

# Heidegger, Mood and the Lived Body: The Ontical and the Ontological

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It is sometimes said that Heidegger neglected the ontological significance of the lived body until the Zollikon Seminars, where he elaborates on the bodily aspect of Being-in-the-world as a “bodying forth.” Against such a contention, in this article I argue that, because of the central role that Heidegger grants to mood (disclosive affectivity) as a primordial way of disclosing Being-in-the-world, and because it is impossible to think mood without also thinking the lived body, Heidegger has actually placed the latter at the very center of Dasein’s disclosedness. Heidegger’s account of mood thus entails and highlights, rather than neglects, the ontological significance of the body.

Thinking begins only when we have come to know that reason, glorified for centuries, is the most stiff-necked adversary of thought.

—Martin Heidegger (1977/1952, p. 112)

The lucid courage for essential anxiety assures us the enigmatic possibility of experiencing Being. For close by essential anxiety as horror of the abyss dwells awe.

—Martin Heidegger (1998/1943, p. 234)

Every feeling is an embodiment attuned in this or that way, a mood that embodies in this or that way.

—Martin Heidegger (1979/1961, p. 100)

How does Heidegger view the role of ontical phenomena in the illumination of ontological or existential structures? The answer to this question, I believe, can be found in the central role that Heidegger (1962/1927) gives to moods (*Stimmungen*) in the disclosure of our Being-in-the-world:

[O]ntologically mood is a primordial kind of Being for Dasein, in which Dasein is disclosed to itself prior to all cognition and volition, and beyond their range of disclosure. (p. 175)

In Heidegger’s conception, mood is disclosive in three ways: (1) it discloses Dasein’s “‘thrownness’ ... into its ‘there’” (p. 174), into its situatedness;

(2) it discloses “Being-in-the-world as a whole” (p. 176); and (3) it discloses how “what [Dasein] encounters within-the-world can ‘matter’ to it” (p. 176) in a particular way.

Elkholy (2008) makes the case for the centrality of mood in Heidegger’s view of Dasein’s disclosedness aptly and persuasively:

Arguably, Heidegger’s most important contribution to the history of philosophy, in addition to entrenching the subject in its world and thereby overcoming the subject/object dualism, is the primacy that he accords to mood in his analysis of human existence. Through mood humans gain access to their world, to themselves and to their relations with others in the world in a manner that is prereflective and unthematic.... [M]ood, especially the mood of *Angst*, has the power to reveal the whole: the whole of how one is in the world and the whole of the world at large. (p. 4)

Thus for Heidegger, ontical experiences of mood, or of certain moods, are ontologically revelatory. According to Elkholy, Heidegger thereby displaces the traditional, excessively cognitivist “metaphysics of reason” with a “metaphysics of feeling” (p. 6).<sup>1</sup> I take Elkholy to mean that, for Heidegger, affectivity rather than reason constitutes the ground of philosophizing. Anxiety, in particular, is grasped as “a bridge to the truth of Being,” a bridge from the ontical or psychological to the ontological.

In his 1929-1930 lecture course, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger (1995/1983) gives a particularly powerful statement of his view of the philosophical significance of mood. Referring to ontologically revelatory moods as “fundamental attunements” or “ground moods” (*Grundstimmungen*), he makes a truly remarkable claim:

*Philosophy in each case happens in a fundamental attunement* [ground mood]. Conceptual philosophical comprehension is grounded in our being gripped, and this is grounded in a fundamental attunement. (p. 7)

In the lecture course, Heidegger discusses a number of such ground moods

that make philosophizing possible. For example, in addition to anxiety, there is “homesickness,” “turbulence,” “boredom,” and “melancholy.” Capobianco (2010) traces how Heidegger’s privileging of anxiety in *Being and Time* gives way in his later work to an emphasis on other ontologically revelatory ground moods, such as awe, wonder, and astonishment.

In certain contexts, Heidegger (1962/1927) alludes to the role of mood in “the disclosedness of the ‘they’ [*das Man*]” (p. 210). The mood of “curiosity,” for example, can, along with “idle talk” and “ambiguity,” disclose “Dasein’s falling into the ‘they’ [and] ‘fleeing’ in the face of itself” (p. 230). Fear, too, can accompany a defensive evading of the existential anxiety of authentic Being-toward-death, replacing the latter with some concrete entity or event threatening to life and limb. Such fear “is anxiety, fallen into the ‘world,’ inauthentic” (p. 234).

I cannot recall ever encountering a reference to the mood of shame in *Being and Time*. It is my view that, just as existential anxiety is disclosive of authentic existing, it is shame that most clearly discloses inauthentic or unowned existing. In feeling ashamed, we feel exposed as deficient or defective before the gaze of the other (Sartre, 2001/1943). In shame, we are held hostage by the eyes of others; we belong, not to ourselves, but to them. Thus, a move toward greater authenticity, toward a taking ownership of one’s existing, is often accompanied by an emotional shift from being dominated by shame to an embracing of existential guilt, anxiety, and anticipatory grief.<sup>2</sup> This is a shift from a preoccupation with how one is seen by others to a pursuit of what really matters to one as an individual—from how one appears to others to the quality of one’s own living, including especially the quality of one’s relatedness to others.

### *Moods, Emotions, Feelings*

A number of authors (e.g., Freeman, 2011; Ratcliffe, 2008) have criticized Heidegger for failing to distinguish clearly among mood, emotion, and feeling, a failure that Freeman characterizes as “sloppiness.” In my reading, Heidegger is rarely, if ever, sloppy. He often does, however, appropriate familiar words and use them as terms of art, giving them meanings that are very different from those found in common everyday usage. Examples abound: “Being (*Sein*),” “existence (*Existenz*),” “care (*Sorge*),” “understanding (*Verstehen*),” “death (*Tod*),” “anxiety (*Angst*),” “conscience (*Gewissen*),” and so on. I want to claim that “mood (*Stimmung*)”

is another such term of art for Heidegger, a term that plays a special role in Heidegger's ontological language-game which terms such as "emotion" and "feeling" do not. Let me try to explain.

Heidegger (1962/1927) claims that in being our "there," our disclosedness, we *are* three constitutive ways of disclosing our Being-in-the-world: discourse (*Rede*), understanding (*Verstehen*), and *Befindlichkeit*. To me, the best translation of the latter is the literal one: "how-one-finds-oneself-ness." How-one-finds-oneself-ness shows up ontically as mood, through which we are attuned to ourselves and to our situatedness in the world.<sup>3</sup> I believe Heidegger, in this context, is using the term "mood" to refer to the *whole range of disclosive affectivity*. If I am right, "mood" as a Heideggerian term of art can encompass all of what is ordinarily meant by "moods," "emotions," and "feelings," but, and this is crucial, only insofar as these affective phenomena are disclosing our ways of Being-in-the-world,<sup>4</sup> as Heidegger variously claims can be the case for anxiety, homesickness, turbulence, boredom, melancholy, awe, wonder, and astonishment, and, in the mode of falling or inauthenticity, curiosity and fearfulness, to which I have added shame.<sup>5</sup>

### *Mood and the Body*

It is sometimes said that Heidegger neglected the ontological significance of the lived body until the *Zollikon Seminars* (Heidegger, 2001/1987), where he elaborates on the bodily aspect of Being-in-the-world as a "bodying forth" (p. 196), a term he had introduced earlier in his Nietzsche lectures (Heidegger, 1987/1961, p. 218). According to Aho (2009), Heidegger's concept of bodying forth, like Merleau-Ponty's (1962/1945) earlier account of embodied perception, belatedly addresses the previously neglected fundamental role that the lived body plays in spatially orienting our practical comportments in the world.

Heidegger's (1962/1927) claim that *Befindlichkeit* is equiprimordial with understanding (*Verstehen*) and discourse (*Rede*) as a way of disclosing Being-in-the-world is, in my view, a definitive answer to criticisms of his alleged neglect of the body in *Being and Time* (Stolorow, 2011, chapter 3). This is so because *Befindlichkeit* always shows up in lived experience in the form of a mood (*Stimmung*), and disclosive affectivity always includes an experienced bodily component, a "bodily attunement," as Levin (1999, p. 135) aptly puts it. Against those who fault Heidegger for omitting the lived body from his account of mood (Freeman, 2011; Ratcliffe, 2008), I am contending to the contrary that it is impossible to think mood, and

thus to think the disclosedness of Being-in-the-world, without thinking the lived body. Thus, without explicitly naming the lived body, Heidegger has placed it, along with affectivity, at the heart of Dasein's disclosedness.

A skeletal account of the ontogeny of affective experience can help support my claim. One can distinguish two closely interrelated developmental lines for affectivity: (1) affect differentiation: the gradual development of an array of distinctive emotions from the infant's diffuse ur-affect states of pleasure and displeasure, and (2) the symbolic integration of affect: the gradual evolution of affect states from their earliest form as exclusively bodily states into emotional experiences that can be verbally articulated. Symbolic processes play a pivotal role in both of these developmental progressions. The capacity for symbolic thought comes on line maturationally at the age of 10-12 months, eventually making language possible for the child. At that point, the earlier, exclusively bodily forms of emotional experience can begin to become articulated in symbols—at first in imagistic symbols and then in words. Consequently, the child's emotional experiences increasingly can be characterized as *somatic-symbolic* or, eventually, *somatic-linguistic unities*.

I have long contended (e.g., Stolorow, 2007) that these developmental progressions always take place within a relational medium or context. It is the caregiver's attuned responsiveness, phase-appropriately conveyed through words, that facilitates the gradual integration of the child's bodily emotional experience with symbolic thought, leading to the crystallization of distinctive emotions that can be named. In the absence of such verbally expressed attunement, or in the face of grossly malattuned responses, derailments of this developmental process can occur, whereby emotional experience remains inchoate, diffuse, and largely bodily. The persistence of psychosomatic states and disorders in adults may be understood as remnants of such developmental derailments. Most important for my purposes here, however, is the grasp of even the most evolved affective phenomena as somatic-linguistic unities in which the experienced body is never absent. From the standpoint of a developmental phenomenology of affectivity, it is impossible to think mood without also thinking the lived body.

### *Summary of My Claims*

(1) One of the most important relationships between the ontical and the ontological in Heidegger's thought is the central, ontologically revelatory role that he gives to moods. (2) Heidegger uses the word "mood"

as a term of art to refer to the whole range of disclosive affectivity. (3) Because of the role that Heidegger grants to mood as a primordial way of disclosing Being-in-the-world, and because it is impossible to think mood without also thinking the lived body, Heidegger has placed the latter at the center of Dasein's disclosedness. (4) Heidegger's account of mood thus entails and highlights, rather than neglects, the ontological significance of the body.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Furtak (2005) has shown that a similar characterization can be given of Kierkegaard.

<sup>2</sup> I have contended (Stolorow, 2011, chapter 7) that authentic Being-toward-death always includes Being-toward-loss of loved others, that death and loss are existentially equiprimordial, and that existential anxiety anticipates both death and loss.

<sup>3</sup> Macquarrie and Robinson, translators of *Being and Time*, tell us, "*Stimmung* originally means the tuning of a musical instrument" (p. 172, fn. 3).

<sup>4</sup> Artificially or endogenously induced affect states, for example, are not ontologically revelatory in this way.

<sup>5</sup> A passage in Heidegger's 1927 lecture course, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, lends support to my claim: "To be affectively self-finding [*Befindlichkeit*] is the formal structure of what we call *mood, passion, affect, and the like*, which are constitutive for all comportment toward beings.... (Heidegger, 1982/1975, p. 281, emphasis added).