

## HEIDEGGER: BEING, MOODS, AND FEELINGS

Richard M. Owsley

Teachers of philosophy in American universities are expected by their students to become moralists. In this role they extol certain societal trends and condemn others. Teachers often begin by focusing on the virtues and vices of these same students. A clear and stimulating writer, such as Allan Bloom, can use these judgments as the basis for a best-seller. In any case, from a supposed Aristotelian base of moderation, professors can always say that their students have too much of this characteristic or too little of that.

In this paper I want to assert that my students indulge in too many subjective feelings and attend insufficiently to objective attunement to the world and to the earth. I want to enlist the aid of Martin Heidegger, the centennial of whose birth is being celebrated in the year of 1989. Heidegger provides me with—and, I hope to convince you, can provide others with—a meaningful context from which adequately to consider emotions, moods, and feelings.

Philosophers in the twentieth century are little help in the exploration of affective qualities; they seldom take emotion seriously. Rationalists concede that, at best, such properties represent precognitive mentality that can and should be controlled by reflection. Positivists relegate feelings to the emotivism of religion and morality. Both rationalists and positivists deny that affects can make truth claims. Pragmatists look upon moods and feelings as stimuli to problem solving, as rewards for successful solutions to these problems, and as frustrations when these problems prove to be unsolved and insoluble. It is little wonder that many contemporaries seek in the work of Jaspers, Sartre, and Marcel descriptions and analyses of subjective experiences. Feelings about the world, the people in that world, and especially the self are a central aspect of existential philosophy. It is my contention that, despite himself, Martin Heidegger—the Existentialist—is

the best source for making sense of moods, feelings, and emotions. In the famous Section 29 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger has examined the emotive characteristics of humans as these capacities aid or detract from the pursuit of Being. Here Heidegger has considered these capacities under the rubric *Befindlichkeit*.

Eugene Gendlin introduces a discussion of this concept in the following way:

*Befindlichkeit* is among the most frequently misunderstood concepts in Heidegger's work. Certainly it is the most important among those that are frequently misunderstood. (43)

The German word *Befindlichkeit* has been variously translated into English by Robinson, Wild, Gendlin, Guignon, and others as "state of mind," "thereness," "mood," "attunement," "feelings," "situationness," and "affect." What makes these phrases even more difficult to grasp is that Heidegger and Heideggerians reject most suggestions of help from psychologists, sociologists, linguists, and literary critics. One would think, certainly an American would think, that descriptions of affect or mood could be gotten at best through the introspections of a trained psychologist, the soliloquies of a literary character, or some sociologist's summations of group or class attitudes. To Heideggerians, however, such investigations are futile since each goes in the wrong direction and proceeds from ungrounded assumptions. All assertions about the presence, intensity, or direction of moods from the "inside" are suspect. Even when these accounts are supplemented by careful observation from the "outside," they remain irrelevant. Both of these types of superficial findings are confusing and, for the most part, speculative. In ordinary experience each of us is vaguely aware of a prevailing tone that is sad or happy, alluring or threatening, satisfying or disturbing, but such moods or feelings are almost inevitably distorted by practitioners of the social sciences. Awareness as it "naturally" occurs is quite different from the abstract phenomena that are defined by

historians, economists, and philosophers. As "lived" intentions, feelings and affects are more personal, deeper, and more abiding than the ideal-type abstract qualities presented in the professional books and journals.

Heidegger has attempted to preserve the character of "mineness" of feelings and to combine this with the emotional structures of the general human condition. For this purpose he uses the term *Befindlichkeit* rather than *Gefühl*. When a German says, "*Wie Befindlichkeit Sie sich?*" this is equivalent to the English, "How are you?" Perhaps more adept translations are, "How do you feel yourself to be?" or "In what condition do you presently find yourself?" or "How is it going?" or "What is the mood of the situation?" Perhaps the slang expressions "What's happening?" and "What's shaking?" are even closer to the mark. *Befindlichkeit* also suggests something like, "What are the overtones of where and how you are?" or "What is the condition of this place and time?" or "What is disclosed concerning the atmosphere of this time or place?" The implicit "you" in each case is not an isolated substance or subject but rather a series of happenings or relations within a field. Both you and the world share a tone, mood, or disposition. There is no isolated "I" which takes on various colorings. Perhaps the biggest mistake for non-Heideggerians is to refer to mood as individually and arbitrarily generated, activated, and sustained by a separate psychological agent.

The crucial aspect of the word *Befindlichkeit* in German is "to find." The attunement of a series of situations is not invented or even chosen but found, revealed, or discovered. "How do we find ourselves?" "How do you find yourself?" Each attunement requires a process of removed registration, reflection, and description. Moods are responses to this basic attunement. They are more public than private and more shared than insulated. Both attunement and mood are unconcealed through a phenomenological posture of persistent variation and analysis. This method is markedly different from psychoanalysis, controlled introspection, behaviorism, or Gestalt experimentation. Accounts of "What is the situation?" are distorted when filtered through psychological techniques.

The prevailing mood of a situation, along with the understanding of that situation and its articulations, is of an interwoven context that is more than inter-psychic. It demands a series of careful reflections as to the what, where, how, and why of things, relations, and projects. Contrary to many popular moralists, affective qualities need not be superficial whims but can manifest deep abiding patterns. The Existentiell, in Heidegger, refers to the peculiar ontic characteristics of the individual, whereas the existential is ontological and trans-individual. While Heidegger is interested primarily in the ontological, he recognizes that Existentiell considerations are a necessary *entrée* to ontological ones. Attunement is the basic layer of response to the implicit inquiry, "How does it stand with Being?" This inquiry carries its own incipient understanding. This question is different from all others. It does not require nor does it suffice just to give an intellectual answer. Whatever the answer is to this crucial question about Being, it always has an emotional component. This component may be momentarily hidden when questions such as "What do you think about a particular season, city, or work of art?" are asked. The ontological question may also be disguised in an inquiry about a single personality, landscape, or a social condition; but, it is there all the same. Continually to ask about particular feelings can only result in a catalogue of distracted and unrelated accounts of one thing or another. Ontological attunement has a single focus. The distribution and dwelling within a horizontal catalogue obscures the vertical presence of Being, and these superficial moods can eclipse that presence. To Heidegger, specific ontic feelings, even when psychologically and sociologically important, are often philosophically insignificant. This is especially true of unanchored subjective aims, attitudes, or dispositions. A deep attunement of a personal anxiety reveals Being. Basic attunement together with connected moods can reveal Being. Being can also be squandered by a series of disconnected joys, sorrows, resentments, and attachments.

The entire metaphoric range of inward and outward, the self and other, immanence and transcendence has very little

place in Heidegger's thought. Attunements are not in one's consciousness, person, head, or ego. Neither are moods. They are just as much outside in the world of events, contexts, and connections. These interconnections manifest a set or a disposition to which the individual may or may not respond. The way of attunement modulates the shape of the world. Attunements are abiding patterns concerning the intermingling of occurrences among entities rather than mere inter-mental epiphenomena. There is, of course, a human aspect to attunement, but this is never the Whole. The secondary human responses may give clues that the reflective philosopher uses to disclose phenomena but that are not significant for their own sake. A social reformer or an individual counselor who sets out to change the mood of an individual or group by appealing to each of them as a human agent begins at the wrong end of the attunement spectrum. Such reformers can only function effectively when they accept a phenomenologically oriented and disclosed mood or feeling such as anxiety. Human moods participate in the fundamental structure of the situation. Moods modulate and shape the textual totality of being-in-the-world.

The concept of *Befindlichkeit* is applicable in at least five areas:

1. Philosophically it is one of the fundamental ways to reveal Being.
2. Morally it pertains to ethical or political authenticity or their absence.
3. It is crucial for aesthetics.
4. It serves as a basis for applications to psychology and psychiatry.
5. It indicates an opening for religious reflection.

In order for Dasein to reveal what is or what may be, Dasein becomes concerned or cares. A kind of phenomenology can and does analyze and describe this caring in terms of attunement and moods. As a being-in-the-world, Dasein participates in projects and presences in that world through

The prevailing mood of a situation, along with the understanding of that situation and its articulations, is of an interwoven context that is more than inter-psychic. It demands a series of careful reflections as to the what, where, how, and why of things, relations, and projects. Contrary to many popular moralists, affective qualities need not be superficial whims but can manifest deep abiding patterns. The Existentiell, in Heidegger, refers to the peculiar ontic characteristics of the individual, whereas the existential is ontological and trans-individual. While Heidegger is interested primarily in the ontological, he recognizes that Existentiell considerations are a necessary *entrée* to ontological ones. Attunement is the basic layer of response to the implicit inquiry, "How does it stand with Being?" This inquiry carries its own incipient understanding. This question is different from all others. It does not require nor does it suffice just to give an intellectual answer. Whatever the answer is to this crucial question about Being, it always has an emotional component. This component may be momentarily hidden when questions such as "What do you think about a particular season, city, or work of art?" are asked. The ontological question may also be disguised in an inquiry about a single personality, landscape, or a social condition; but, it is there all the same. Continually to ask about particular feelings can only result in a catalogue of distracted and unrelated accounts of one thing or another. Ontological attunement has a single focus. The distribution and dwelling within a horizontal catalogue obscures the vertical presence of Being, and these superficial moods can eclipse that presence. To Heidegger, specific ontic feelings, even when psychologically and sociologically important, are often philosophically insignificant. This is especially true of unanchored subjective aims, attitudes, or dispositions. A deep attunement of a personal anxiety reveals Being. Basic attunement together with connected moods can reveal Being. Being can also be squandered by a series of disconnected joys, sorrows, resentments, and attachments.

The entire metaphoric range of inward and outward, the self and other, immanence and transcendence has very little

place in Heidegger's thought. Attunements are not in one's consciousness, person, head, or ego. Neither are moods. They are just as much outside in the world of events, contexts, and connections. These interconnections manifest a set or a disposition to which the individual may or may not respond. The way of attunement modulates the shape of the world. Attunements are abiding patterns concerning the intermingling of occurrences among entities rather than mere inter-mental epiphenomena. There is, of course, a human aspect to attunement, but this is never the Whole. The secondary human responses may give clues that the reflective philosopher uses to disclose phenomena but that are not significant for their own sake. A social reformer or an individual counselor who sets out to change the mood of an individual or group by appealing to each of them as a human agent begins at the wrong end of the attunement spectrum. Such reformers can only function effectively when they accept a phenomenologically oriented and disclosed mood or feeling such as anxiety. Human moods participate in the fundamental structure of the situation. Moods modulate and shape the textual totality of being-in-the-world.

The concept of *Befindlichkeit* is applicable in at least five areas:

1. Philosophically it is one of the fundamental ways to reveal Being.
2. Morally it pertains to ethical or political authenticity or their absence.
3. It is crucial for aesthetics.
4. It serves as a basis for applications to psychology and psychiatry.
5. It indicates an opening for religious reflection.

In order for Dasein to reveal what is or what may be, Dasein becomes concerned or cares. A kind of phenomenology can and does analyze and describe this caring in terms of attunement and moods. As a being-in-the-world, Dasein participates in projects and presences in that world through

moods. Care itself may be considered as a kind of attunement. How the Dasein is tuned into the world dictates which interests of the world show themselves. Human beings in all of their aspects are creatures of involvement and commitment, highlighted by the moods of facticity, anticipation, and fallenness. It is from moods that Dasein comes to realize its destiny or becomes trivialized by gossip, curiosity, and ambiguity. Human being becomes authentic through the basic attunement of dread before nothingness and becomes resolute in the face of death by facing negative moods squarely.

Although Heidegger declined to write directly on ethics and politics, his conclusions on these subjects can be deduced from his published works. *Being and Time*, and especially the section on *Befindlichkeit* in that volume, is pertinent for these conclusions. The basic attunement that a human agent has within the world conditions that agent's ethical and political posture within the human world. A mood of nihilism, that is, an attunement of diffuse groundlessness, means that the universe is devoid of all moral and political significance. In such a mood, any course of action would be just as meaningful as any other, and no act could be meaningfully praised or blamed. In a mood of openness to the future, on the other hand, the individual could expect to become a responsible family member, a community participant, and a citizen. Neither of these moods—neither nihilism nor responsibility—follows from rational choice. It is rather that, in large part, the moods following attunement predetermine those choices.

For aesthetics, especially poetic discourse, Heidegger's concept of *Befindlichkeit* is especially pertinent. The poet or painter awakens on canvas with words or forms a precognitive disposition toward aesthetic objects. The disposition as mood or feeling precedes the construction of the contents within a work of art. To highlight form, expression, or manner of composition is to uncover moods and feelings derived or basic. Aesthetic communication is of these moods related to the world, to the earth, to the gods, and to mortals. An artwork is an analogue of feeling that, in and of itself, would be unheeded without the artwork. Attunement underlying the artwork

manifests feelings impossible to paraphrase in calculative thinking.

Many implications of Heidegger's philosophy as it relates to feeling have been reformulated for psychiatry and psychology. Gendlin, Binzwaner, Straus, and Boss have all utilized Heidegger for psychiatry. Each has formulated the ontic implications of moods based on the fundamental attunement for a particular human being in a specific situation. Using the theoretical structure of the fundamental Existentials of attunement, each has given a demonstrative survey of the consequences for mental health of ability, of affects, and of moods. In defining neurosis and psychosis, the existential psychiatrist has discussed at length the deviations from the basic attunement. Heidegger's concept of *Befindlichkeit* serves as the base point for judgments of normality.

Heidegger's call for the awareness of moods has religious implications that he himself does not always draw. The basic moods resulting from being thrown into an uncanny universe with its resulting anxiety can lead to an attitude of reverence or irreverence. In any case, the conditions of each individual's choosing are prefigured by mood. We are not the origin of ourselves and are thus dependent upon a Being that is more comprehensive, fundamental, or lasting than individuals or collectives. These situations of origin reveal the destiny of where and how we are but never the complete why. As revealed in moods, we are faced with an ultimate lack of comprehension concerning our condition and its destiny. Such concerns as fate, fortune, luck, and hope appear as the result of this mood. Rationalized attempts to summarize our fate must rest upon the moods of adoration, supplication, and obedience. They also reveal possibilities for rebellion, defiance, and the denial of a deity. Because the moods are always present in being human, they are inevitably the point of disclosure for existence. Attunement is that form in which metaphoric awareness, ethical sensitivity, aesthetic responses, psychiatric insight, and religious responses appear. Although it is not possible to say which specific moods accompany a given experience, the awareness of mood is the decisive factor for all experience.

Authenticity is neither a complete surrender to one's mood or moods nor a rejection of it or them. The worth of an individual human being is connected with the interplay of that person and his or her moods. Subsequently, understanding, speaking, and action are based on this interplay. For this reason, the case can be made that moods and their study are not for Heidegger merely one consideration among many, but the propaedeutic pursuit of being human.

In conclusion, those students who wish to make pronouncements about moods or feelings should acknowledge that:

1. These processes are rooted in the whole human situation.
2. This attunement and subsequent moods must be studied phenomenologically and not merely naturally.
3. Applications concerning appropriate or inappropriate moods in human experience follow from fundamental ontology.

#### WORKS CITED

- Binzwanger, Ludwig. *Being-in-the-World*. New York: Basic Books, 1963.
- Bloom, Allan. *The Closing of the American Mind*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987.
- Boss, Meadard. *Grundriss der Medizin un der Psychologie*. Bern: Hans Huber, 1975.
- Gendlin, Eugene. "Befindlichkeit: Heidegger and the Philosophy of Psychology." *Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry* 16 (1978-79): 43-71.
- Guignon, Charles. "Moods in Heidegger's *Being and Time*." In *What Is an Emotion?* Ed. Chesire Calhoun and Robert C. Solomon. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1984.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.

Straus, Erwin W. *Psychiatry and Philosophy*. New York: Springer-Verlag, 1969.

Wild, John. "The Introduction and Part I of Heidegger's *Being and Time*." Unpublished manuscript, 1951.