptually powerful families in Spanish psychology.

And it is precisely this conceptual power that allows us to place PDs in their proper place, to treat them on their own scale, instead of cutting them into the Procrustean bed to which we are so accustomed in psychology. Reading the manual constantly conveys the tension between a traditional classificatory approach and a perhaps more courageous approach that dares to think about these phenomena outside of scholasticism, without the safety net that tables and taxonomies always provide. Do the phenomena encompassed under the category "PD" come already naturally arranged in ten or twelve subtypes—like the thirteen subtypes of placental mammals—or should each case be analyzed based on a functional idiographic approach where their possible taxonomic localization is, at best, irrelevant?

The first section of the first volume offers a broad and updated framework of this stubborn field, as controversial as it is essential. There, we find everything from an exhaustive list of the models based on which PD have been understood, to a review of the assessment tools, essential reading for all clinical and health professionals who deal with these problems. We find very relevant

reflections on the relationship between PD and "concrete" psychological problems, in a brilliant exercise of dialectics between figure and background. And we end the reading with an approach to these disorders based on a contextual logic, probably the approach—both classic and avant-garde—that is most appropriate to these phenomena and that can produce the best clinical results.

And once the path has been opened, it is only necessary to walk it, in all its stages, through all its ramifications, along its entire length. Without dogmas or prejudices, beyond labels and "school" disciplines, the manual by Díaz-Garrido, Al-Halabí, Cangas, and Rodríguez-Otero reviews the various treatments that have promising indicators of efficacy for PD. This is an area that has undergone significant advances in recent decades, which has allowed us to move from a situation in which there were practically no indicated therapeutic approaches to one where professionals now have several well-established options—from classical approaches such as behavioral therapy or cognitive therapy, to more sophisticated therapeutic forms derived from the above, such as schema therapy, acceptance and commitment therapy, or transference-focused psychotherapy. Throughout it all, the interpersonal therapeutic relationship serves as the guiding thread of these new approaches, and the manual we are discussing acknowledges its importance by giving it the extensive treatment it deserves.

Not long ago the appearance of such a text would have been impossible. Its publication is also a celebration of the progress that has been made in this field. Not least of which is the realization that there is little point in distinguishing between academic and clinical approaches when faced with problems of this complexity that bring into play the workings of fundamental aspects of the human psyche. The authors know this and demonstrate it, which is why these volumes are of equal interest both to scholars of human behavior and its dysfunctions, and to practitioners who, on a daily basis, strive to help people who get entangled in these difficulties. It is true that nothing is more practical than a good theory, but it is also true that nothing is more theoretical than good practice, and good practice and good theory are two sides of the same coin in the quality psychological work found within the pages of these manuals.

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