

# Moods disclose being-in-the-world

*Alja Lah*

The essay offers an exploration of *moods* and how they may disclose ways of *being-in-the-world*. I begin with a practical example: an excerpt of a diary that was kept with an intention to research changing moods. Further I introduce a theoretical discussion of what moods are, how we experience them and how they may affect our lives. I follow with a portrayal of the relation between moods and being-in-the-world. I discuss the importance of understanding one's being-in-the-world for research and psychotherapy. I suggest how researching moods can be used to disclose one's being-in-the-world and mention other life experiences that can do that. I finish by elucidating the dangers of *falling* into other's being-in-the-world.

*"I wake up. First realizing I am awake. A look at the clock reveals an inhumane time of 4.27. Then realizing there is a familiar heaviness laying on my soul. Oh no, not you again. Why are you here? Where have you come from? What do you want? I turn around in my bed and hope to fall back into sleep. Too late, a blurry thought starts to dance around in my mind, inviting others to dance with her. These thoughts are no jolly dancers. They are dark shadows, with scary masks and heavy coats. But their dance is so eloquent, so powerful that in no time they have everyone looking at them, hypnotised by their strong presence. It is 4.31, by now they take over my mind and my body. Frustrated with the early morning dance spectacle I turn around in my bed once more. That of course does not stop the dancers. Every secret thought, plan, worry, excitement or feeling is now putting on dark clothes and scary masks to join*

*the hypnotic dance. All possibilities have by now fled the stage. At 5.05 I have had enough, turn on the light and start reading. I know they are still there but I refuse to be a part of the charade. After an hour of immersing into an imaginative world I get tired and fall back asleep. When I wake up two hours later I silently attend to my thoughts and feelings to eavesdrop if there is any music or stomping of the dark dancers. I find them all snuggled in their cosy pyjamas, not yet ready to face the light of day. Myself, I feel optimistic and ready to embrace the innumerable possibilities of the world that awaits me."*

It is an experience, which "finds no sympathetic resonance that can lie so heavily on the soul as a burdensome mood, and can eventually assume such preponderance that it compresses and constricts the other contents of the soul" (Nietzsche, 2006, p.22). This is Nietzsche's description of how the soul assimilates things and forms *mood*, which he sees as current situation of inner conflict between old and new thoughts. Heidegger (1953/1996) on the other hand asserts that mood is a *primordial* kind of being in which one is disclosed to oneself preceding all cognition or will, and beyond their range of disclosure. One is always already in a mood which manifest "how one is and is coming along" (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p.127). Moods reveal ways in which one surrenders to the world and is affected by the world (Moustakas, 1996). We do not choose our moods, we are *thrown* into them, much like waking up into a mood, as in the above example from the diary excerpt. Because of that *thrownness* there is sometimes a feeling of dis-owning moods as if they are not *of us* but out there *separate from us*. Heidegger (1953/1996, p. 129) sees moods as coming "neither from 'without' nor from 'within' but arising out of being-in-the-world, as a mode of that being". Moods manifest in feelings like fear, threat or serenity and these in turn influence perceptions, thoughts and behaviour. Thus it makes a difference as to how our moods are going to affect us depending on whether we experience them coming from inside ourselves

or from outside. In the above example mood is being experienced as something separate (“*Oh no, not you again. Why are you here? Where have you come from? What do you want?*”). Consequently the person will do anything possible to disregard and avoid it (“*At 5.05 I have had enough, turn on the light and start reading. I know they are still there but I refuse to be a part of the charade*”). On the contrary, if a mood is experienced as part of oneself then it can also become a part of one’s identity (for example one can have an identity of a depressed person because of mostly having “depressive” moods). This is especially apparent in *bad moods* when “Da-sein becomes blind to itself” (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p.129). Bad mood *assails* and is far from being reflected upon. There is no possibility of an alternate mood, nor any possibility of life *mattering* again. Similarly as Ratcliffe (2010) has already noted, we can see, from the above example, an extreme alteration in mood, as well as how certain moods open up possibilities (“*...innumerable possibilities of the world that awaits me.*”) whereas other moods close them down (“*All possibilities have by now fled the stage.*”).

By reflecting upon various kinds of extreme alterations in moods, I believe it is possible to gain perspective over one’s being-in-the-world and even understand there are other ways of being-in-the-world. Stolorow (2013, p.8) posits “mood as a Heideggerian term of art can encompass all of what is ordinarily meant by ‘moods,’ ‘emotions,’ and ‘feelings,’ but, and this is crucial, only insofar as these affective phenomena are disclosing our ways of Being-in-the-world”. Being-in-the-world can be understood as the *how* beings fundamentally experience their own existence in the world. It “signifies the unthematic, circumspect absorption in the references constitutive for the handiness of the totality of useful things” (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p.71).

By adopting a phenomenological stance we are able to suspend our habitual acceptance of the shared world we live in as being the same for all. This allows us the openness to explore the possibility of structurally different

worlds or ways of being-in-the-world. We hold a presupposition of a shared world that we all experience in quite the same way and this is the foundation on which we build our understanding of all phenomena. However we rarely consider being-in-the-world, as phenomena like any other. A phenomenon that can be experienced differently by different people and can thus have different characteristics. Human experience is characterized by the way one *finds oneself in the world* (Ratcliffe, 2012).

Therefore to understand a person (and even more importantly for a person to understand herself) we must understand her world, this implies the environment or surrounding, the internal life in which the person exists (Moustakas, 1996) as well as the interaction between her internal and external worlds, the way she handles them and makes sense of them. This is essential in phenomenological research as well as in psychotherapy. For a client to be able to access her intimate and unknown dimensions, she is invited to let go of her representations and beliefs about herself and the world. Take off her usual skin and enter a state of vulnerability. In order to carry out this intimate effort, she needs to trust the psychotherapist to be completely present, attentive, open-minded and humble. The objective is to open up space for the client and make it possible for her to go into the realms of experience where she normally does not let herself roam to. Petitmengin (2006, p.255) stressed the importance of an open-minded position on both sides because “while the interviewee does not know what he knows, the interviewer does not know what he is looking for”. They are bound together by intentions of exploring experience with the focus on “how” rather than “why”. It is a dialogue between the two, a constant reminder that their task is to *bracket* their expectations of how one should be-in-the-world. Bracketing does not mean getting rid of judgments but continually noting and when possible articulating them. Only then can they slowly come to understand how the client *finds herself in the world* and what that means for her.

Heidegger (1953/1996) states that moods are disclosing ways of being-in-the-world, in line with that I believe one's being-in-the-world can most easily be accessed through a critical reflection of one's own moods. The above diary excerpt is an example of such phenomenological self-enquiry of moods. In the study she discovered that she exists in two interchangeable moods, which have a quality of encompassing her whole experiential landscape but at the same time differ in some basic premises. Often we can come upon less global but still completely differentiated moods. It is intriguing how seamlessly a person can move from one mood to another, without noticing that they entered into a completely different mood, with different relationships, contexts, etc. When she reflected and gained a broader perspective on different moods she experiences, she was able to grasp how they form her way of being-in-the-world. She acquired an overview on all the feelings and situations in which she previously got completely absorbed. She was able to understand and more importantly experience all of her worlds as equal and realize that she does not need to be bullied or thrown around by them.

In my view, life experiences also have the momentum and power to disclose one's way of being-in-the-world, which in turn changes one's moods. These experiences are usually exact opposite of one's being-in-the-world or an extreme end of it. They can also be a genuine encounter with another person who's being-in-the-world is completely different. In the latter case there is always a danger of merely being absorbed in another, fallenness into another's being-in-the-world. "In falling one becomes superficial, an imitation of who one really is" (Moustakas, 1996, p.23). "Jumping on other people's bandwagons, such shortcuts to a wider or better perspective may simply lead us up blind alleys" (Van Deurzen, 2009, p.231). To much of our surprise it ends up being the long way around. We need to be careful with this issue in psychotherapy as well, not to provide a new way of being for a client, one that did not emerge from her own exploration. What we can do is provide a

new relational experience, which allows her to explore nature and meaning of her experience and maybe see it, for the first time, from another perspective. Ultimately realizing there are other ways of being-in-the-world, other ways of relating to oneself and others, other ways of conceiving space and time, and of feeling alive.

Realization is the soul's readiness to expand and assimilate new worlds. Nietzsche (1864/2006, p.22) noticed that the soul strives to attract only what is like it and thus is touched only by what it wants. Anything the soul cannot reflect cannot touch it and it does not lie in the power of the will to make the soul reflect or not. The same goes for moods as we can never free ourselves of them, with mastery we can only turn away from a mood, but that is only to another mood (Heidegger, 1953/1996). Nevertheless I do believe that we hold the power to plant a seed in our soul or that of another, which eventually, with perseverance, patience and care grows into a new, genuine way of being-in-the-world.

## Literature

Heidegger, M. (1996). *Being and time*. Translated by Joan Stambaugh. Albany: State University of New York Press. Original work published 1953.

Moustakas, C. E. (1996). *Existential Psychotherapy and the Interpretation of Dreams*. Jason Aronson, Inc.

Nietzsche, F. (2006). On Moods. In K. A. Pearson and D. Large (Eds.), *The Nietzsche reader*. Blackwell Publishing Ltd. Original work published

1864.

Petitmengin, C. (2006). Describing one's subjective experience in the second person: An interview method for the science of consciousness. *Phenomenology and cognitive science*, 5, 229–262.

Ratcliffe, M. (2010). The Phenomenology of Mood and the Meaning of Life. In P. Goldie (Ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Emotion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 349-371.

Ratcliffe, M. (2012). Phenomenology as a Form of Empathy. *Inquiry (United Kingdom)*, 55(5), 473-495.

Stolorow, R. D. (2013). Heidegger, Mood and the Lived Body: The Ontical and the Ontological. *Janus Head*, 13(2), 5.

Van Deurzen E. (2009). Life is for Living. *Existential Analysis: Journal Of The Society For Existential Analysis*, 20(2), 226-239.