

Moods and Emotions

Some Philosophical Reflections on the 'Affective Turn'

Nils Gilje

A cognitive bias has dominated the humanities and the social sciences for a long time. Most researchers have neglected the importance of moods and emotions in understanding the social and cultural dimensions of the human condition. Even those interested in the deeper and 'inner' realms of experience have often avoided the affective aspects of social interaction. In recent years, especially within what could be called existential sociology and ethnology, there has been a new focus on emotions – including those of the researcher. Subjectivity is on the agenda. With the new 'affective turn', some highly interesting work has been done to investigate feelings and emotions from an empirical perspective (Povrzanović Frykman 2003; Clough and Halley 2007; Greg and Seigworth 2010; Frykman 2012). Some of the older sociological literature on the existential predicament is also highly relevant with regard to the 'affective turn' (Douglas and Johnson 1977; Ellis 1991; Scheff and Retzinger 1991). With the new focus on moods and emotions, existential philosophy could be a source of inspiration for more empirically oriented social and cultural research. Philosophers such as Kierkegaard, Jaspers, Heidegger and Sartre suddenly become sparring partners for researchers analysing strong and challenging emotions and feelings.

In this chapter I will take a step back and look at how affects, moods and emotions are treated by some of the philosophers of existence.¹ Even though Heidegger uses terms like *Affekt*, *Affektion* and *affizieren*

(Heidegger 1996: 137–142, 341–346), his most important contribution to the ‘affective turn’ is his analysis of attunement (*Befindlichkeit*) and moods (*Stimmungen*). As it is understood in present-day philosophy and ethnology, the ‘affective turn’ also seems to reflect how Spinoza understood basic affects such as joy (*laetitia*) and sadness (*tristitia*). It would therefore be interesting to take a closer look at the affinities and differences between Spinoza and Heidegger. In doing so I will initially discuss a possible conceptual difference between moods and emotions, for example anxiety and fear. Even though anxiety and fear are sometimes treated as synonymous, some existential philosophers insist that this is not necessarily the case. It is often claimed that anxiety has no intentional object, but that fear always has, as for example in a fear of empty spaces, criminals or wild animals. The most existential of the existentialist philosophers is probably Kierkegaard. He is rightly famous for his analysis of anxiety, and he will therefore be the point of departure in this essay.

Starting at the beginning

In what sense could Adam and Eve be said to have been fully *self-conscious* human beings before the Fall? Were they perhaps closer to natural phenomena without self-consciousness? As far as I know, the cliff outside my window has no consciousness. My cat, on the other hand, is quite a different story, and seems to have a high level of consciousness. In the world of nature there seem to be different degrees of self-awareness, but despite this we still think that human beings have a self-consciousness that is unique. There is also, of course, the fact that infants and young children gradually become self-conscious and aware of themselves in new ways. According to Kierkegaard, all infants reflect the experience of Adam and Eve in their journey to self-awareness.

In *The Concepts of Anxiety* (1844), Kierkegaard retells the biblical story of Adam and Eve and the meaning of original sin. Before the fall, Adam and Eve lived a preconscious, or not fully self-conscious, life. This state is described by Kierkegaard as one of innocence and ignorance. In the Garden of Eden their lives were happy, and they knew nothing of pain and sorrow. They could eat anything, except the fruit from the tree of knowledge. So far they had no experience of good and evil. After sinning, they were driven out of the garden and had to live the life of

human beings. Kierkegaard obviously treats the biblical story of the Fall of Man as an allegory: every human being has to make the passage from the preconscious life of infancy to self-conscious adulthood. Freedom, spirit (*Ånd*) and morality are not given, but are phenomena that develop in human beings (Pattison 2005).

In Kierkegaard's language, Adam and Eve were not fully awake in the Garden of Eden, being ignorant and without spirit. But even in this state they had the capacity to experience something, namely to become aware of something that is really nothing, but that still gives birth to the human feeling of anxiety. Nothing begets anxiety. That is the first step out of the Garden of Eden; a step that has to be repeated by every human being (Kierkegaard [1844] 1980: 41).

Kierkegaard's style of writing is not always easy to understand. What he seems to be saying is that anxiety is triggered by the child's first awareness of a way of living ('eating from the tree of knowledge') that it still does not understand. Neither can it avoid the temptation to move in the direction of this 'nothing'. In this moment, anxiety becomes part of the human condition:

The anxiety belongs so essentially to the child that he cannot do without it. Though it causes him anxiety, it captivates him by its pleasing anxiousness ... The more profound the anxiety, the more profound the culture. (Ibid. 42)

According to Kierkegaard, this kind of anxiety is not found in animals. Animals have no spirit and do not have the freedom to commit original sin. It is difficult to say whether this argument is consistent with Kierkegaard's gradualism or not, but we do not need to go into detail here.

Kierkegaard's probably best known argument in *The Concept of Anxiety* is the claim that anxiety is not the same as fear, or that anxiety cannot be reduced to fear. Only a nothing can bring anxiety. The concept of anxiety is therefore very different from fear and similar concepts 'that refer to something definite, whereas anxiety is freedom's actuality as the possibility of possibility' (ibid. 42). This is another argument for the thesis that anxiety is not found in animals – they simply lack the possibility of freedom. It is only for human beings that 'freedom's possibility announces itself in anxiety' (ibid. 74). Understood in this way, anxiety is a reality *sui generis*. I can take the necessary steps to avoid

fear, but this is not so easy when it comes to anxiety. If someone asks me ‘What is it?’, a possible answer could be ‘I don’t know. It was probably nothing.’ And that is a good answer. But how can I be troubled by something that cannot be found anywhere in the world? How can I be worried about nothing? Of course, it can sometimes be psychologically difficult to distinguish between anxiety and fear, and the two states can also be intertwined in different ways.

What is really at stake here is the idea that anxiety and fear are two very different concepts. Kierkegaard never tires of repeating that the object of anxiety is nothing: ‘If we ask more particularly what the object of anxiety is, then the answer, here as elsewhere, must be that it is nothing’ (ibid. 98; see also 77, 97). But in Kierkegaard’s case, it is problematic to claim that anxiety is a non-intentional object and something that can never be an object of knowledge. This is especially so when it comes to children: ‘In observing children, one will discover this anxiety intimated more particularly as a seeking for the adventurous, the monstrous, and the enigmatic’ (ibid. 42). Anxiety, of course, is not identical with these phenomena, although they do point in that direction. Sometimes Kierkegaard seems to be saying that anxiety announces itself in the enigmatic. When the distinction between good and evil is finally established, then ‘the object of anxiety is a determinate something and its nothing is an actual something, because the distinction between good and evil is posited *in concreto*’ (ibid. 111). But this will not eliminate anxiety. For the adult human being, the possibility of freedom will never erase the distinction between good and evil. There are always possibilities and therefore new – so far unimaginable – sins: ‘So anxiety again comes into relation with what is posited as well as with the future’ (ibid. 111).

Even though the relation between anxiety and fear is not crystal clear in Kierkegaard, I still think he is right to argue the difference between these two concepts. In the existentialist tradition, it is often claimed that what Kierkegaard calls anxiety is a mood – a *Stimmung* – to use the terminology of Heidegger and his pupils, while fear is an emotion. We are afraid of something, while when anxious we become conscious of a ‘possibility of a possibility’ (Kierkegaard). Human beings are always open in this way. Every ‘no’ – as in the Garden of Eden – makes us conscious of a new, as yet undiscovered possibility. A ‘no’ makes us aware of a border, beyond which we should not move.

Being itself is not an object

The literature on Heidegger's relations to Kierkegaard is huge (for some interesting contributions, see Magurschak 1985; Caputo 1993; Mulhall 2001). We have seen that in Kierkegaard anxiety and nothingness always correspond with each other, and that nothingness produces anxiety. We can find similar statements in all of Heidegger's work: 'Anxiety discloses Nothingness' (Heidegger 1967: 9), and 'Anxiety is the basic attunement that confronts us with Nothingness' (Heidegger 1973: 231). Such similarities in terminology hide some important differences. Heidegger's project in *Being and Time* was to develop an interpretation of being as such – a universal fundamental ontology. Despite all the external similarities, this project was very different from Kierkegaard's thinking. In *Being and Time*, Kierkegaard is only mentioned in three footnotes. Seen from Heidegger's point of view, 'Kierkegaard got furthest of all in the analysis of the phenomenon of Angst', he had 'explicitly grasped and thought through the problem of existence ... in a penetrating way', but this 'does not mean that he was also successful in the existential interpretation of it' (Heidegger 1996: 405, 407, 412). According to Heidegger, the fundamental ontological problematic – the question of being as such – was foreign to Kierkegaard and he complained that the Danish philosopher was 'completely under the influence of Hegel' (ibid. 407). In Heidegger's interpretation, Kierkegaard was still dominated by Western metaphysics. Strictly speaking, Kierkegaard was 'not a thinker, but a religious writer' (Heidegger 1977: 91).

Heidegger's basic criticism of Kierkegaard in *Being and Time* could perhaps be summed up in the following way: Kierkegaard's thinking never moves away from an ontic and psychological level (with the exception of *The Concept of Anxiety*) and he was alien to the question of being, even if he had interesting things to say about 'das Existenzproblem'. Heidegger was right: Kierkegaard was not interested in uncovering the deep ontological structures of human existence. But as Pattison has pointed out, Kierkegaard could have criticised Heidegger in more or less the same terms as he criticised Hegel: a thinker interested in the subjective and passionate approach to existence would not be interested in developing a universal ontology. He/she would be interested in his/her subjective and personal existence and not in *Dasein's* (Pattison 2005: 86).

Karl Jaspers was influenced by both Kierkegaard and Heidegger. He took over Kierkegaard's understanding of anxiety, freedom and human existence, never missing subjectivity and personal *Existenz*, and reformulated Heidegger's question of being in his own vocabulary. In many ways it is much easier to understand Jasper's version of the question of being:

The first answer to the question of *being* arises from the following *basic experience*: Whatever becomes an object for me is always a *determinate* being among others, and only a *mode* of being. When I think of being as matter, energy, spirit, life, and so on ... in the end I always discover that I have absolutized a mode of determinate being, which appears within the totality of being, into being itself. No known being is *being itself*. (Jaspers [1937] 1971: 17)

As finite human beings we never attain a standpoint where the limiting horizon disappears and from which we can survey the whole, like a view from nowhere. Seen in this way, it seems a difficult – if not impossible – project to construct a universal fundamental ontology. What Jaspers calls *being itself* is not an object and not a being, and disappears the moment it announces itself in new beings. Trying to capture being itself is like trying to capture our shadow. This being itself is what Jaspers calls the encompassing (*das Umgreifende*): 'The encompassing always merely announces itself – in present objects and within horizons – but it *never* becomes an *object*. Never appearing to us itself, it is that wherein everything else appears' (ibid. 18). A similar distinction can be found in Kant. According to Kant, everything we can know is *in* the world, but the 'world itself' is not an object of knowledge. There is astronomy, physics, chemistry and so on, but no science of the 'world itself' (Kant [1787] 1970: 384 ff.).

Like anxiety, I cannot point my finger at the encompassing. Anxiety and the encompassing are not open to ostensive definitions. I cannot show you where they are. This understanding of the encompassing is close to Heidegger's own position in the 1930s. But Heidegger would probably have added something to Jasper's description, namely that the encompassing is always already affective and characterised by certain moods (despair, boredom, the feeling of estrangement etc.).

Everything is so strange ...

The Norwegian poet Sigbjørn Obstfelder (1866–1900) – who died of tuberculosis at the age of 34 – wrote a beautiful poem describing something that perhaps could be called a ‘mixed mood’, involving both the feeling of estrangement and that of anxiety. This mood ‘colours’ everything that is observed; every object is experienced from a certain affective perspective, or a certain mood. The poem is called ‘I look’, ‘Jeg ser’:

Jeg ser på den hvide himmel.
Jeg ser på de gråblå skyer.
Jeg ser på den blodige sol

Dette er altså verden.
Dette er altså klodernes hjem.

En regndråpe!

Jeg ser på de høye huse,
jeg ser på de tusinde vinduer,
jeg ser på det fjerne kirketårn

Dette er altså jorden.
Dette er altså menneskenes hjem.
De gråblå skyer samler sig. Solen blev borte.
Jeg ser på de velklædte herrer,
jeg ser på de smilende damer,
jeg ser på de ludende heste.

Hvor de gråblå skyer blir tunge.
Jeg ser, jeg ser ...
Jeg er visst kommet på feil klode!
Her er så underlig ...

(Obstfelder 2001)

I look at the white sky.
I look at the grey-blue clouds.
I look at the blood-red sun.

So this is the Earth.
So this is the home of the planets.

A raindrop!

I look at the tall houses,
I look at the thousand windows,
I look at the distant church spire.

So this is the Earth.
So this is the home of mankind.
The grey-blue clouds gather. The sun disappears.
I look at the well-dressed gentlemen,
I look at the smiling ladies,
I look at the stooping horses.

The grey-blue clouds become so heavy.
I look, I look ...
I must have come to the wrong planet
Everything is so strange ...

(translation by Nils Gilje)

In the poem the familiar world is present – the sky, clouds, houses, a church, gentlemen, ladies, horses – but at the same time is strangely unfamiliar. Something has moved in between mankind and the worldly things, between the poet and his worldly compatriots. Everything is strange. All the well-known phenomena seem to have lost their meaning and what is going on has become questionable. This leads to a feeling of estrangement. Is the observer a stranger in the world he inhabits – or does he know it too well? Can this really be the world of mankind? At the end the poet seems to be trapped in the mood of the uncanny, or what Heidegger calls ‘Unheimlichkeit als solcher’. The poet feels that he is not at home in this ‘home of mankind’, where everything has become strange.

There are some striking similarities between Obstfelder and the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke, both of whom seem to experience the same complexity of moods. In Rilke’s poem ‘Die grosse Nacht’ the poet is in a city that appears strange and unfamiliar, watching it from the window and observing it at a distance:

Noch war die neue
 Stadt wie verwehrt, und die unüberredete Landschaft
 finsterte hin, als wäre ich nicht. Nicht gaben die nächsten
 Dinge sich Mühe, mir verständlich zu sein. An der Laterne
 Drängte die Gassen auf: ich sah, dass sie fremd war.

(Rilke 1975)

The new city still was as if denied me, and the unpersuaded landscape darkened as if I was not. The nearest things did not bother to make themselves known to me. The street crowded itself up to the lamppost: I saw it was strange.

(translation by Nils Gilje)

In such a mood the world is disclosed in a certain way. Moods seem to have the function of opening up the world to us, and different moods disclose the world in different ways. In this sense, moods are our pre-theoretical access to the world. However, it is also a well-known fact, at least in some forms of existentialist philosophy, that some moods have a more privileged status than others. In the works of Kierkegaard and Heidegger, anxiety has such a privileged ontological position. But perhaps we should also regard the feelings of alienation and estrangement, as in Obstfelder and Rilke, as important existential moods that should not be transformed into ontological structures.

I have already indicated that anxiety differs from fear in that the object of anxiety is ‘nothing’ or ‘nothingness’. In this sense, anxiety is not just understood as a mood among other moods, such as pleasure and sadness, but is also said to be an ontological characteristic of mankind, rooted in his or her very existence. I do not find this argument very convincing, though. It is not quite clear why anxiety should be ranked in this way. The same could probably be said about despair, boredom, estrangement – or more cheery moods like happiness and the feelings of pleasure and joy. It is exactly at this point that Spinoza becomes relevant for our discussion.

Spinoza and the ‘affective turn’

There is little of Spinoza in Heidegger’s *oeuvre*. Heidegger seems to have accepted the argument of post-Kantian German idealism that Spinoza could not think of the Absolute as subjectivity (cf. Heidegger

[1936] 1986: 57 ff., 124; Heidegger 1957). Heidegger developed a dialogue with the Greeks, Duns Scotus, Meister Eckhart, Kant, Hegel, Schelling and Nietzsche, but not with Spinoza. In *Being and Time* Spinoza is not mentioned at all. This is strange, because there are interesting points of overlap between *Being and Time* and Spinoza's *Ethics*. One promising theme is Heidegger's interpretation of *Befindlichkeit* and moods (*Stimmungen*) and Spinoza's analysis of the emotions (*affectiones*). Kierkegaard does not seem to have shown much interest in Spinoza either. His claim that Spinoza's substance is only a metaphysical expression of Christian providence is not very convincing (Kierkegaard 1980: 199).²

Even though Heidegger and Spinoza develop similar claims about thinking, understanding and moods, there is also an obvious distance between them. This comes out clearly in their reflections on death. For Heidegger, death is a permanent and yet undetermined 'possibility of no-longer-being-able-to-be-there' (1996: 232). Death is intimately mine. No one else can die my death. At the same time, death is something that I would like to put into parentheses, or ignore. For me, anticipating death, or 'running ahead into death', defines the possibility of the absence of all possibilities. For Heidegger, this is the most challenging way of being attuned: 'Being-toward death is essentially Angst'. What is it that characterises authentic existence projected being-toward-death? Anticipating death, which for Heidegger has nothing to do with the 'cowardly fear' of death, discloses the finitude of existence and makes us free in relation to it (ibid. 245). In this sense, Heidegger talks about the possibility to be ourselves 'in passionate anxious *freedom toward death* which is free of the illusions of the they' (ibid. 245; emphasis in the original). Anticipating death can even free us from the tyranny of *das Man* and open the gate to an authentic life. In Spinoza there is nothing of this heroic realism towards death. In fact, Spinoza is extremely critical of those moods that have had a privileged status in many existentialist traditions: 'A free man thinks of death least of all things; and his wisdom is a meditation not of death but of life' (IVp67).³ According to Spinoza, a free person is not led by anxiety and fear. Rather he/she strives to act, live and preserve her/his being. Therefore a free man does not focus on death, but – as Spinoza claims – 'his wisdom is a meditation of life' (ibid.). For Spinoza anxiety can never lead to an authentic life. Authentic existence is rather correlated with joy and happiness. This seems to be an understanding of being-in-the-world that is far removed from Kierkegaard and Heidegger.

However, this first impression reveals some very interesting affinities between these thinkers.

According to Spinoza, all forms of understanding and knowledge are expressed in affective structures (see Renz 2012). Spinoza seems to claim that feeling and thinking, or feeling and cognition, are two aspects of the same psychological process (cf. 2a3, IIP48–49). Even true knowledge is something that is *felt*, not only something that is known (cf. Vp23). As we have seen, Heidegger develops a similar thesis by arguing that our understanding is always already ‘attuned’ in certain ways:

Mood has always already disclosed being-in-the-world as a whole and first makes possible directing oneself toward something ... The moodedness of attunement constitutes existentially the openness to world of Da-sein. (Heidegger 1996: 129)

In both Spinoza and Heidegger we are confronted with the elimination of the idea of an original unbodily and ‘pure’ theoretical attitude to the world. This explains why the purest *theōria* does not abandon all moods:

Even when we look theoretically at what is merely objectively present, it does not show itself in its pure outward appearance unless this *theōria* lets it come toward us in a *tranquil* staying. (Heidegger 1996: 130)

For Spinoza, there is close correspondence between the emotions of the body and the ideas of the soul. Human consciousness can never be analysed independently of the body and its emotion. Our relation to the world is always already constituted by bodily emotions or affects.

The reason why Spinoza has such an important place in the ‘affective turn’ is due to his philosophy of emotion and power. Gilles Deleuze has correctly pointed out that Spinoza engenders all the passions, in detail, on the basis of two fundamental affects: joy as an increase in the power of acting and sadness as a decrease or diminution of the power of acting (cf. Deleuze 1981). According to this analysis, Spinoza leaves the philosophy of the mind and concentrates on the philosophy of the body. Seen from Spinoza’s point of view, we still do not know what a body is capable of. We talk about the soul and the mind, but we have no idea what a body can do. Here Spinoza goes in a materialistic direction compared

to Heidegger and Kierkegaard, where at least *Dasein* (Heidegger) or the individual being (Kierkegaard) gets a body.

Power is a key term in Spinoza's philosophy of bodily emotion. Whenever power of some kind increases or decreases, there are emotions. When there is an increase in power, there is active emotion. This claim can also be turned around: when there is active emotion, there is an increase in power. According to Spinoza, increase in power is also an increase in freedom. Only active emotions will increase our power and freedom; passive emotions will decrease our power and diminish our freedom (cf. IIIp6–9). What kind of emotions will increase our power and freedom? What kind of emotions will decrease our power and freedom? The starting points for answering these questions are joy and sadness.

In the *Ethics*, especially in parts 3 and 4, Spinoza analyses many emotions on the basis of the two fundamental affects of joy (*laetitia*) and sadness (*tristitia*). An increase in power, freedom and autonomy has everything to do with joy. Joy cannot be separated from authenticity. In IVp41, Spinoza defines joy as the emotion, whereby the body's power of activity is increased or helped. Thus, it is not only the body that profits from joy. According to Spinoza, an increase in the body's power to act also implies an increase in our ability to think (cf. IIIp11). Joy makes us better thinkers and improves our minds. Here, active emotions have a lot to do with intellectual activity.

Why is joy so important for Spinoza? Most of the positive claims in his philosophy of emotion are based on joy: when we are in joy, we increase in power. Increasing in power implies being joyful. When we experience joy, we become freer, at least in some respects, and become more active. When we feel joy we also experience an increase in self-realisation and authenticity (being oneself). So, for Spinoza, it is not primarily anxiety that discloses the world to us – it is *joy*.

Not all forms of joy have positive effects, however. Love and desire, for example, may be excessive and take control of our actions. In such contexts Spinoza uses the term *titillatio*, which is perhaps best translated as intense stimulation or extreme excitement. When our bodies are taken over by *titillatio* we tend to become the slaves of our own passions. In part 4 of the *Ethics* Spinoza analyses some of these possibilities:

For the emotions, whereby we are daily assailed, are generally referred to some part of the body which is affected more than the rest; hence the emotions are generally excessive, and so fix

the mind in the contemplation of one object, that it is unable to think of others. (IVp44)

Emotions can thus become obstinately fixed. This is the case when we are completely absorbed in an object (or a subject). It is not difficult to imagine what Spinoza has in mind here. His favourite example is ‘those persons who are inflamed with love, and who dream all night and all day about nothing but their mistress, or some woman’ (IVp44). According to Spinoza, we should therefore differentiate between cheerfulness (*hilaritas*) and extreme excitement. When joy affects all parts of the mind and body equally, increasing our total power, Spinoza normally talks about joy as cheerfulness. Cheerfulness somehow permeates the whole person.

Spinoza’s *Ethics* can be read as an attempt to show us how to educate our emotions and desires. We have to learn that a strong emotion may impede the development of different aspects of mind and body, especially when it is concentrated in one or a few bodily parts (and corresponding ideas). *Titillatio* comes in many forms. One effect of extreme excitement might be a partial or limited increase in power and freedom, although it could also result in a dramatic decrease in power and freedom. Very strong stimulations of the body may block an increase in power and freedom, or reduce it. An example of this is sexual addiction, or an unusually strong obsession with sex, which can reduce a person’s possibility of self-realisation. In fact, any extreme excitement that is initially pleasurable may turn us into slaves. If *titillatio* renders the body ‘incapable of being affected in a variety of other ways’ (IVp43), we will soon lose our freedom and autonomy.

The power and freedom of mankind can also be reduced in other ways. Some of Spinoza’s most interesting reflections on human affections focus on sadness (*tristitia*). Generally speaking, sadness is a state of decreasing power and freedom. When discussing sadness, Spinoza distinguishes between melancholy (*melancholia*) and pain (*dolor*). This trio corresponds more or less with joy, cheerfulness and extreme excitement. Melancholy can be said to be the polar opposite of cheerfulness. Melancholy diminishes or hinders the power of activity in our bodies, and therefore also hinders the power of thought and understanding in our minds. This mood implies an overall decrease in activity (cf. Næss 1975: 103). Like cheerfulness, melancholy affects all parts of the body (cf. IIIp11). We can be taken over by melancholy. It is a mood that completely

colours our perceptions of the world and ourselves. Spinoza has a lot to say about the emotions that we encounter in poets such as Rilke and Obstfelder, but insists that melancholy is a state in which we lose power and freedom in every relation. Extreme forms of melancholy come close to madness.

Pain corresponds to extreme excitement or stimulation and normally implies a decrease in power in at least one relation and a partial loss of freedom. Being in pain also implies a partial decrease in understanding. Pain is clearly intertwined with thinking and understanding.

It is not possible here to go into Spinoza's complex analysis of mixed emotions. The pain that is experienced during a pleasurable or highly rewarding undertaking, such as climbing a mountain or working on an article late at night, does not normally lead to a decrease in power and freedom, largely due to the joyful nature of the undertaking. If *titillatio*, or excessive stimulation, is an obstacle to freedom and self-realisation, in certain joyful situations *dolor* could be a positive stimulation.

From these comments on the 'affective turn' in Spinoza we can easily understand why he could not give any primacy to the existential mood of anxiety. Even though anxiety, like *dolor*, could help us to understand some important aspects of the human condition, Spinoza would probably say that anxiety is a mood that at least partially diminishes our body's power to act and decreases our freedom and autonomy. But Spinoza would also agree with Heidegger that thinking and knowledge production cannot be separated from the emotions of our body. We always *feel* our understanding of something.

Back to basic moods

Let us suppose that anxiety has an important philosophical function. Kierkegaard's claims that anxiety discloses our experience of 'nothingness', and Heidegger does the same: 'Die Angst offenbart das Nichts' – anxiety reveals nothingness. Why, then, is this presentation of anxiety and nothingness so important for thinkers such as Kierkegaard and Heidegger? It might be because anxiety shakes the human being in all his/her familiar relations. According to Heidegger, in everyday life the human being is ontologically 'fallen', lives an inauthentic life and has *das Man* as its hero. In our daily lives most of us take part in what Heidegger calls the 'real dictatorship of the "they"' – with its 'newspapers' and

‘public transport’. Of course, everything that is ‘public’ (*öffentlich*) – such as political parties and trade unions – is an expression of *das Man*. Most of the time I take part in the ‘great mass’, where ‘every Other is like the next’. However, most importantly, *das Man* conceals my finitude and what it really means to be a finite being-in-the-world (see Heidegger 1956: 167–180). Here I will not discuss Heidegger’s elitist and rather problematic criticism of modernity, but will instead focus on his understanding of the role of moods.

For both Kierkegaard and Heidegger, anxiety and the experience of ‘nothingness’ are necessary in order to bring humans out of their everyday lives and attain a more authentic level of existence. Anxiety serves to shake us up and bring us back to ourselves. Understood in this way, anxiety has an extremely positive function, and is not something that should be avoided at all cost. It is rather an expression of what is human about human nature. Anxiety is like some sort of dizziness that creates a distance between people and everything they are involved in. However, in this state of lack of control, mankind’s existence, possibilities and freedom are revealed. When humans are thrown back on themselves, they will finally discover their real existential freedom. Seen from this perspective, which is shared by both Jaspers and Heidegger, anxiety has nothing to do with weakness. Weakness shows itself when we flee from anxiety and move back to the security of trivial and inauthentic everyday life – to the life of *das Man*. Withstanding anxiety implies extreme effort.

Other basic moods (*Stimmungen*) have a similar function in the philosophy of existence. They all call mankind to authenticity, but do not have the same privileged position as anxiety. I will not go into an analysis of moods such as boredom (*Langweile*), melancholia (*Schwermut*) and despair (*Verzweiflung*), but will simply make a few comments about them. With regard to boredom, we need to distinguish between superficial boredom, for example when reading a boring book or listening to a boring lecture, and a deeper and more ‘*eigentliche Langweile*’ (Heidegger), which can be totally overpowering, where nothing seems to be important and all action seems meaningless. I am bored by everything, including myself and nothing in the world matters. Heidegger calls this a feeling of ‘strange indifference’ (*merkwürdige Gleichgültigkeit*). It is probably easier to flee from boredom than anxiety. Heidegger once said – in 1929/1930 – that boredom was the primary mood of the times (Heidegger 2004). But as we know, in 1933 the basic mood was quite different.

Heavy-mindedness and melancholia seem to have been important moods in Kierkegaard's life. Melancholia (*tungsind*) was his 'faithful mistress'. According to Kierkegaard, melancholia is similar in many ways to anxiety. If you ask a melancholic what makes him or her so gloomy, then he/she will answer: I don't know, I can't say. Heavy-mindedness is akin to being melancholic and is a person's way of being in the world (for a good analysis of Kierkegaard's view of melancholy, see Verstrynge 2008: 143–159). There also seems to be a close relationship between boredom and melancholia; melancholia is sometimes understood to be an extreme form of boredom. Kierkegaard also accepted the old idea that melancholia was a severe sin, in that it breaks down our ability to decide and to act as free human beings.

Let us leave the moods for a moment and turn to how existentialist philosophy understands 'existence', or the basic human condition. According to Kierkegaard, there is no progress and no cumulative learning at the existential level. At this level, every generation has to start from scratch. What is really human can never be learned from previous generations. The question of heritage is therefore reformulated within existentialism: it becomes a question of 'repetition', which is also the title of one of Kierkegaard's books from 1843: *Repetition (Gentagelsen)*. It is an important argument, too, in *Being and Time*: 'The repetition is the explicit handing over' (Heidegger 1996: 352, translation modified by Nils Gilje). This idea was already very popular in Lutheran Protestantism and is clearly expressed in Luther's claim that 'the old Adam should become sober by daily remorse and repentance and daily be reborn as a new man' (quoted from Bollnow 1949: 104). It is important to stress that it is only at an existential level that something like 'repetition' is found, which Kierkegaard also pointed out in *Repetition*. In normal life we are involved in transformation and progress. Repetition understood from an existential point of view does not exclude reforms and transformations of society. However, existential repetition cannot make sense of such changes.

In our everyday language we talk about high and low moods, superficial and deep moods, and being 'attuned' in a certain way. This expression comes close to the German *Stimmungslage* (or the Norwegian *stemningsleie*). When I am in a certain mood or attuned in a certain way, the world appears to me affectively. I am tuned like a musical instrument. When I am attuned in a different way, it appears differently. Moods are

therefore basic ways of relating to the world. They also have an epistemic function. Moods make certain experiences possible and exclude others. They determine from the outset how the world appears to us as individuals. Even our observations are coloured by moods, sometimes in light colours, sometimes in dark colours. Our experience of the world is therefore emotionally coloured, as 'rosy' or 'gloomy.' This is how moods open the world for us. Not even the so-called theoretical attitude is free from moods, but is based on very specific ones. Moods are thus always involved in the discovery of the world: 'Every understanding has its mood. Every attunement understands' (Heidegger 1996: 309). While there is surely more to discovery than attunement and moods, basic affects seem to play an important role in scientific activity.

At this point there is also an important difference between Heidegger and his most famous pupil Hans-Georg Gadamer. In *Truth and Method* Gadamer develops a much more cognitive interpretation of how the world is disclosed to us. Seen from Gadamer's point of view, preunderstanding and prejudice are the most important preconditions for understanding. But both preunderstanding and prejudice are basically forms of propositional knowledge. Moods are not propositions. And Heidegger's idea of the primacy of practical knowledge or know-how (the German terms being *Vorhabe* and *Vorsicht*) can in my opinion not be reduced to propositional knowledge.

I have tried to establish a distinction between moods (*Stimmungen*) and emotions (*Gefühle*), even though this distinction is not very well supported by our everyday language, at least not in Norwegian and probably not in English either. I still think that there is a difference between experiencing joy when an old friend unexpectedly turns up and being attuned in a certain way. A mood is more like a state that for shorter or longer periods 'takes hold of me'. In the 1970s Jack Scott had a hit called 'What in the world's come over you'. A mood is something that comes over me, without necessarily being intentionally directed towards an object. There might be a close relation between the general feeling of well-being or happiness, and the joy of seeing an old friend, but it still seems to be a good idea to draw a distinction between mood and intentional emotion.

Mood and emotion are related in complex ways. In Sergio Leone's spaghetti western 'Per un pugno di dollari' you never see the nameless and lonely rider, played by Clint Eastwood, smile or laugh. The antihero

is obviously tuned in a certain way. He is characterised by his gloomy moods. But mood does not reduce the emotions to superficial epiphenomena. Even though Heidegger placed moods at a deeper ontological level than emotions (*Gefühle*), moods can be turned on by strong emotions. The loss of a dear friend or a family member could mean being in a sad mood for a very long time. In Henrik Ibsen's epic poem *Terje Vigen*, he tells the story of a Norwegian fisherman and sailor who during the British blockade in the Napoleonic wars set out in his rowing boat to buy wheat in Denmark. On his way home he was captured by an English captain and put in prison for five years. When he eventually returned to Norway he found that his wife and child had starved to death. The loss of his wife and daughter transformed Terje emotionally. In his mourning he became completely overwhelmed by melancholia and sadness, and also by hate and revenge. In such a mood certain emotional expressions are unthinkable, for example laughter and joy. Only after having saved the wife and daughter of the English captain who was responsible for his loss could Terje Vigen be attuned in a new way:

Ærbødig løftet han barnet ned,
 og kysset dets hender mildt.
 Han ånded, som løst fra et fængsels hvelv;
 hans stemme lød rolig og jevn:
 'Nu er Terje Vigen igjen sig selv.
 Indtil *nu* gik mit blod som en stenet elv;
 for jeg *måtte* – jeg *måtte* ha'e hævn.'

Respectfully he sat the child on its feet,
 and kissed its hands gently.
 He was breathing as though released from a prison cell,
 his voice sounded calm and even:
 'Now Terje Vigen is himself again
 Like a rocky stream flowed my blood then;
 for I *had* – I *had* to take revenge'.

(translation by Nils Gilje)

Despite my emphasis on the difference between emotions and moods, there are clearly intriguing interactions between the two, and in many cases it can be difficult to determine which is which. A mood is not a

completely subjective experience either, because subject and object and the self and the world are interrelated. This point is clearly expressed by Heidegger in *Being and Time*: The mood is neither 'subjective' nor 'objective', but arises as a way of being-in-the-world in the world itself.

Kierkegaard, Jaspers and Heidegger give anxiety a certain priority over other moods. Even though anxiety is an important mood, I think that moods in the plural open up the basic structures of our being in the world. Unfortunately, Kierkegaard and Heidegger tend to focus on anxiety and despair in their analyses of the human being. In paragraph 40 of *Being and Time* it is clear that anxiety is the primary and paradigmatic mood in the analysis of *Dasein*. The problem with this approach is that other moods tend to be reduced to deficient or superficial moods. In my opinion, Heidegger's analysis of anxiety is brilliant, but he tends to end up with a one-dimensional *Dasein*. This is because it is based mostly on one mood – anxiety.

It is easy to understand why anxiety has been given such a privileged place in existential philosophy. Anxiety is the mood that confronts us with *Nichts*. What we are confronted with in Nothingness is life itself, or what Heidegger called 'das In-der-Welt-sein selbst'. According to Kierkegaard, anxiety presents to us the possibility of freedom. Heidegger's argument is similar: Without the original manifestation of nothingness, there is no self-being and no freedom.

An interesting approach to such claims that does not start from anxiety can be found in the works of the Italian Renaissance philosopher Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. In *On the Dignity of Man* (1486), Pico presents his personal version of the myth of creation. In Pico's version, God is a Platonist and uses the rich resources in the realm of ideas in the creation of the world. According to this view, the sun, the moon and the stars have a fixed essence or nature and behave in accordance with ideas about the sun, moon and stars. The same is the case with animals, trees, plants etc. The lion behaves in accordance with ideas about lions, the sheep in accordance with ideas about sheep and so on. No created being can change its nature. However, on the sixth day, when God created Adam, all the ideas and resources had been used up. So when God made Adam he had to conclude that all creatures had a fixed and eternal essence except for Adam, who was created without a permanent nature and had freedom to become a wild beast or a beautiful angel. According to Pico, this is how man is distinguished from all other beings. He also

maintained that freedom is the dignity of man (Pico 1965). We know that Kierkegaard was aware of Pico, as was Heidegger (probably from his reading of Schelling's treatise on the freedom of man).

I would like to add a few words about Pico to explain the relevance of his myth. Pico is a kind of paradoxical anti-essentialist. What is the essence of men and women? It is to be without a predetermined essence. Our existence precedes our essence. We recognise this as Jean-Paul Sartre's argument in *Existentialism is Humanism*. Sartre has only secularised Pico's analysis. Seen from Pico's point of view, every human being is placed in Adam's position; he is either free or condemned to freedom, as Sartre would say, and has to pick his way between the beasts and the angels. At an existential level there is in fact nothing new, no progress, no learning process. This idea, as we have seen, was taken over by Kierkegaard and Heidegger, both of whom focused on exactly the same points: *Gentagelse* and *Wiederholung*.

Conclusion

In my opinion, anxiety is a very fragile foundation for a phenomenology of moods and emotions. Let me first reiterate the sound point Heidegger's position, namely that I am always in some kind of mood. I am distracted, indifferent, anxious, bored or whatever. Therefore, mankind's primary form of disclosure is affective, and this affective disclosure reveals humans as confronted with their own existence. When mankind is attuned in a mood, she/he sees possibilities – for instance of an authentic existence.

Most of the time we live our lives in what Plato called the realm of *doxa*, and what Heidegger refers to as everyday life. Being-in-the-world is always being together with others in that world (*Mitsein*). Heidegger calls the everyday form of this being together *das Man*. Being determined by *das Man* is inauthentic, because it means that man lives according to the conventions and customs of the everyday world. In *Being and Time* – except for the discussion in paragraph 74 on taking part in the fate of the *Volk* – there does not seem to be any authentic form of being together. With this exception, being together is understood negatively as *das Man*. Authentic existence is only possible when man confronts anxiety and death. In some sense, then, authentic existence in Heidegger takes the form of self-sufficiency.

Is it perhaps time to rehabilitate inauthentic existence? What is really wrong with small talk? What is wrong with a jolly good party? Why is it inauthentic to see Liverpool play football, read newspapers, or watch television? (For some interesting comments on this, see Critchley 2007: 21–50). If Heidegger had been more open to positive moods, or to Spinoza’s phenomenological descriptions of joy, his criticism of modern daily life would probably have been different. There is an elitist bias in both Kierkegaard and Heidegger, and much less so in Spinoza (see Negri 1991). Whatever Heidegger thought of the modern world, he was surely not fond of the ‘real dictatorship of the “they”’. But this did not protect him from the real dictatorship of Hitler. Heidegger’s phenomenological analysis of attunement and moods is nonetheless an important source of inspiration for both present-day philosophy and more empirically oriented social and cultural research.

In this chapter I have tried to spell out some of the philosophical ideas involved in the recent ‘affective’ and existentialist turn in ethnology and social science, focusing primarily on Kierkegaard, Spinoza and Heidegger. One important claim has been that moods and emotions disclose our world in different ways. Thus moods and emotions also have important epistemic functions.

Notes

- 1 Generally speaking, moods can be understood as collective phenomena and should not be reduced to more individual or psychological affects or emotions. We are affected by moods that somehow come upon us from the ‘outside’. On the other hand, moods should not be ‘objectified’ (*hypostasis*). Moods are nothing if they are not experienced by human beings.
- 2 The reference is to Kierkegaard’s *Journals and Papers*.
- 3 Spinoza is quoted using the standard system of reference to the *Ethics*. The edition used is *Ethics* (translated from Latin by R.H.M. Elwes), New York: Dover Publications, 1955. For example, IVp67 refers to part IV proposition 67.

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