The defective gears of civility: On the purposes of personality

This work examines the longstanding debates in psychiatric nosology regarding the validity of diagnostic categories, the distinction between illness and evil, and the imbrications of morality and diagnosis. These issues are particularly acute for Personality Disorders (PD), where disputes over whether to use discrete categorical or dimensional models are persistent. The authors focus on the ICD-11's adoption of a dimensional model centered on "personality functioning," which assesses deficits in self and interpersonal functioning. The central concern is that this concept relies on unexamined teleological assumptions about the purposes of personality. Tracing the concept's genealogy, the author finds its theoretical roots in psychodynamics and evolutionary psychology, which frame "adaptive" behavior within biological and social contexts. This line of reasoning prompts a critical review of what constitutes adaptive behaviour and its historical relations to economical and political settings. In response, the authors propose that a "political human nature" – grounded in a theoretical prisma reminiscent of Spinoza – offers a more robust framework for understanding personality disorders, moving beyond purely adaptive or functionalist accounts to address the broader philosophical and political dimensions inherent in the concept of personality and its potential teleology.