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Moods and emotions

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Since the main task of phenomenology concerns the various modes of givenness in which things manifest themselves, it unavoidably has to come to terms with the phenomena of moods and emotions that shape the way the world is revealed both in its overall meaning and in its most salient features. To be more precise, what shows up in moods and emotions is not the world of objects standing in opposition to subject or consciousness, but the world as the ultimate horizon of significance in which we are involved, as well as various possible ways in which things matter to us. Drawing on joint insights from the phenomenology of Heidegger and of Merleau-Ponty, I claim that moods are to be understood as fundamental ways of disclosing our current existential situation(s), while emotions are to be redefined as emotional conducts through which we act out and display the way we feel about relevant matters of concern. Such an approach allows us not only to differentiate between moods and emotions, but also to understand better how emotional experiences come about on the basis of our ubiquitous attunement to an already significant world, manifested through moods. The latter make up the background that shapes, orients and regulates the range and the intensity of specific emotional conducts through which we reply to the solicitations of our environment. Furthermore, I contend that emotions are neither internal mental states, nor hard-wired reactions occurring in our brains. From the phenomenological point of view, they are experience manifest as wholes that can be only ex post decomposed in what seem to be – once we adopt an objectivizing perspective – their components, such as cognitive appraisals, inner feelings, motor reactions, physiological arousals, etc. Against the strong impulse to decompose emotion into such empirically identifiable components, phenomenology points to the impossible task of reconstructing our affective life in its full sense out of determinate component-entities and provides the means to grasp emotional experience simultaneously in its primary indistinction and implicit articulation. In short, my contribution on the one hand presents the original insights brought by phenomenology into the unified structure of emotional experience and, on the other, deals with the relevance of affective life and its investigation for phenomenology itself.

**Affective disclosure of meaning and value**

Since Husserl’s *Logical Investigations*, phenomenology has been concerned with the interrelated ways in which the world manifests itself as the meaningful and value-rich environment in which
we dwell. The first thing to note in this regard is that the appearing of things should not be confined to the thinking I and its capacity to grasp matters of fact. If our basic encounter with things and situations is one of affective attunement to them and of interested engagement with them, cognition cannot pretend to serve as a mediator. On the contrary, the attitude of merely seeing something objectively present, or its “pure beholding”, to use Heidegger’s term, is to be explained on the basis of our prior affective involvement with the world. However, the legacies of both Husserl and Heidegger concerning feelings, moods and emotions are ambivalent, since their many merits in the study of affective life consist of providing essential conceptual and methodological tools rather than extended analysis of the affective phenomena themselves. Moreover, these merits are most visible in their substantive disagreements about the ontological and epistemic status of affective life, so that Heidegger’s strengths illuminate Husserl’s weaknesses and vice-versa.

Husserl’s contribution to the study of affective phenomena notably includes the following claims whose short enumeration will serve as a declaration of principles behind our subsequent investigation of affectivity. Husserl’s emphasis on a priori correlation between acts of consciousness and various modes of givenness:

- rejects the modern assumption of the representation of the external world within the private realm of consciousness, since our intentional openness to the world cannot be seen either as a mirroring of exteriority within interiority, nor as a causal relation between external stimuli and their inner counterparts.
- opens a new field for the systematic investigation of lawful relations between various intentional acts and experienced objects, allowing one to recognize the essential characteristics of phenomena precisely as they are given in the perception, memory, imagination or emotion.
- provides the means to understand the role of the lived and living body in the genesis of affective states. Most notably, it permits to appreciate the contribution of kinesthetic feelings to the monitoring of how one’s body is positioned with regards to the requirements of the perceptual field, articulated according to “I can” or “I can’t” rather than “I think”.
- finally, it prevents one from regarding experiences as a mere succession of mental states, causally linked to each other or somehow “produced” by their physiological counterparts. As part of intentional flow, even the most simple affect, feeling or emotion is a temporally extended and internally structured whole that entails the retention of our past experiences and the anticipation of what is likely to happen.

All these claims are crucial for questioning the many objectivist assumptions that led the larger part of both modern philosophy and empirical psychology to treat the emotions as entities occurring within our heads, and that prevented those theories from grasping the specificity of affective intentionality. However, if one looks more closely at how these innovative Husserlian claims apply within his concrete analysis of emotional life, one cannot but feel at least a bit dissatisfied. To be sure, already in his famous Fifth Logical investigation, Husserl recognizes that the role of the feelings (Gefühle) does not boil down to providing some affective “coloration” to an already encountered object. Feelings transform our perceptual experience into a special class of intentional acts of their own, in which our consciousness is directed at the values of a given. Nevertheless, Husserl is far from recognizing the fundamental role that our affectivity plays on its own in world-disclosure and he does not departure from the intellectualist account of feeling.

Since the everyday notion of feelings is equivocal, Husserl proposes to distinguish between intentional and non-intentional feelings. Intentional feelings, which Husserl exemplifies by the
joy we experience in front of a beautiful landscape, are dependent upon a more basic intentionality, provided by “presentative acts”, such as perception or belief. Drawing in this regard on Brentano, Husserl fails to acknowledge the possibility of affective, prethematic and non-objectifying openness to a meaningful world. And yet, in opposition to Brentano, Husserl emphasizes the crucial function that non-intentional feelings perform within a complex, stratified phenomenon of emotion that entails both sensory and intentional layers of sense. In the terminology of the Logical Investigations, these non-intentional feelings include both sensuous feelings (sinnliche Gefühle, such as sharp sound, soft or rough touch) and affective sensations (Gefühlempfindungen, closely related to proprioceptions such as visceral feelings or a pang in the heart). In Husserl’s later view, these non-intentional feelings can function as presentative contents and thus give rise to fully fledged intentional acts through which we disclose our value-rich surroundings. However, even from the partly reversed perspective presented in Ideas II, where Husserl speaks of sensuous feelings as a fundamental stratum for the constitution of values, the intellectualist assumption prevails in the claim that feelings would remain blind if they were not consciously “taken up” by an act of apprehension. In short, bodily feelings play the same role for the acts of valuing that “hyletic”, sensuous data (Empfindungsdaten) play for the acts of perceiving: they provide material ground to be animated by an act of meaning-giving or “animating” apprehensions. Though he recognizes here that experience of value implies an irreducible feeling, Husserl nevertheless still strives to found any value-apperception worthy of its name upon the intuition of the value in question. Such a stance is consequent with Husserl’s commitment to provide a rationalist account of our practical world-orientation, where any evaluative position-taking has to be based on some kind of cognitive element. At the same time, it leads Husserl to provide an overly intellectualized picture of affectivity.

The Husserlian account illegitimately decomposes the unified structure of our emotional life, since within the limits of experience we never witness anything like the mere sensory feelings that would have to be “animated” by an act of interpretation. Husserl’s analysis introduces, praeter necessitatem, distinctions that our experiential life does not support. Wouldn’t it be much more consequent to recognize that an important and even fundamental part of our openness to the world does not have the character of objectifying acts and does not rely upon doxic, conscious acts? Is it necessary to presuppose that the flow of feelings, in order to disclose our situation in the world meaningfully, is to be “animated” by conceptual apprehension, as Husserl claims?

The phenomenological primacy of affectivity

This is precisely where Heidegger’s emphasis on the fundamental role of the affective disclosure of the world offers a welcome antidote to Husserl’s intellectualism. In contrast to Husserl, the disclosure of the world as the horizon of my being does not primarily result from objectifying acts, be they representations, judgments or other epistemic “acts of consciousness”. Instead, moods constitute the fundamental lenses through which we experience the world. We do not always form explicit judgments about everything we encounter, but we are always already attuned to the world through a mood. Prior to any objectifying act directed at things and their determinate qualities, we feel we are a part of a meaningful whole and the allure of such belonging is revealed in our being attuned. That is why phenomenology cannot start by establishing our epistemic access to the world and regard its affective tones and values as founded upon this relation of knowledge. On the contrary, the attitude of “simply seeing” should be explained on the basis of our affective involvement in the world.

Then, if we are to overcome the intellectualist position, we have to acknowledge that our openness to the world exceeds the a priori correlation between constituting subjectivity and
constituted objectivity. The a priori correlation itself is to be reformulated in terms of the funda-
mental inextricability between self-understanding and the disclosure of the things that matter 
or that have to be dealt with. Depending on our attunement, things and situations manifest 
themselves as pressing or tedious matters; they are enticing or fascinating in the mood of elation, 
threatening in anxious attunement, simultaneously repulsive and attractive when we find our-
selves in what Spinoza called *fluctuatio animi*, associated with envy, jealousy and the like. Things 
always show up within a certain “tonality” or “feel” to which we are responsive. If they did not, 
not even their most rigorous scientific uncovering would be of any relevance for us. Any search 
for specific meanings thus always presupposes our affective openness to world-significance, 
which includes not only the possibility of being addressed by meaning, but also the possibility 
of losing meaningfulness, as will become clear when we turn to consider “basic attunements” 
such as *Angst* or profound boredom.

Prior to engaging with these Grundstimmungen, let us first consider several examples of what 
Heidegger calls the “ontic side” of the ontological structure of affectivity. On the ontic level, our 
affective disposedness mostly manifests itself in our passing moods, affects and feelings such as 
grief, eagerness, feeling blue, puzzlement, elation, exasperation, mourning, wariness, satisfaction. Already in paying attention to these and similar ontic modes of attunement, we can observe that 
the things and the situations are not merely given, but are something that we care about: a love 
has been lost, the joyful blue of the sky above is inviting us for a walk, the fridge is empty again. 
Because of the ubiquity of moods, our relation to “matters of fact” is never one of indifference. 
All these everyday feelings are indicators of how well we are faring in our dealings with worldly 
matters and social interactions. ‘Mood makes manifest ‘how one is and is coming along.’ In this 
‘how one is’ being in a mood brings being to its ‘there’” (Heidegger 2010, 131). Feelings are thus 
not inward; they are ways of disclosing our current standing in the world.

Unlike the most common examples of everyday feelings and passing moods mentioned 
above, the so-called “ground attunements” do not regard specific states of affairs to be con-
cerned with, but rather disclose the overall situation of our factual, unchosen being-there. To be 
sure, it does not mean that “merely being in a mood” will illuminate by itself the relevant onto-
logical structure of Dasein (see Heidegger 2010, 132). And yet, while particular “ontic” feelings 
and moods disclose the salient features of objects or situations, fundamental attunements such as 
Angst or deep boredom disclose our being-in-the-world as a whole. Why is it so?

First of all, what these “existential feelings” make manifest is the unitary structure of our 
being in the world, the inextricability of *who* (as attuned to one’s own being at stake), *being-in* 
(as belonging to a whole that can never be grasped by representation) and *world* (neither as par-
ticular this or that, nor the sum of it, but the ultimate existential horizon of any positioning). It 
is precisely because they disclose both the world as a whole and our situatedness within it that 
moods are of utmost importance for fundamental ontology, understood as a method of discovering 
the meaning of being. It might even be said that one has to be in a mood for angst if one is 
to develop a precise description of Dasein’s ontological condition.

Secondly, this disclosive function of moods passes inconspicuously most of the time, but is 
activated in radical shifts in deep attunements. This point is never explicitly stated by Heidegger 
himself, but convincingly developed by Ratcliff (2008). While passing from one shallow mood 
to another is noticed only incidentally, extreme changes in moods allow us to become aware 
of what was taken for granted in our absorbed coping with things up to now. Our situatedness 
as such becomes conspicuous precisely to the extent to which our background orientation has 
eroded or drained away in angst. Only during such drastic shifts might we become aware of the 
tacit, but fundamental role that our previous attunement played in structuring the meaningful-
ness of our world.
Thirdly, basic attunements disclose the radical ungroundedness of existence, the fragility of our everyday meaningfulness that we have taken for granted as well as the contingent and indeterminate character of our shared form of life. This third “function” of Grundstimmungen is convincingly stressed and developed in all its ambivalent political consequences in a recent paper by Slaby and Thonhauser (2019). Once our angst or deep boredom discloses the world as such, a world in which no aspiration and no activity appears more meaningful than any other, one might ask: what comes next? Since nobody can prolong the moment of confrontation with nothing, and since all previous significance seems to have been dissolved by the corrosive effects of Angst, the resoluteness opens a variety of political choices, including the most disastrous.

This is surely not the only criticism that might be addressed to Heidegger’s account of affectivity. Apart from the notorious neglect of body to which we will turn shortly, it has been also criticized for the “sloppiness” of its conceptual distinction (see Freeman 2015, 249–252). Heidegger not only uses the concept of Stimmungen rather loosely so that it is unclear if he speaks about their ontic manifestations (i.e. moods in the everyday use of the world), or about our fundamental, pervasive and ubiquitous attunement to the world, but after having delineated moods as precisely “modes of Befindlichkeit” in §29, he goes on in §30 to exemplify their focal role in world-disclosure with the example of fear, also called to be “a mode of Befindlichkeit”, i.e. an instance of mood. To my mind, this particular issue identified by Freeman (2015) can find its solution in the following differentiation: Heidegger is right to call fear “a mode of Befindlichkeit” providing that we do not conflate such a denomination exclusively with moods, but rather treat it as one suited for all various modes of affective disposedness including emotions, feelings, sentiments and even “ground moods” such as those with implicit disclosive power. What seems more unfortunate is the subsequent identification of fear as “anxiety which has fallen prey to the ‘world’” (Heidegger 2010, 183) and its characterization as “inauthentic mode of attunement” in Division II (Heidegger 2010, 325), since it supposedly makes one turn away from one’s existence. Freeman is right, however, in pointing out that Heidegger owes us a more precise differentiation between various modes of Befindlichkeit. All these omissions and dubious distinctions make it difficult to grasp in concreto the basic relationships that bind moods and emotions as various ontic manifestations of our affective disposedness. The only way to exonerate Heidegger from this charge is by his own acknowledgment that the fundamental task of his investigation lies elsewhere, to wit, in the clarification of the meaning of being. 6

Moods as a pre-intentional background of emotions

Even though Heidegger does not offer a robust theory of affectivity, he surely provides powerful conceptual tools to develop an account of various modes of attunement, as we experience them in our everyday lives. On this ontic level, it is possible to differentiate moods from emotions at least in three fundamental respects:

1) It has been often stressed that moods are not intentional, but rather diffuse, atmospheric and pervasive. For instance, Lormand (1985) and Sizer (2000) explicitly claim that moods lack intentional object. This seems to be confirmed by Heidegger’s insight that moods or attunements disclose the tonality of the whole world (2010, 133–134). However, moods are not devoid of any intentionality, since they entail a certain position vis-à-vis one’s overall existential situation or the more specific milieu to which one belongs: one might feel generally threatened by one’s competitive work environment, in control or vulnerable in one’s relationship, overwhelmed not only by this or that particular task, but by the overall multiplicity of requirements one has to face. Moods are thus not devoid of content, even
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though they are objectless in the strict sense of the word. What they disclose is not “this” or “that” in particular, but rather the existential or social context in general, appraised through the lens of one’s coping potentials. That is why it is best to qualify moods as pre-intentional, rather than non-intentional.

2) Moods are not necessarily expressed in overt conduct. Heidegger even states that a person overcome by grief might not alter anything in her comportment, so that “everything remains as before, and yet everything is different” (Heidegger 1995, 66). This point is closely tied to the previous one; since moods typically lack discrete intentional objects, they do not feature a particular purpose to be accomplished either. However, the motivational aspect is not completely missing, since moods function as a background, giving my emotional experiences their general orientation, as developed below.

3) We have much less control over moods than over our emotions. “Mood assails” (Heidegger 2010, 133). It comes uninvited and resonates inconspicuously through all our being due to its intrusive nature. To be sure, it would be an exaggeration to pretend that we control or even choose our emotions. In comparison with moods, however, emotions are undoubtedly more malleable insofar as they are expressed in overt gestures and conducts. In fact, these latter surely come under our responsibility, if for no other reason than for the commitments that we manifest through our conduct and for which we are accountable to others. It might be then suggested that while we find ourselves in a mood, often without being able to justify why, emotions are something that we enact and that we overtly express both spontaneously and for all kinds of strategic purposes.

These distinctions seem better fitted to various affective phenomena than the usual stereotypical differentiations between short-term intense emotional episodes and lingering and calmer moods. However, other nuances might be advanced and those presented above questioned with counterfactual cases, since it is ontologically misleading to differentiate moods from emotions as if they were natural kinds or two categories in a given set of all affective states. Whenever we attempt such classifications within the experiential complexity of our affective life, we run the risk of treating our moods and emotions again as if they were occurrent entities, i.e. we transform them into various kinds of objects that would be juxtaposed against each other in our minds. Rather, we need to explain how they are bound together in our overall engagement with the world and, more specifically, how emotional episodes emerge against the backdrop of our ubiquitous and pervasive attunement. Heidegger points us in the right direction when he claims “Mood has always already disclosed being-in-the-world as a whole and first makes possible directing oneself toward something” (Heidegger 2010, 133). Since being affectively attuned to the world is necessary for things and situations to matter, our general moods constitute the ground-floor dimension of intentionality insofar as they pre-structure all of our specifically directed comportments, be they affective (emotions), cognitive (judgments and beliefs) or behavioral (goal-oriented acts as well as the taking of stances). Concerning emotional life, we can say that pervasive moods are preconditions of experiencing object-directed emotions, insofar as they delimit the space of possibilities against which we deem certain emotional conducts as relevant, worthy or out of the question. My anxiety thus motivates me to restrain my social interactions, while elation leads me to seek more experiences likely to bring me joy. In reverse, when deeply depressed, no joke, novelty or positive news has enough motivational force to bring me joy or laughter. In all such cases, being in a mood tends to shape the way one reacts emotionally to particular things and situations. Moods function here as a pre-intentional, tacit background that codetermines the range, intensity and style of possible emotional conducts. Moreover, it has to be stressed that Befindlichkeit is closely tied up with the past dimension of
our temporal situatedness. Our affective familiarity with the (social) surrounding is rooted in our past experiences, their reciprocal confirmations and traditionally sanctioned ways of coping to which we are also affectively attuned, as can be seen in our feeling of guilt in cases of transgression.

**Embodiment as ontological basis of affectivity**

It has been stated and repeated that Heidegger’s account of *Befindlichkeit* illegitimately brackets the embodied nature of our affective openness to the world (Freeman 2015). Unlike the other charges mentioned above, the neglect of body cannot be explained away by the different orientation of Heidegger’s investigation, since he does not merely omit a particular or “ontical” domain of interest, but fails to acknowledge the *ontological* relevance of the body for a proper account of our belonging to the world and our spatial orientation within it. If we restrict this criticism to the present subject-matter, we clearly see that our attunement to the world cannot be explained apart from our bodily capacity to “be in tune” with its environment. In this regard, the antidote to Heidegger’s disembodied account of affectivity consists partly in the reappropriation of the Husserlian lesson from *Ideas II* concerning the contribution that kinesthetic experiences constantly bring to the implicit self-awareness that we have about our practical involvement with the perceptual field. The Heideggerian approach is thus to be combined with Husserl’s and Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of the subjectively felt, living body that is continuously synchronizing itself with worldly solicitations. It is through and from within our body that we are opened and responsive to something in the world (in emotion) or attuned to our current existential situation as such (in moods such as boredom, anxiety or joy). It is precisely our lived body that ties us to our “here and now” from where we have to perform each one of our earthly moves. At the same time, my lived body is also a habitual body that evaluates all present and future affordances according to the range of its acquired skills. My attunement to a meaningful, soliciting world would not be understandable if I did not have a pre-reflective, non-observational sense of what sorts of actions are available within the space I inhabit with my body. As part of this implicit sense, kinesthetic sensations provide the embodied subject with an appropriate evaluative feedback about “how one is and is coming along” that Heidegger’s analytic attributes to moods (Heidegger 2010, 131). The link between action–control and kinesthesia, developed in detail in Merleau-Ponty’s account of perception, has thus to be applied to affective experiences too.

The first thing to observe is that emotions are closely tied to felt variations of our capacity to meet the requirements, novelties and disturbances of our environment. I am affectively responsive to all kinds of tugs and pulls of the world proportionally according to what “I can” or “can’t”; I am affectively sensible to certain matters as threatening when I tacitly see my bodily capacities restricted (typically in dark places or other cases of momentary sensory impairment), as frustrating when I perceive others as obstacles on my path, and as exciting when I hope with uncertainty to be capable to live up to some rare occasion. All such threats, promises, hindrances and other solicitations are continuously appraised according to my body’s capacities, skills and habits allowing me to meet them. As an integral part of this synchronization, kinesthetic experiences contribute to one’s implicit background awareness about one’s current standing in the world. Bodily feelings tacitly shape and articulate worldly matters into relevant, recalcitrant, attracting and otherwise existentially significant objects or situations.

Drawing on such insights about the lived body’s responsivity to the world, a new current in phenomenological investigations of affectivity has reappropriated the Jamesian notion of the body as a “sounding-board” (James 1884) pointing toward the body’s capacity, including
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its most visceral sensitivity, to make us aware of features relevant for our being. Fuchs (2000) thus proposes to re-describe Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on “body-schema” in terms of “bodily resonance” (leibliche Resonanz). This notion can be developed, to my mind, in three interconnected directions: a) in order to explain our successful synchronization with the salient features of our natural surroundings perceived in their expressive physiognomy (“sensing” understood as “living communication with the world” in Merleau-Ponty (2012, 53)); b) in order to provide a convincing account of shared emotions that is not reduced to mirroring each other’s emotions, but encompasses more complex forms of emotional coordination between agents receptive to each other’s gestures and postures (Fuchs 2013; Slaby 2013); c) most of all, to provide the means for an alternative approach to the emotional dimension of depressive disorders in terms of deficiency or even loss of bodily resonance which alienates the self from the world and from others (Svenaeus 2013).

Even though Merleau-Ponty emphasizes mostly the successful cases of such attunement and limits the scope of his investigations to the perceptual synchronizing of my body’s posture to the perceived solicitations, his account can be applied as well to the cases when we are “out of tune” with our surroundings. It is precisely when our felt body registers some breakdown in the customary harmonious coordination with its Umwelt that we experience our most unsettling emotions. Conventional harmony is unsettled and the felt disarray motivates our body to search for any means available to recover its grip on things. Moreover, such an account can serve to provide an ontologically embodied ground for depressive disorders too. In a way analogical to ground attunements of angst and deep boredom, in the cases of most severe depression, it feels as though the universe is devoid of any familiarity and there is no alternative to reestablishing a meaningful association with it. As we slip into boredom, weariness and gloom the affective background of intelligibility – which was tacitly presupposed by all experience – vanishes; our Stimmung becomes Verstimmung. Our lived body still serves as a “resonance board”: it incessantly evaluates goings-on as potential threats, poles of attraction or repulsion, or affordances through the lens of its own capacities to cope with them. In cases of depression, however, such bodily resonance becomes less sensitive, out of tune or completely deficient, with a broad spectrum of frailties including physiological alterations as possible causes of such deficiency (Svenaeus 2013).

Emotional conducts

Merleau-Ponty’s metaphor of “living communication” between the self and the world further points to the inextricability of activity and receptivity in our affective engagements with the world. The best concept available to grasp this mutual dependence between “moving oneself” and “being moved” is that of emotional conducts. It allows the recognition that we are guided and oriented by various affective pulls, but not without guiding ourselves, i.e. not without continuous monitoring, assessing and reorienting our grip on the situation. In this last section, I claim that felt evaluations or appraisals of one’s situatedness that are constitutive of our emotions cannot be separated from the activity we perform. Since our felt evaluations unfold – and are subject to revision – according to our more or less successful coping with the emotional situations, it is impossible to deal separately with evaluative and agentive “components” of our affective life. Our emotions do not consist merely in perceiving values, as was suggested by Döring (2007), Tappolet (2010) and many others, but rather in attending to affective affordances practically. It is insofar as we unfold our emotions within conducts that we bestow a determinate significance and weight to affective qualities of a given situation.

To date, most theories regard emotion as existing in principle prior to and independently of emotional conduct, which is conceived as something arising out of already given and deter-
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minute emotion. Even though most contemporary approaches recognize “action readiness”, “motivation to act”, or another motor component as part of emotional experience, they still operate a dichotomy between the emotion itself and the “action out of emotion”, as if the latter was the end-product of the former (Griffiths 1997; Elster 1999; Goldie 2000). However, emotional conduct are not simply final outputs, succeeding already full-blown emotional states, since they constitute the emotions’ directedness, determine their intensity and mold their content. In this final section, I will briefly discuss the most significant reasons why emotions cannot exist independently of their behavioral manifestations and why they should not be severed from their expression in action in their empirical studies.

First, only when our feelings are acted out within a specific interaction can we be sure that the affect results in the entire involvement of the person and that it does not fade out as a fleeting sensation with no consequences. For instance, mere startled reaction (as well as other reflex mechanisms described by affective neurosciences) does not count the emotion of fear that becomes fully fledged only insofar as we flee, hide or remain in a frozen posture. Attending to one of these possibilities will undoubtedly affect the specific way in which I experience my fear and perceive the threat. However, we should not overemphasize the seemingly paradigmatic case of fear that secretly leads to the wrong assumption that the emotions are mostly individual feelings directed at a single object. Because of the interaffective nature of most of our emotions, it matters less how I feel inside than what affective solicitations I grasp as relevant through my conduct and what affordances I myself bring to the shared situation.

In a face-to-face encounter, my own emotions unfold into a specific shape to the extent in which the soliciting presence of other(s) summons me to reveal the way I feel about the situation in question. If honest, I would have to acknowledge that in most cases, I am unable to provide an explicit answer by means of introspection. I learn what I feel through acting it out. The ambiguity of the perceived and emotionally felt has to be unified through our conduct. When frustrated by a partner’s indolence, there is no one stimulus giving rise to one precise emotion, but rather a complex situation that I partly constitute in its meaning through overtly hostile or merely grumpy conduct and self-expression. Through our emotional conduct, we enact one of the possible interpretations of what is at stake in our current and existentially open-ended situation.

Secondly, when emotions are evaluated as appropriate or inappropriate, it is not only a matter of evaluating that the judgment sustaining them is correct. I can acknowledge that an offense has been committed or even agree with the reasons behind someone’s anger, and still deem that his anger – precisely as it is expressed in his loud shouting and insulting gestures – is an inappropriate conduct given the situation and the relational links between its participants. Once expressed in our overt conducts and acknowledged by relevant others, our emotions become our commitments and only then are they morally significant and rationally assessable for their appropriateness. Others expect me to hold to commitments displayed by my emotions and they put pressure on their coherent expressions by all kinds of normative sanctioning. For example, one is expected to feel relief when escaping a dangerous situation, to display “obligatory” happiness after having successfully given birth to a child or to display sorrow when losing a close parent. And yet, there are cases of emotional disconnection that might be puzzling for one’s surroundings, analyzed both by existential literature (think of Camus’ Meursault) and current critical sociology. Taylor (1996), for instance, tells the story of how post-partum and other maternal depressions, contrary to societal requirements associated with motherhood, led to the formation of self-help groups, aiming first at changing the mother’s moods and emotions, but ending up by transforming the parameters of the role itself and the range of emotions that might be associated with it.
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Thirdly, acting out the emotion shapes or alters both its intensity and its content.9 Regarding the variations of intensity, they can be clearly evidenced in our ability to suffer, suppress, endure or enjoy the affect through its canalization into a particular behavior; the vivacity of our gesture or conduct increases the intensity of the felt affect. Concerning the content, what matters is the transformation of the affect into a goal-oriented movement that resolves an ambivalent situation through its unilateral taking-over. Merleau-Ponty’s claim about the ambivalence of the perceived world, applied to emotionality, amounts to the rejection of one-to-one correspondence between a myriad of affective solicitations and the limited range of value-judgments and conceptually identified emotions. Situations are ambivalent, our fellow beings not entirely predictable, the outcomes of our involvement uncertain. Which salient possibilities offered by an affective situation are to be actualized and developed in their consequences largely depends upon the action performed, the gesture expressed, the tone, the intensity or the smartness of the reply provided.

Fourthly, only if we adopt the above-mentioned redefinition of emotions in terms of conducts can we explain why it is possible to perceive someone’s anger directly in his clenched fists and threatening posture, the joy in his laughter, the disgust in his spitting or the wrinkling of his nose without recourse to any theory of his mind or inference of the best explanation (Scheler 1954, 260; Merleau-Ponty 2012, 372). The emphasis on the direct perception of another’s emotions was largely discussed within the phenomenological accounts of intersubjectivity in order to disqualify “the problem of other minds” in its diverse Cartesian reformulations. What was still lacking, however, was the requalification of emotions themselves in terms of expressive conducts through which we a) determine their content and intensity; b) manifest our commitments and make ourselves accountable; c) disclose to others what we care about; and d) engage in shared sense-making of the present emotional situation through our interaffective reciprocity. All these aspects find their synthesis in the notion of emotional conducts, which allows me to conclude with a reappropriation of Merleau-Ponty’s claim about the intrinsic relation between thought and speech. Emotion tends toward its expression in conduct as toward its completion.10

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Notes

1 “We do not merely have a presentation, with an added feeling associatively tacked on to it, and not intrinsically related to it, but pleasure or distaste direct themselves to the presented object, and could not exist without such a direction” (Husserl 2001, 108).
2 For Brentano, each mental act is a presentation or is itself founded on a presentation (Brentano 1924, 112). However, in his manuscripts dating from 1909 to 1911, Husserl recognizes that feelings are by themselves oriented toward experienced objects or situations. Based on an analogy between Wahrnehmung (perception) and Wertnehmung (value-reception or apprehension of value through feeling), Husserl acknowledges that affective and cognitive dimension are fused within a single emotional-evaluative experience whose content cannot be defined by a core of objective determinations of entities to which the feeling would add its “value” properties. See Husserl (2018) and the detailed account of Husserl’s manuscripts about Gefühl und Wert in Jardine (2020).
4 Heidegger calls our basic ontological condition of “being attuned” Befindlichkeit, and its specific manifestations “moods” (Stimmungen) that are best translated as “attunements”. As noted by Elpidourou...
and Freeman (2015) and many others, there is no ideal English equivalent for Heidegger's neologism. *Befindlichkeit* connotes both our situatedness (we find ourselves situated without being given a choice) and our feeling about such a situation (how do we find ourselves regarding our current standing). In order to prevent the confusion resulting from the fact that both *Befindlichkeit* and *Stimmung* were translated into English as “attunement” (compare Heidegger 1995 and 2010), I decided to leave *Befindlichkeit* untranslated for the purposes of this text and to redescribe it, when necessary, in terms of affective disposedness.

This ontic side of *Befindlichkeit* is equated by Heidegger with “phenomena [that] have long been familiar ontically under the terms of affects *Affekte* and feelings *Gefühle*” (Heidegger 2010, 134).

“The various modes of attunement and their interconnected foundations cannot be interpreted within the problematic of this investigation” (Heidegger 2010, 134).

Such attempts might, however, be found in Nussbaum (2001) and most notably in Solomon’s *Not Passions’ Slaves* (2003).

See Parkinson and al. (1996). Solomon rejects differentiating between moods and emotions in terms of duration and ascertains the existence of long-lasting *emotions* such as love, “lasting even for years or a lifetime and occupying several levels or dimensions of consciousness” (Solomon, 2006, 303). For further development of various affective phenomena in their mutual bonds and differences, see Švec (2013).

See also Slaby and Wüschner (2014) who emphasized the active momentum of emotions in a way convergent with my own approach in Švec (2013).

Cf. “Thought tends toward expression as if toward its completion” (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 182).

**References**


Moods and emotions


