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Individualizing Psychological Assessment Using the Five-Factor Model: A Phenomenological, Enactivist Approach

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In this article, we discuss two distinct approaches to the study of lived experience that have non-reductionism at their basis: the human science approach to psychology and the enactive approach to cognitive science. Specifically, we articulate an emerging confluence of the *individualized approach to psychological assessment*—which stems from the human science tradition in psychology—and the *Enactivist Big-5 Theory* (EB5T) of personality—which is grounded in the enactivist tradition in cognitive science. In the theoretical portion of our article, we leverage our demonstration of the philosophical continuity between the human and cognitive sciences through their shared commitment to phenomenology by discussing core phenomenological concepts shared by both traditions. We then propose a phenomenological reformulation of individual differences in traits as reflecting differences in *styles of world-enactment*. In the clinical portion of our article, we demonstrate the clinical utility of our theoretical contribution through a vignette in which a patient's lived struggles with anxiety were assessed phenomenologically and their styles of world-enactment thematized through an individualized application of EB5T's phenomenological principles for understanding personality as lived experience.

Public Significance Statement
This article discusses the phenomenological underpinnings of enactivist cognitive science and the individualized approach to psychological assessment and argues for a mutual synthesis of the two approaches. It demonstrates a clinical application of enactively individualized psychological assessment using the five-factor model (FFM) of personality through a case presentation.

Keywords: phenomenology, enactivism, Big Five, individualized assessment, personality

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Human experience is irreducibly complex, yet a science of lived experience seems unlikely without considerable reduction. After all, two of the most prevalent explanatory paradigms produced in the mind sciences—behaviorism and cognitivism—were both

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predicated on reductionist grounds. Though reductionism in the mind sciences may be difficult to define (see Hovhannisyan, 2022), most forms of it tend to emphasize and even prioritize third-personal data as measured by instruments in experimental settings over first-personal data grounded in the lived experience of individuals. The functionality of the mind—one of the core *explananda* in the study of subjectivity—is not to be found within lived experience but in its physical substrate.

Nevertheless, the reductionist orthodoxy in the mind sciences has not been without its dissidents. Non-reductionist approaches give priority to lived experience and have generally regarded knowledge gained through third-personal means as derivative.[1] In this article, we plan to discuss two distinct approaches to the study of lived experience that have non-reductionism at their basis: the human science approach to psychology and the enactive approach to cognitive science. Specifically, we venture to articulate an emerging confluence of the *individualized approach to psychological assessment*—which stems from the human science tradition in psychology (Fischer, 1994)—and the *Enactivist Big-5 Theory* (EB5T) of personality—which is grounded in the enactivist tradition in cognitive science (Hovhannisyan & Vervaeke, 2022). Our decision to focus on these two is philosophically motivated insofar as both approaches have made extensive use of phenomenology. Despite the fact that phenomenology has been common to both, however, the two have rarely interfaced with one another (e.g., Hasek, 2016; McInerney & Walker, 2002). In dialoguing the individualized approach to psychological assessment with EB5T, our philosophical aim is to ameliorate this gap by illustrating the continuity between the human sciences and the cognitive sciences vis-à-vis their shared commitment to non-reductionism through phenomenology.

In addition to our philosophical rationale for pursuing such a dialogue between the human and cognitive sciences, our motivations are also deeply clinical. Specifically, by grounding enactivism in a non-reductionist approach to applied psychological assessment, we aim to illustrate the practical utility not only of bearing a non-reductionist attitude in the clinical context but of what the enactive approach, more generally, has to offer to clinicians in psychology. Conversely, we believe that such a grounding can in turn benefit enactivist research by extending it beyond mere theory and making it more deeply pertinent to lived experience—namely, with respect to the clinical practice of assessment.

We begin our article with an overview of some of the core phenomenological themes that have been deeply formative of both the human and cognitive sciences. In the second section, we advance a discussion of the individualized approach to assessment to highlight how phenomenology has prefigured it both at the level of theoretical assumptions and practical implementation. In the third section, we elucidate the basic phenomenological commitments of the enactive approach through a historical-philosophical reading. Accordingly, in the fourth, we demonstrate how these commitments inform enactivism's understanding of personality, EB5T, which affords a phenomenological understanding of individual differences not merely as differences in trait measures within a person, but as differences in styles of how individuals bring forth, experience, and participate in their worlds—a process we term *world-enactment* (Hovhannisyan & Vervaeke, 2022). In the final section of our article, we tie our theoretical discussions of the individualized approach and EB5T together through a clinical vignette in which the NEO-FFI-3—a test instrument derived from the five-factor model (FFM) of personality on which EB5T is based—was used to assess the structure and dynamics of a patient's lived struggles with anxiety phenomenologically. In modeling

[1] For instance, while reductionists have sought to explain instances of purposive or "teleological" activity away from the scientific picture, non-reductionists have sought to secure a place for teleology in nature and in lived experience (Hovhannisyan, 2022).

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a manner of conducting psychological assessment that is *explicitly* in line with enactivist and phenomenological understandings of subjectivity, we seek to demonstrate how interdisciplinary dialogue of this sort can afford novel articulations and applications of non-reductionist approaches to lived experience to human science psychologists, cognitive scientists, and clinicians alike.

From Phenomenological Psychology to Transcendental Phenomenology

As we closely follow the non-reductionist thread that can be seen tying together the human and cognitive sciences (Gordon, 2013; Hovhannisyan, 2018, 2022; Hovhannisyan & Dewey, 2017; Hovhannisyan & Vervaeke, 2022; Robbins, 2013; Robbins & Gordon, 2015; Sundararajan & Ho, 2020; Varela, 1996), we are led into the domain of phenomenology. The overview of phenomenological thought that we aim to present here is not exhaustive but focuses on those contributions which we find of mutual relevance to a human science approach to assessment and the Enactivist Big-5 Theory of the cognitive sciences. To this end, we frame our discussion around the Husserlian strand of transcendental phenomenology, particularly as it is presented in Husserl's (1954/1970) posthumous work, *Crisis*, as we articulate some of its core themes.

In the context of psychological research, as well as in philosophy, phenomenology is generally introduced as a method of reflecting upon experience by way of the *époche*. The époche is an attitude in which we bracket "the metaphysical and epistemological assumptions that characterize our daily life" (Zahavi, 2008, p. 44). The task during phenomenological bracketing is to concern ourselves not with whether a person's intentional contents—that is, their beliefs, judgments, or reasons—bear (metaphysical or epistemic) validity but with what they mean with respect to the person's manner of being in relation to their world.

A defining feature of transcendental phenomenology is that it treats the phenomenological reduction only as a preliminary step in what it regards to be the fundamental task of phenomenological reflection. The phenomenological reduction (the first époche) reveals to us that the world given to us in our prereflective awareness is not actually a collection of physical objects as conceived, for instance, in a Newtonian fashion, but a field of possibilities for *action* (Husserl, 1954/1970; Merleau-Ponty, 1948/2004). Indeed, the scientific-objectivistic meanings that are generally attributed to an object—such as its composition, mass, or size as being defining features—are achievements of a particular kind of theoretical attitude that characterizes the objective sciences. On the contrary, the prereflective meanings that are original to our lived experience of the object in our situated (worldly) engagements have to do with the possibilities for action that it affords us. The first époche allows us to encounter both ourselves (as experiencing subjects) and the world (as lived) in a naïve sense, rather than as apprehended from the point of view of a scientific mind whose attitude is characteristically theoretical rather than practical. The transcendental reduction, then—as the hallmark of Husserlian phenomenology—acts as a second époche that drops inquiry to a level beneath even our prereflective awareness of the world and ourselves. Specifically, it seeks to elucidate two important points: (a) the mutual inseparability of self and world as two constituting poles of a unitary structure (i.e., experience), and (b) the fact that no form of reality (whether it be the reality described by science or of our prereflective experience of ourselves and the world) is ontologically pregiven—even if experienced as such—but rather *constituted* or *brought forth* by our manners of being-in-the-world.

To begin with, the transcendental reduction invites us to ponder the conditions of possibility for certain types of experience as they are lived, which must occur only once an experience has been subjected to the first époche (the phenomenological reduction). For instance,

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the phenomenological reduction might allow us to realize that we experience a table as "hard" even before we have made contact with its surface, as though its "hardness" is a property given by the table itself. Yet by posing the question "What are the conditions of possibility of the type of experience that characterizes the hardness of a table?"—and thereby initiating the transcendental turn in our reflections—we very rapidly come to realize that the hardness of the table is neither an objective property of the table, nor is it reducible to a mere projection on the part of the perceiving subject (ourselves). After all, we could imagine how altering either what is on the subject-pole (e.g., the physical size and strength of the experiencing subject) or the object-pole of the experience (e.g., the material comprising the table) would unequivocally transform the type of experience had from one of hardness to one of "brittleness" (in the case that the subject's physical size and strength were multiplied a hundredfold) or one of "softness" (in the case that the table's base material was replaced with sponge). The first transcendental insight thus brought into light through this example is that the classical Cartesian categories of object and subject, inner and outer, are fundamentally insufficient for accounting for experiences like the hardness of the table. The broader implication is that *all* and *any* possible experiences had by an experiencing subject necessarily implicate a world-horizon that extends beyond the subject (i.e., the object-pole), and, accordingly, any possible worldly phenomenon that is the object of our reflection must always in turn presuppose an experiencing subject for whom to exist (i.e., the subject-pole).[2]

The first transcendental insight thus strongly endorses a kind of non-reductionism with respect to the relationship between the subjective and the objective, a pair of categories that jointly and irreducibly prefigure and are subsumed by one and the same structural arc: lived experience. The task is not to grant ontological or epistemological priority to the objective or subjective levels of analysis but to promote a disciplined circulation between these two levels to disclose the dynamics of the relationship that grounds them both. Indeed, it is not that the world grounds the subject (physicalism) or even the subject the world (idealism). Rather, it is the relationship between the two that acts as their transcendental grounding (transcendentalism in the Husserlian sense). Hence, we are led to the second transcendental insight, namely that of *constitution* or *enactment*.

If the hardness of the table is neither just a property of the table nor a property of the mind that is perceiving it, then what exactly is it and how do we come to know it? The answer to this question from the Husserlian perspective is that we come to know the hardness of the table through bodily means. Hardness is what is perceived when we press our hand against the tabletop and exert force, only to find the pressure building up in our hands and hand joints, until—once a certain threshold has been reached—we notice a pain make itself felt at the point of contact between ourselves and the table (i.e., our hand), extending all the way to our arm and even our shoulder if pressed harder. While a scientific-objectivistic account of hardness might explain it as a property of the wood or the metal that composes the table, our prereflective sense of its hardness necessarily invokes our bodily manners of engagement with it, such as what is felt when we press against its surface. Subjecting such a description of our prereflective experience of hardness to a transcendental reduction (époche) discloses how, despite our prereflective understanding (and treatment) of the hardness of the table as a "pregiven" property of the table in our experience of it, hardness is nevertheless an emergent property that arises from how we come to (actively) relate to the table through embodied means. This is to say that the experience of the table's hardness,

[2] Merleau-Ponty (1964/1969) famously articulated the intentional arc of self and world in terms of the "chiasm" (*The Visible & The Invisible*).

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far from being a pregiven reality, is in fact actively *constituted* or *brought forth*—or *enacted*—by our manners of embodied interaction with it.

For Husserl, the lived body was the crucial nexus point between the world and experience. Specifically, the lived body prefigures our experience of the world, and our experience of the world reflects our subjectively lived, embodied self. The transcendental époche was an articulation of a method of rendering the mutual inseparability of human-being-in-the-world *intelligible* and *thematizable*, and it is in this way that the transcendental reduction goes beyond *the world* as it makes focal the self-world relation—the lifeworld, as such.

Most empirical phenomenological research in the human sciences has the phenomenological reduction at its basis but does not advance further (or fully) into the transcendental domain. Indeed, phenomenological psychology has chiefly been concerned with gathering and fleshing out descriptions of our prereflective experiences of the world and ourselves (e.g., Giorgi, 2009). Transcendental phenomenology goes beyond phenomenological psychology by way of the transcendental reduction, which helps us to understand *how*, through our patterns of *doing* and *being* in the world, our experiences *become* the phenomena that they *are*. Phenomenologists, like Husserl, have generally described the function of the époche as a bracketing of our metaphysical and epistemological presuppositions. What it means to be presuppositionless is not to be without presuppositions at all, however, but to be transcendentally oriented toward our relationship with this or that type of experience, which, we come to learn, is never pregiven but always fundamentally enacted through embodied means (D. Orange, personal communication, 2021).

This overview of Husserlian transcendental phenomenology explicates how core concepts—like the phenomenological reduction, the transcendental reduction, enaction, embodiment, and the transcendental ground—are necessary for understanding the non-reductionist thread that runs through and weaves together the human and cognitive sciences. In the next section, we discuss the phenomenological underpinnings of the individualized approach to psychological assessment, which stems from the human science tradition in psychology.

Individualized Assessment: Phenomenology in the Clinical Context

In the 1970s, Constance Fischer began articulating the foundations of an individualized (collaborative) approach to psychological assessment that was grounded in the human science tradition in psychology. Fischer recognized the influence that the phenomenologists had on her work (Fischer, 1994, p. 349), but seldom did she explicate the theoretical depth of this influence. Rather, her aims were largely concerned with demonstrating the practical utility and applications of phenomenological thinking in the context of clinical assessment. Her project, after all, was a response to the growing awareness, particularly among humanistic psychologists, of the limitations of standard assessment practices in the field. Assessment was predominantly concerned with using test instruments to classify individuals based on statistically derived categories to make general predictions about their patterns of behavior (Fischer, 1994). Moreover, assessment reports were generally written in theoretically heavy language, meant to be shared only with other clinicians and never made available to the assessee, and findings often discounted contextual and personal data (like anecdotes) that formed an important part of the clinical picture.

Fischer argued that these limitations could be ameliorated by grounding assessment in phenomenological, human science principles "through which a person's actual life becomes the subject matter of assessment" (Fischer, 1994, p. v). Within the individualized approach, Fischer explains, "the primary data are life events, both as reported and as directly witnessed

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during assessment sessions […] Comportment during testing is regarded as a specialized instance of other life events" (Fischer, 1994, p. v). She elaborates, "Data derived from testing, such as scores and statistical profiles, are tools to help revise and refine one's direct impressions of the client" (p. v). In other words, "Test scores, categories, and related research are used as *bridges* into a particular life, and then as our *tools* for exploring that life [whereby] the *life world* is given priority" (Fischer, 2000, p. 3).

Broadly speaking, the phenomenologists regard descriptions of human experience that have been generated by way of the phenomenological époche—(i.e., as denoting prereflectively lived human reality)—as more real than those generated from having assumed an objectivistic-scientific attitude with regards to the mind. Similarly, the individualized approach stresses the importance of describing the life events of clients in detailed terms that capture the clients' comportment with respect to their world, rather than relying exclusively on data derived from "test scores, theoretical constructs, and research literature" to make sense of it (Fischer, 1994, p. 46). Fischer elaborates:

> Our explanatory system is that of contextualized primary data. We do not look for underlying causes, but for a comprehension of the fullness of an event—its what/how/when (and when not). By "when," we refer to the context—temporal, physical, personal, and interpersonal aspects of the phenomenon, all understood as they are lived by the client and as they are perceived by the assessor. By "how," we refer to the shaped/shaping evolution of the event, to the process through which it comes into being. "What" refers to when and how, as seen through some particular behavior. This full description of the behavior is a description of its structure, which attempts to capture the holistic way in which biology, world, and experience are aspects of a unitary moment [in which] the aspects imply each other. (Fischer, 1994, p. 47)

Fischer's use of the term comportment was borrowed from Merleau-Ponty, but her conceptualization of comportment as reflecting an irreducible mutuality between experience and action hearkens back to classical phenomenological notions more broadly (1994, pp. 350–351). Indeed, it is the structural unity of "experience, action, body, and environment" that individualized assessment seeks to disclose and thematize for clinical purposes. Assessment reports should be written in everyday language, seeking to capture and convey the various lifeworld dynamics characteristic of the client's situation in an accessible manner, with the understanding that these will eventually be shared with the client and possibly impact them in a meaningful way (1994, p. 47). A general principle of report writing is thus to convey the findings in terms that are not only "*experience near* but are *life near*" (Fischer, 2000, p. 11).

Fischer's commitment to capturing lifeworld themes reflects her deep understanding of the importance of being phenomenologically oriented toward experience and a simultaneous recognition of the formative role of situatedness and embodiment in clients' experiences of their suffering. To this end, Fischer adopted von Eckartsberg's (1971) term *experiaction* to evoke the "simultaneously actional, decisional, stylistic, and habitual aspects" of the structural unity of the self-body-world relation (Fischer, 1994, p. 37). Her clinical appreciation of this mutuality as it was taken up by clients in their own particular lifeworld situations exemplified a disciplined form of non-reductionism in the context of psychological assessment (e.g., Fischer, 1994). Furthermore, the participatory nature of *experiaction* sought to capture and convey the enactive dimension of human lived experience. It reflected a deep phenomenological concern in the individualized approach to understanding how a client brings forth, lives through, and participates in the unfolding of their experiences through fundamentally embodied means.

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The phenomenological commitments of Fischer's work form its foundation, which has since been carried into a broader field of "collaborative, therapeutic assessment" or CTA (Finn et al., 2012). Despite the various contributions made by this important field, the phenomenological grounding of Fischer's approach has not been articulated in great detail but left relatively implicit. It is this invisibility that we seek to ameliorate with our paper by interfacing the individualized approach to assessment with EB5T, an emerging cognitive scientific framework for understanding human personality phenomenologically. To this end, we initiate this important dialogue in the next section by reviewing the enactive approach to cognitive science, which grounds EB5T and, in turn, has a grounding in phenomenology.

Enactivism: Phenomenology in the Scientific Context

The enactive approach emerged in the 1990s as a critical response to the cognitivist paradigm, which itself emerged from the cognitive revolution 40 years prior. Methodologically, the rise of cognitivism welcomed into the mind sciences a novel, positive account of cognition that revolutionized the manner in which research had been conducted since the behaviorist era, affording novel (scientific) means of studying mental life experimentally.[3] Theoretically, the emergent (cognitivist) account of the mind depicted cognition as a physically instantiated process of symbol manipulation in relation to a pregiven world, whereby the mind would realize its functionality by, first, accurately representing the external world through inner (symbolic) means, and, second, acting on these representations to enact relevant changes in the world—thereby solving its problems.[4]

Despite the much-needed conceptual and methodological opportunities that were afforded by the cognitive revolution, philosophers of mind and cognitive scientists eventually came to question the degree of its radicalness. By the 1990s, several philosophically motivated critiques had been launched against cognitivist theories of mind, all demonstrating in some fashion that the same basic philosophical assumptions that were once used to ground behaviorism were now (ironically) playing a foundational role in cognitivism. One such basic assumption that is of particular importance to this article was that the world with which the mind is contending is somehow *already there*, ontologically pregiven to the mind as the objective ground on which it stands. Cognitivism assimilated this assumption and was thereby able to advance a distinctly representational account of the mind in which the mind stands in a representational relationship with this "pregiven world."

As a response to such cognitivist notions of mind and world, enactivism ventured to revolutionize the cognitive sciences not just at the level of theoretical and methodological assumptions but of basic philosophical commitments. Enactivism thus advanced the central claim that the world being contended with by the mind is not an objectively pregiven one, but one that is brought forth or enacted through the mind's own manners of situated and embodied interaction with it (Noë, 2009; Thompson, 2007, 2011; Varela et al., 1991). Importantly, enactivism rendered the role played by biological embodiment central to its understanding of the processes of constitution that organize and bestow lived experience its lived form,

[3] Cognitive psychologists concerned themselves with studying various cognitive processes (e.g., attention, problem-solving, planning, language, etc.) in measurable ways. Artificial Intelligence research became concerned with engineering machines that could behave in intelligent ways (i.e., solve problems) similar to human beings. Neuroscientists became concerned with the ways in which the brain and nervous system carried out their functions, and cognitive neuroscience sought to explain the functioning of cognitive/mental operations in terms of the functioning of the brain.

[4] The representational view of the mind served as the basis of cognitivist accounts of problem-solving like Newell and Simon's (1972) General Problem Solver.

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drawing much of its philosophical inspiration from classical phenomenological understandings of embodiment and situated action.

Indeed, enactivism was originally presented as a "continuation of a program of research founded over a generation ago by the French philosopher, Merleau-Ponty," whose contributions were essentially an articulation of earlier phenomenological themes tracing back to Husserl himself (Varela et al. 1991, p. xv). As such, one of the core phenomenological themes that prefigures enactivist understandings of lived experience is the distinction between the body as a living or physiological (objective) body—*Körper*—and the body as a (subjectively) lived body of experience—*Leib* (Thompson, 2011, p. 8). This distinction originated with Husserl (*Crisis*, 1954/1970) and, like several other important phenomenological concepts, was articulated to a significant degree by Merleau-Ponty throughout his life (e.g., in *The Structure of Behaviour, 1942/1963*, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, *1945/1962*, and *The Visible and the Invisible*, *1964/1969*). Like Husserl, Merleau-Ponty discussed in astounding detail the manner in which the lived body stood as the nexus point between the embodied mind (or self) and the lifeworld (e.g., in *The Visible and The Invisible, 1964/1969*). For instance, in a discussion about the interpenetration of mind and world, Merleau-Ponty famously wrote:

> The world is inseparable from the subject, but from a subject which is nothing but a project of the world, and the subject is inseparable from the world, but from a world which the subject itself projects. (1945/1962, p. 430 as cited in Varela et al., 1991, p. 4)

This crucial insight thus leads us to yet another core phenomenological theme: enaction.[5] Indeed, enactivism received its very name from the phenomenological realization that the relationship between embodied self and world is not only deeply reflected in the lived body but is even responsible for the very manners in which self and world *as types of experience* are jointly brought forth or *enacted* by the embodied mind in its lived situation. Just as the hardness of a table is not *in* the table or *in* the mind that is perceiving it but rather emerges or is brought forth through the embodied relationship that unfolds between the two, so too all lived experience is brought forth or *enacted* through our embodied manners of being in the world. It is this in-between space that became the focal point of study for the enactive approach to cognitive science.

Enactivists typically employ the "strong life-mind continuity thesis" to leverage their nonreductionist stance with respect to lived experience. The continuity thesis states that complex human minds share a core set of organizational and phenomenological properties with basic forms of life (Thompson, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2011). From the enactivist standpoint, conceptualizing the relationship between mind and matter thereby poses the task not of relating two ontologically opposed categories but of making common reference to life, the intervening variable between the physical and the mental. Despite its theoretical and methodological success, however, enactivism faces an important limitation that it must overcome to secure its nonreductionist commitments. Specifically, the prototypical enactivist strategy begins by adopting the single cell as the paradigmatic case for minimal cognition, which then is used to leverage the life-mind continuity thesis and the non-reductionism that it affords with human lived experience (Thompson, 2007; Varela et al., 1991). Yet generalizing from the phenomenological properties of single-celled organisms to those of complex human minds poses an obvious

[5] In fact, Merleau-Ponty (1964/1969) devoted his final manuscript, *The Visible and the Invisible*, which was published posthumously, to articulating the depth and extent of the (transcendental ground of the) self-world relation, which he termed "the chiasm."

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methodological challenge and an attendant risk of reducing human intentionality to the teleology of a cell (Hovhannisyan & Vervaeke, 2022).

To preserve its commitment to non-reductionism, some have recently argued that enactivism must become more distinctly human in its articulation (Hovhannisyan, 2018, 2022; Hovhannisyan & Vervaeke, 2022; Robbins, 2013; Robbins & Gordon, 2015). The proposed solution is to facilitate a disciplined dialogue between enactivism and the empirical human sciences to advance enactive cognitive science beyond the life of a cell and into the mind of a person (Hovhannisyan & Vervaeke, 2022). In the following section, we review Hovhannisyan and Vervaeke's (2022) enactivist theory of human personality, EB5T, which constitutes an important step forward in making enactivism more humanistic in this way. In the final section, we demonstrate the convergence of enactivist cognitive science and human science psychology as it is realized in the context of enactively individualized psychological assessment.

Enactivist Big Five Theory of Personality

Enactivist Big-5 Theory (EB5T) is an original synthesis of core concepts from cognitive science, phenomenological philosophy, and personality psychology (Hovhannisyan & Vervaeke, 2022). Its broad aim is to elaborate a model of human cognitive life that simultaneously enables enactivism to advance beyond its minimal models of cognition while providing the five-factor model (FFM) of personality—one of the most studied and esteemed psychological tools for predicting human behavior—a grounding in enactivism and phenomenology. Below, we discuss the core themes of EB5T in preparation for the following section. Our purpose is not to review EB5T fully (see Hovhannisyan & Vervaeke, 2022) but only to the extent that is needed to effectively situate our following demonstration of enactively individualized psychological assessment in its proper theoretical context.

Personality psychologists are generally interested in two sets of research questions: questions concerning those aspects of personality that transform over time and questions concerning those aspects that remain relatively stable. The trait approach to the study of personality is primarily concerned with the latter.[6]

The FFM is a forerunner of the trait approach as it describes personality along five major traits or dimensions: Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, Neuroticism, Openness, and Extraversion. Each of the traits described by the FFM is qualitatively distinct from the others and is used for predicting global patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving that are presumed to have some degree of stability across time. Moreover, the kinds of behaviors predicted by the FFM are nontrivial. Individual differences in measures of trait Conscientiousness, for instance, are predictive of educational and workplace success, marital stability, and even longevity (Costa & McCrae, 1992; McCrae & Costa, 2003).

Despite its descriptive and predictive utility, for a long time the FFM lacked an explanatory basis for its understanding of personality traits (DeYoung, 2015). In the last decade, DeYoung (2015) has sought to ameliorate this explanatory gap by conceptualizing FFM trait functions in cybernetic terms, advancing a Cybernetic Big-5 Theory (CB5T) of personality. Cybernetics is "the study of goal-directed, self-regulating systems" (DeYoung, 2015,

[6] Traits in this literature are distinguished from and contrasted with states. The difference between the two is that states refer to patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving that unfold across shorter timescales (e.g., seconds, minutes, hours, or days) whereas traits refer to patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving that unfold across longer timescales (e.g., weeks, months, years). An example of a state is an emotion, such as anger. If the emotion of anger lasts for days, we refer to it as a *mood*. However, if a person has a proclivity of getting angry, we might regard it as a trait and even attribute it to their personality, referring to them as an angry person.

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p. 33) and was originally used to ground the cognitivist paradigm in the early days of cognitive science (Varela et al., 1991). It drew from developments in complex and dynamical systems theory and was heavily grounded in evolutionary thought, two very powerful explanatory paradigms in the natural and life sciences. To approach questions of function from a cybernetics perspective is therefore to ponder the adaptivity which they implicate in relation to an environment that exerts selective pressure on the organism (in the evolutionary sense). Accordingly, grounding the FFM in cybernetics affords an understanding of personality function that seeks to disclose the inherent adaptivity of traits and articulate their manners of manifestation at the level of individual cognition. Fortuitously, such a grounding makes personality from the FFM perspective amenable to theorization in enactivist terms, which we plan to discuss only after providing an overview of the traits and their functions from the perspective of CB5T.

Cybernetic Big-5 Theory (CB5T) defines traits as "probabilistic descriptions of relatively stable patterns of emotion, motivation, cognition, and behavior, in response to classes of stimuli that have been present in human cultures over evolutionary time" (DeYoung, 2015, p. 35). Each of the traits is conceptualized as a complex system of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral tendencies, which adapts the human person to a general problem domain existing in the human environment. Trait Extraversion, to begin with, is explained as an adaptation to the problem of reward such that individual differences in Extraversion correspond to "variation in parameters of the [human cybernetic] mechanisms designed to respond to rewards" (DeYoung, 2015, p. 42). Behavioral tendencies associated with Extraversion are thus reflective of the individual's relationship to noticing, responding to, and securing possible rewards in their environment. High scorers tend to be quite excitable, enthusiastic, and assertive in their pursuit of rewards, whereas low scorers tend to be more laidback and, at times, even indifferent.

Trait Neuroticism is explained as an adaptation to the problem of threat such that individual differences in Neuroticism correspond to variation in "the parameters that determine whether any increase in psychological entropy [uncertainty] triggers a defensive response" (DeYoung, 2013, p. 43). High scorers on trait Neuroticism tend to experience negative emotion (e.g., anger, anxiety, depression) more often and are more concerned with avoiding or managing threats than are low scorers, who generally appear more calm or relaxed.

Accordingly, trait Openness is explained as an adaptation to the problem of cognitive framing such that individual differences in Openness correspond to variation in the parameters on the mechanisms designed to respond to the incentive reward value of information (DeYoung, 2013, 2015). High scorers tend to have strong aesthetic and intellectual interests, enjoy discussing ideas and seeking artistic experiences, whereas low scorers tend to appreciate concrete styles of thought and tend to remain within culturally predefined bounds.

Trait Agreeableness "represents the general tendency toward cooperation and altruism, as opposed to exploitation and lack of concern for others" (DeYoung, 2015, p. 46). Individual differences in trait Agreeableness thus correspond to variation in the parameters on the mechanisms designed to prioritize and coordinate one's own goals with those of others. High scorers tend to appreciate and seek out acts and styles of behavior that lead to social harmony while avoiding possible sources of conflict, while low scorers tend to be less averse to having disagreements with others, more readily state their views and pursue their goals even if it means risking hurting others' feelings or causing disappointment.

Finally, trait Conscientiousness is explained as an adaptation to the problem of prioritizing goals across various timescales. Individual differences in trait Conscientiousness thus correspond to "variation in the mechanisms that allow people to follow rules and prioritize

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nonimmediate goals" (DeYoung, 2015, p. 45). High scorers tend to live more in the future, keep their environments relatively neat and orderly, and are more punctual overall. Low scorers tend to live more in the present and are less concerned with maintaining orderliness and strict schedules.

CB5T thus explains individual differences in human personality as differences in functioning along the five major dimensions described by the FFM. It offers a powerful theoretical framework for understanding personality because of its appropriation of the FFM, which is descriptively rich, predictively useful, and constitutes a statistically plausible approximation of the *universal* structures of human personality (DeYoung, 2015). Furthermore, it has explanatory utility because of its grounding in cybernetics, which affords an understanding of the inherent adaptivity of traits that can readily be theorized in cognitive scientific terms (DeYoung, 2015).

Given the impressive feats of CB5T, what exactly does EB5T add to the picture? Essentially, EB5T borrows the same descriptive and functional understanding of the five traits that is central to CB5T but instead grounds it in an enactivist account of embodied cognition. Such a grounding then affords a phenomenological and non-reductionist interpretation of personality traits as fundamentally embodied and world-involving, thereby establishing a deep theoretical compatibility between cognitive science, contemporary personality theory, and phenomenological approaches to clinical practice and assessment, like Fischer's individualized approach. This is especially important since the interdisciplinary space inhabited by these three fields is pregnant with radical possibilities for all three disciplines but has seldom been explored. Before we demonstrate what such an exploration might consist of through our application of EB5T in the individualized assessment context, let us first elaborate on the core themes of EB5T starting with the notion of *optimal gripping*.

The notion of optimal gripping originates from the phenomenological contributions of Merleau-Ponty, "whose work […] constitutes the theoretical and philosophical backdrop of enactivism" (Hovhannisyan & Vervaeke, 2022, p. 356). It construes the primary function of the embodied mind as aimed at *skillfully coping* with the world (Bruineberg et al., 2018; Bruineberg & Rietveld, 2014; Dreyfus, 2014; Rietveld, 2008). In the sense that Hovhannisyan and Vervaeke (2022) employ it, optimal gripping specifically entails processes of optimization of trade-off relationships inherent in acts of problem-solving, which EB5T appropriates in its understanding of traits (Vervaeke et al., 2012; Vervaeke & Ferraro, 2013).

To demonstrate this point, let us turn to the example of reading a book. Holding a book too far or too close to one's face renders the text illegible. What one must do is hold the book at the optimal distance from one's face to render the very act of reading possible. At times, when a word on a page appears faded, one must draw the book closer to better see the details on the page to make sense of what is written. Conversely, when one's eyes have tired from reading too intently for too long, one must lower the book and create some (but not too much) distance to alleviate the accumulated tension in one's eyes. The process of reading a book is *embodied* and *enacted* through an ongoing process of optimization of holding the book at the right distance from one's eyes. Moreover, it is world-involving (*extended* into the world) insofar as the book is a worldly object, and it is necessarily *embedded* in a meaningful context of interaction (e.g., trying to understand a story or study for an exam). Optimal gripping is thus an inherently embodied, enactive, extended, and embedded act —and hence an enactivist construct. To read the book, one must continually realize the kind of (optimal) grip that is needed to make reading possible.

Hovhannisyan and Vervaeke (2022) follow suit with Merleau-Ponty and adopt the account of cognition as optimal gripping, in which all cognitive problem-solving "consists

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of acts of embodied interaction (skillful coping) involving processes of optimization like those involved in reading a book (e.g., optimizing the distance between the book and one's eyes)" (Hovhannisyan & Vervaeke, 2022, p. 357). This allows the authors to advance their enactivist conception of traits as "dispositional tendencies for how we come to optimally grip our distinctly human worlds" (along the five major dimensions described by the FFM; Hovhannisyan & Vervaeke, 2022, p. 341). Accordingly, EB5T conceptualizes the differential functionality of traits not as denoting interpersonal variation in the parameters on the *cybernetic* human system, but as reflecting *stylistic differences* in optimal gripping tendencies between human beings (Hovhannisyan & Vervaeke, 2022, p. 369).

Subsequently, while CB5T recognizes the contextual nature of traits, EB5T goes further by advancing an explicitly phenomenological understanding of traits. Specifically, as an enactivist concept, optimal gripping affords "a technical means of reconceptualizing personality traits from properties that are internal to oneself to ways in which one tends to participate in and experience one's world" (p. 369). The authors elaborate:

> According to EB5T and its world-involving conception of traits, if we wish to better understand who someone is, we must look beyond their personality measures and turn to their world. As we have argued, individual differences in personality do not merely reflect differences in optimal gripping tendencies but also differences in styles of world-enactment—a structural feature of personality that is irreducible and must be taken into account by clinicians wishing to helpfully intervene in persons' lives. (Hovhannisyan & Vervaeke, 2022, p. 372)

The point here is fundamentally phenomenological in that EB5T's world-involving conception of traits necessarily implicates the structural mutuality of self and world that is a cornerstone of phenomenological philosophy (e.g., Husserl, 1954/1970; Merleau-Ponty, 1942/1963, 1945/1962, 1964/1969, 1948/2004). Specifically, EB5T's conceptualization of the phenomenology of individual differences introduces the notion of *world-enactment,* directly linking person and situation at the level of phenomenological structure. Individual differences thus become stylistic differences in the kinds of worlds individuals tend to enact, experience, and participate in as situated and embodied selves.

An important implication of EB5T's (world-involving) conception of traits is the criterion of psychological dysfunction that it affords: if optimal gripping denotes a particular manner of relating to worldly tasks, then suboptimal gripping (a necessary element of psychopathology) occurs when contextual demands exceed a trait's finite capacity to adapt. Recall, for instance, that individual differences in trait Extraversion correspond to differences in styles of noticing, responding to, and pursuing possible rewards in one's world. This means that high scorers tend to take greater risks because they are more strongly driven by opportunities. In contexts where the risk of punishment is low and the payoffs are great, behaviors motivated by Extraversion clearly have an advantage (e.g., attending parties and social gatherings). However, in contexts where the risks are higher (e.g., attending parties and social gatherings amidst a pandemic), introverted behaviors are rewarded instead (e.g., social distancing). Extraversion, as seen through these possible scenarios, is therefore neither inherently adaptive nor maladaptive but only in relation to the worldly demands being faced by the situated person. All of this is to say that traits are functional, trait functionality is context-dependent, and trait dysfunction ensues when worldly conditions exceed the adaptive reach of a trait's functionality. This logic applies to the adaptivity of traits more broadly in EB5T.

As an enactivist theory of personality, EB5T creatively upholds the life-mind continuity by explaining the functionality of traits in optimal gripping terms: as the manners through

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which autopoietically embodied *human* minds realize their immanent teleology. Moreover, as an enactivist theory of *human* personality, EB5T allows enactivism to consider human cognitive life on its own terms instead of risking reduction by staying confined to the minimal models employed previously (e.g., the single-celled autopoietic model). In this light, EB5T constitutes a non-reductionist, phenomenological theory of human personality that is grounded in enactivist cognitive science. Because of its grounding in enactivism, EB5T thus has at its core many of the same phenomenological themes that figure into the individualized approach to assessment. In the following section, we take the opportunity to extend the emerging dialogue between the cognitive and human sciences by exploring the deep phenomenological continuity between EB5T and the individualized approach to assessment. We do this by discussing a clinical vignette in which a patient's struggles with anxiety were assessed using the NEO-FFI-3.

The Phenomenology of Individual Differences in Assessment

The vignette presented in this section is based on clinical information about the lived experience of a patient struggling with anxiety. The vignette is presented from the first-person perspective of the treating therapist. Some of the facts have been altered to a significant degree to ensure anonymity while nevertheless disclosing the spirit of this individual's struggle and illustrating the essence of what an enactively individualized approach to psychological assessment might be able to offer to clinicians in practice. In presenting this vignette, our hope is to highlight the utility of the notion of *styles of world-enactment* in the context of case-conceptualization by demonstrating how findings from the NEO can be used phenomenologically to enrich a structural understanding of an individual's lived struggles. In the concluding section, we summarize the contribution of our article to the theory and practice of psychological assessment as well as to researching individual differences phenomenologically.

Identifying Information

At the time of the intake for outpatient psychotherapy, Jessica (pseudonym) was a 22-year-old female, in a long-term relationship, who had recently graduated from college and was pursuing freelance work in fashion styling. Since having recently moved back home with her mother, Jessica had been struggling with ongoing, overarching feelings of anxiety and panic. She attributed part of her anxiety to the interpersonal tension she was experiencing with her mother, but also—and perhaps even mostly—to the pervasive sense of instability she was presently feeling from her job. Above and beyond Jessica's frequent disagreements with her mother, Jessica's recent experiences at work, during which she felt expected to complete unfamiliar tasks that she was not fully prepared for, created immense and debilitating anxiety. She characterized one experience—whereby she lost a sense of control over the situation altogether—as a panic attack, which occurred very suddenly and overtook her by surprise. Jessica described a large portion of her anxiety, not as caused by any specific triggers, but as pervasive and present within the background of her day-to-day experience.

Jessica decided to seek psychotherapy to gain a better understanding of the major life changes she was going through, but also to more appropriately cope with the (at times) overwhelming anxiety that she felt these changes were bringing her.

During our first meeting, Jessica appeared quite eager and excited, though perhaps also somewhat anxious, to be starting psychotherapy. She was very engaged during the interview

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process and responding to all the questions asked of her in an enthusiastic and curious manner. In one moment, she would appear quite well composed and emotionally in control of herself, and in the next, her voice would soften, her eyes would suddenly tear up, and a sense of emotional vulnerability would immediately become present.

When we met during the assessment, Jessica had already formulated a rough idea of what she was curious to learn more about. Jessica said she was interested in understanding how to find ways to relax, instead of feeling overwhelmed or controlled by her feelings of anxiety—which she described as being particularly pervasive in her life at this point in time. Thus, we embarked on the assessment process in the hope of understanding the general patterns that her experiences of anxiety tend to take in her life, including the context(s) under which they show up, to gain a clearer sense of what it might take to "relax" and to find better grounding instead of feeling overwhelmed and debilitated.

Background Information

The background information offered here is meant to anticipate and further contextualize the data that emerged through the use of the NEO.

Jessica described her experiences growing up and going to school as relatively "uneventful." She and her family lived in her childhood home until she was 5 years old, and then they moved to another town. While her father worked full time, her mother stayed at home. When Jessica was 13 years old, her father was diagnosed with stage 4 colon cancer, which weighed very heavily on the entire family for 2 years, until his passing, when she was 15 years old. Jessica described this period of her life, during which her father was undergoing intensive cancer treatment (chemotherapy), as chaos-ridden and confusing—full of both suffering and hope and not knowing what outcome to expect. After her father's passing, Jessica felt devastated; and although she started seeing a psychotherapist, ultimately, she did not use this time with the therapist to process her grief and mourning. During our interview, it became evident to me that Jessica still carried some deep and unresolved feelings of grief and was keenly aware of the wound left behind by the loss of her father.

When Jessica started college and moved out of her home, her mother decided to "downsize" and moved to a new house. Jessica told me that, since moving back home, she was really struggling with seeing eye-to-eye with her mother. Particularly, Jessica was considering moving into an apartment with her boyfriend of 3.5 years and who has been an important source of support and stability, but her mother reportedly felt that couples should only cohabitate after marriage, or at least after becoming engaged. Jessica also told me that the new house did not feel like a "home" yet—instead, it felt like living in a hotel.

Having endured so much distress and confusion from (a) disagreements with her mother and (b) chaotic experiences with work—on top of (c) having recently graduated from college and begun an entirely novel chapter in her life, which has added to Jessica's overarching sense of chaos and feelings of confusion, fear, and anxiety—became Jessica's main reason for seeking psychotherapy. Thus, Jessica pursued psychotherapy in the hope of gaining a more informed understanding of *how* she experiences anxiety, as well as *what* she can do to relax when she experiences such anxiety.

Assessment Tools

We used two assessment tools: The NEO-FFI-3 ("NEO," for short) and the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT). This case write-up will make focal the NEO results (the scores and qualitative descriptors which are drawn from the manual), using TAT data for illustration when needed.

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Thematic Findings

Neuroticism = 61T; 86/87th percentile (high)
Extraversion = 35T; 7th percentile (low)
Openness = 64T; 92/93rd percentile (high)
Agreeableness = 31T; 3rd percentile (low)
Conscientiousness = 66T; 95th percentile (high)

Jessica's high score on Openness suggests a style of navigating situations by imagining a vast number of (alternative) possibilities of how the world might be and how it may unfold. Individuals with high Openness tend to be very creative and imaginative thinkers and possess various artistic sensibilities, and their worlds are full of thoughts, images, and ideas. They find the world of ideas and the imagination intrinsically more enjoyable and prefer it to the world of the concrete, plain, and mundane. The kind of grip afforded by high Openness seeks to fit the individual to the world as an imaginal place, one teeming with possibility. Jessica's score on Openness is supported by the fact that she studied and is pursuing a career in fashion styling, an inherently aesthetic enterprise. The downside of high Openness is that, at times, when faced with rather straightforward tasks, such individuals are prone to enacting worlds of endless possibilities, all of which are competing for their attention—thereby risking drowning in their own imagination and losing a grip over the world. Indeed, when shown a TAT card and invited to interpret its content, Jessica came to a poignant pause and spoke only after being prompted. She proceeded to explain that "it's not that I can't say what's going on in the card, but that I see so many different options and don't know which ones to choose!"

Jessica's high score on Neuroticism and low score on Extraversion suggest a proneness to navigating situations with a disproportionate degree of worry, anxiety, and distress, relative to feelings of excitement, eagerness, and a desire to try new things. Individuals who score similarly tend to be strongly invested in ensuring that the world remains predictable so that they feel safe, for their worlds are often lived as threatening or even hostile to their concerns. In other words, through their threat sensitivity and indifference to exploration, such individuals are strongly gripping for security. Indeed, the interaction of Jessica's high Openness, high Neuroticism, and low Extraversion, is reflected in how she has come to cope with recently having moved back home. Graduating from college is a significant developmental milestone in any young adult's life, particularly when financial security is a pressing need, but immediate employment is neither secured nor guaranteed. In other words, when Jessica graduated and moved back home, her world lost the enduring sense of stability and security that it had over the duration of her college life and suddenly became chaotic. She was now confronted with a world that was uncertain in more ways than she could tolerate, all of which felt threatening and overwhelming for her to manage. She, therefore, lost her grip over the world as a place that can bring a sense of security from the threatening unknown. Her proneness to feeling overwhelmed, worried, and afraid, and, accordingly, enacting the world as a fundamentally threatening place, manifested in two distinct ways. First, she felt lost when trying to imagine a viable future for herself, which felt to her deeply uncertain, beyond her control, and rife with feelings of anxiety, terror, and dread. Second, she often felt anxious, worried, and even irritated in particular lifeworld situations, such as driving her car in heavy traffic or being assigned a task at work for which she has not had a chance to fully prepare—situations in which outcomes became difficult to predict and a sense of control over the situation therefore became relatively absent from her experience altogether.

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In both types of scenarios, what characterizes Jessica's manner of suffering is a way of being marked by petrification from the terror she experiences from being confronted with so many possibilities at once. However, what also figures into her suffering is her relationship to Conscientiousness (high) and Agreeableness (low). Individuals who score high on Conscientiousness tend to be very industrious and task oriented and tend to be invested in bringing order to their world. Importantly, such individuals are called by the future because they are concerned with the realization of long-term goals over achieving immediate gratification. They are constantly gripping for their future. This is to say, the world that is enacted by the conscientious individual tends to be the world of an ideal future, characterized by concern for the necessary steps for reaching the desired destination. Therefore, when Jessica is flooded with factors in her life whose outcomes she finds it difficult to predict, her strong need for managing and reducing uncertainty grows deeply frustrated, and the future, as she imagines or hopes for it to be, begins to elude her grip. Losing a sense of grip over the future in this way is then felt as terrifying and intolerable. Thus, in the presence of uncertainty, the world and the future are enacted as simultaneously terrifying and in need of being changed while being seen as fundamentally unchangeable.

In addition to her strong need for certainty, scoring low on Agreeableness speaks to a kind of distrust Jessica tends to have around others' true intentions and capacity to care for and support her own needs. For individuals who score low on Agreeableness, others —particularly strangers (as personifications of the unknown)—are enacted as untrustworthy and threatening and are to be approached with a degree of caution, if not suspiciousness. For such individuals, their style of (disagreeable) grip fits them to a world of individualistic pursuit. When tackling emotionally straining tasks, Jessica thus tends to confront the world in isolation rather than in collaboration with others, further adding to the feelings of anxiety and panic that characterize her lived world. Not only is Jessica now faced with an uncertain world of overwhelming possibilities (high Openness, high Neuroticism, low Extraversion), but she feels she must confront such a world completely on her own (low Agreeableness) and must not rest until her job is done (high Conscientiousness)—a presupposition that is bound to lead to disappointment.

Concluding Remarks

The kind of phenomenological understanding of traits afforded by EB5T can become a powerful hermeneutic tool for assessing psychological concerns at the level of trait dynamics. Particularly useful is the understanding that, as styles of grip, traits seek to fit individuals to certain kinds of worlds. When one loses a grip over one's world, we should expect to find a significant mismatch of the kind of world that one's traits are adapted to and the kind of world that one is actually facing. The vignette about Jessica's concerns with anxiety and panic serves as an example of how such an understanding can be achieved. Accordingly, establishing a relationship between an individual's trait measures and their styles of world-enactment can be used to generate powerful predictions as to how they might likely respond to similar scenarios in the future—an important point of consideration for clinicians.

Jessica is a highly open and conscientious individual who very strongly values such things as planning and preparation, which allow her to feel more secure when dealing with otherwise uncertain tasks or situations. With the help of this assessment, Jessica wanted to learn more about the general patterns of anxiety in her life, the contexts in which these patterns show up, and possible ways in which she might be able to "relax."

Jessica's low measure on trait Extraversion (sensitivity to positive emotion) and high measure on trait Neuroticism (sensitivity to negatively felt emotion) suggest that given

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her strong sensitivity toward negatively felt emotion, she may experience such things as the unknown and the future, as things to be frightened and wary of—to be avoided—rather than excited by. Indeed, having graduated from college, started a new job, and moved back in with her mother within a span of a few months are all major developmental turning points in Jessica's life that have brought a host of unanticipated and unprecedented changes that would have been challenging to prepare for by anybody's standards.

A more formal conceptualization based on Jessica's measures suggests a style of (a) perceiving a vast number of competing possibilities in novel situations (high Openness), (b) focusing considerably more on threatening possibilities (high Neuroticism) than the promising ones (low Extraversion), (c) feeling an urgent need to manage situations not simply by steering away from negative outcomes, but by trying to eliminate them altogether to secure a predictable future (high Conscientiousness), and (d) feeling compelled to confront the world all on her own rather than by enlisting others for their assistance and support in the process. Overall, Jessica's trait profile—or *style of personality*—presupposes and fits her to a world that is complex and imaginal (high Openness), whose complexity can be managed and rendered predictable by diligent effort alone (high Conscientiousness), and in which predictability is necessary for rendering the world secure and unthreatening (high Neuroticism). Moreover, it presupposes that all of this complexity can be managed effectively without the assistance of others (low Agreeableness) and that complexity is always dangerous and cannot be a source of fun, excitement, or joy (low Extraversion).

In virtue of such a conceptualization, we can raise the various assumptions implicit in Jessica's style of world-enactment to her attention as points of entry for therapeutic dialogue. For instance, we might invite Jessica to reflect on times when she did, in fact, benefit from someone else's help on a task, or times when she did, in fact, experience strong feelings of joy, interest, or curiosity, when confronted with a situation she had not anticipated or prepared for. Moreover, we can use this conceptualization to make various phenomenologically grounded predictions—another important next step in the clinical process. For example, we might predict that in situations involving many different moving targets and in which Jessica lacks the requisite skills or experience or preparation, such as her new job, it is likely that in light of her style of world-enactment, Jessica will feel overwhelmed, insecure, and anxious, as though she is swimming in a sea of chaos with no way out and whereby her only option is to frantically splash across to the other side.

In what ways does this vignette inform our phenomenological understanding of individual differences in personality? And in what ways do the interpretations offered here afford us theoretical insight into the relationship between measures of personality traits and differences in styles of world-enactment? On our account—which finds theoretical grounding in EB5T, a framework for understanding personality phenomenologically—each trait corresponds to a domain of psychological functioning that characterizes human reality as it is lived. Accordingly, trait measures as represented on the NEO clue us in on ways of enacting or bringing forth our worlds that are *stylistic* of who we are. Those who score high in Openness enact worlds that are organized around what is otherwise invisible to the naked eye and can only be disclosed in thought or the imagination, while those who score low enact worlds that are organized around what can be most concretely seen. Those who score high in Extraversion enact worlds that ring with exciting possibilities to be explored, while those who score low enact worlds characterized by a kind of stability in remaining where one already tends to be. Those who score high in Neuroticism enact worlds as hostile and threatening to their livelihood, while those who score low enact worlds that feel relatively safe and habitable. Those who score high in Conscientiousness enact worlds in which the imagined future is more immediately and concretely present, calling to be

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organized and planned, while for those who score low, the future is felt from a greater distance and competes much less powerfully for their attention than do their immediate concerns. Finally, those who score high in Agreeableness tend to enact the world as belonging primarily to others in which others' concerns and personal projects are enacted as most important, while those who score low enact the world as belonging primarily to themselves, in which their own projects take centerstage.

In our article, we explored and articulated the theoretical terrain in which the human and cognitive sciences converge through their mutual commitment to phenomenology. We demonstrated how personality traits can be used to afford insight into the structure of a person's suffering by showcasing how Jessica's struggles with anxiety were assessed using the NEO-FFI-3 in keeping with the principles of EB5T—a theoretical framework for understanding personality phenomenologically. The core theoretical insight of our contribution is that individual differences in traits are reflective of stylistic differences in how individuals bring forth and participate in the very worlds which they experience (Hovhannisyan & Vervaeke, 2022). Our vignette thus also served to demonstrate how the very notion of styles of world-enactment can be used in the clinical setting to invite a disciplined form of empathy for understanding the structure of a person's suffering as it is lived. With our article, we have thus extended the theoretical groundwork that was first laid in Hovhannisyan and Vervaeke's (2022) EB5T framework by demonstrating a possible clinical application of their phenomenological approach to personality. Future work should focus on further developing and elaborating novel uses of the notion of styles of world-enactment in the clinical domain. This will be necessary if the disciplined form of non-reductionism that is engendered in phenomenological approaches like that of individualized assessment or enactivist cognitive science is to be secured in the domains of psychological theory, research, and practice.

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