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Theophrastus's Anaisthetos Transdiagnostic Presentation: comment on Pehlivanidis and Papanikolaou (2022)

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Theophrastus's Anaisthetos Transdiagnostic Presentation: comment on Pehlivanidis and Papanikolaou (2022)

To the Editors,

We were pleased to read Pehlivanidis and Papanikolaou's article¹ and see that more colleagues are recognizing Theophrastus' text as the first description of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)². We agree with the authors' perspective that Theophrastus' description may suggest the presence of more than one neurodevelopmental disorder. In fact, Theophrastus' description aligns with the shared clinical symptoms and underlying neurodevelopmental mechanisms of ADHD and Social Pragmatic Communication Disorder (SPCD).

It is fascinating that a description from over 2000 years ago already presented prototypical individual transdiagnostic aspects that are compatible with a modern biological view of psychiatry. Indeed, it is not unexpected that heritable traits with clear biological underpinnings should have been perceived since the dawn of medicine. A significant leap forward in the development of this field came a few decades ago when Clements (1966)³ published a NIH-sponsored project entitled 'Minimal Brain Dysfunction in Children.' This seminal work prepared the terrain for the ongoing understanding of the grouping of signs, symptoms, and biological factors observed across various neurodevelopmental disorders. This grouping can be present in different spectrums, proportions, and nuances, including children and adults with some impairments that are not solely explained by their cognitive abilities.

Thus, the characterization of 'The Obtuse Man' by Theophrastus could be considered a prototypical case of this more integrated and less fragmented view of what we call neurodevelopmental disorders.

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