Why Mood Matters

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Finding Oneself in the World

This chapter offers an interpretation and critical discussion of Heidegger’s treatment of ‘mood’ in Being and Time. I begin by explaining and defending the claim that moods constitute how we find ourselves in the world. The remainder of the chapter is dedicated to addressing aspects of Heidegger’s account that are unclear or underdeveloped, the focus being upon (1) what it is that makes one mood deeper or more fundamental than another; (2) the diversity of moods; and (3) the relationship between mood and temporality. I suggest that Heidegger’s conception of mood is highly plausible, but that a lot more needs to be done to convey the enormous phenomenological richness of mood. Furthermore, an adequate phenomenological treatment of mood will need to do more than just clarify and further develop Heidegger’s ideas. To an extent at least, it will also have to be revisionary.

According to Heidegger, ‘mood’ [Stimmung] makes a substantial contribution to the sense that we have of belonging to a world. Our moods may change but we are always in some kind of mood, and what might seem like the absence of mood is actually the presence of an inconspicuous mood. Being in some mood or other is, according to Heidegger, a fundamental “existentiale” of Dasein. In other words, it is essential to the distinctively human way of having a world (BT, p.173 / p.134). In the absence of mood, we would not find ourselves in a world at all and would therefore cease to be Dasein. Heidegger refers to the characteristic of finding oneself in a world through a mood as “Befindlichkeit”, a notoriously difficult term to translate. Macquarrie and Robinson, in their 1962 translation of Being and Time, opt for “state of mind”, but this is inappropriate. Heidegger stresses that moods are not experienced as states of mind possessed by psychological subjects, and that we do not experience moods as ‘out there’ in the world either. Moods constitute a sense of being part of a world that is pre-subjective and pre-objective. All ‘states of mind’ and all perceptions and cognitions of ‘external’ things presuppose this background sense of belonging to
a world. Other translations include “affectedness” (Dreyfus, 1991), “attunement” (Stambaugh, 1996), “disposedness” (e.g. Blattner, 2006) and “sofindingness” (Haugeland, 2000). In what follows, I will replace the term “state of mind” with “attunement” when quoting from Macquarrie and Robinson’s translation of *Sein und Zeit*. Elsewhere, I will refer more often to the *having of a mood* and to how we *find ourselves in the world or belong to a world* through a mood.

In maintaining that moods constitute a sense of belonging to the world, Heidegger does not mean that one has a subjective state called a mood and that this somehow contributes to perception of one’s spatiotemporal location in relation to other entities. To find oneself in a world is not, first and foremost, to occupy the perspective of an impartial spectator, neutrally gazing upon things from a particular space-time location. Rather, the world that we belong to is a significant realm, where things can have a host of different practical meanings. An appreciation of these meanings is inextricable from our actual and potential activities. Finding oneself in the world is thus a matter of being practically immersed in it rather than looking out upon it. Consider how I currently experience my office. As I type these words, the computer keyboard does not appear to me as a conspicuous object of experience. Rather, it is seamlessly integrated into my activity, and my appreciation of its utility is inseparable from what I am doing. However, I do not take all my surroundings to be significant in quite the same way. Numerous other things that appear to me as practically significant do not solicit activities in the way that the keyboard does. For instance, the shoes sitting on the floor by my chair appear to me as functional but do not currently summon me to do anything. So we need to distinguish between having practical significance and being both significant and enticing. The pile of student essays on the table matters to me in a different way from the keyboard and shoes; they present themselves as an impediment to my current project. They still have a kind of practical significance though, which takes the form of ‘something I ought to or need to do, which is unappealing and requires effort’. Other aspects of my situation might appear to me as urgent or pressing, safe or threatening, interesting or boring, easy, difficult or impossible, predictable or unpredictable, achievable without effort, beyond my control, and so on. Practical significance thus divides up into a range of subcategories. If another person enters the room, she or he may matter to me in yet further ways. None of the impersonal things in my room appear to me as offering up possibilities
such as conversation, companionship, consolation, love, humiliation, pride and shame. Hence there are many different kinds of significance.

Particular features of my situation do not have the kinds of significance that they do in isolation from each other. I find myself situated in a holistic web of significance relations, where the significance of one thing always relates to the significance of something else, and where all of these relations reflect projects I am currently pursuing or might pursue. According to Heidegger, this web of significance depends, in part, upon mood. A mood does not determine how a particular thing is taken to be significant, such as ‘this pen is for writing’, or even how lots of things appear significant, such as ‘all the people in this room are threatening’. In order to encounter things in such ways, one must already be receptive to certain kinds of mattering, which in these cases are ‘practical utility’ and ‘threat’. Without an appreciation that things can matter in these ways, one could not encounter anything as threatening or useful. This is where mood comes in. Moods constitute the range of ways in which things are able to matter to us, and are thus essential to a sense of the kinds of significant possibility that the world can offer up for us.

It is commonplace to regard moods as generalised emotions, meaning emotional states that are directed at a wide range of objects. In conjunction with this, it is often maintained that they ‘colour’ perception (e.g. Roberts, 2003, p.115). Heidegger rejects both views. A mood, for Heidegger, does not add emotional colour to pre-given objects of experience. We can only have objects of experience insofar as we already find ourselves in a world, and we would not find ourselves in a world at all without mood. For the same reason, a mood is not a generalised emotion. It is not a way in which any number of entities appear but a condition of entities being accessible to us at all: “The mood has already disclosed, in every case, Being-in-the-world as a whole, and makes it possible first of all to direct oneself towards something” (BT, p.176 / p.137). Unlike an act of perceiving, believing, desiring, emoting or remembering, a mood is not an intentional state directed at something within the world. Instead, it is a condition of possibility for such states. A ‘mood’ such as ‘being in a bad mood with someone’ is not a mood in Heidegger’s sense; it is an emotional state that presupposes a mood. The mood is what allows things to matter in such a way that being annoyed
with somebody is possible. The fact that things are able to “matter” in a given way is “grounded in one’s attunement” (BT, p.176 / p.137).

If things were completely bereft of all mattering, we could not relate to them in any way and, therefore, would not have a sense of being there, amongst them. Hence Heidegger maintains that having a mood is responsible for the “Being-in” aspect of “Being-in-the-world” (BT, p.169 / p.131). Of course, moods do not fully determine the nature of what we encounter. That I am capable of finding things threatening does not itself dictate the kind of significance that a particular thing has for me on a particular occasion. For example, it does not make it the case that there is a threatening tiger in front of me. However, one can only find an entity threatening in the context of a mood that accommodates the possibility of being threatened. Hence mood is essential to our “thrownness” [Geworfenheit], the sense we have of being in a significant worldly situation that is not of our own making (BT, p.174 / p.135).

None of this should be taken to suggest that alternative accounts of mood are completely misguided. Heidegger’s analysis almost certainly does not track every use of the English term ‘mood’ and it may well be that certain ‘moods’ are indeed generalised emotions. However, at least some moods seem to fit Heidegger’s analysis. There is no neat and tidy way of expressing this aspect of experience, but it is something that people do attempt to communicate, especially when they undergo substantial shifts in mood. Consider predicaments such as feeling jetlagged, hung-over, exhausted or grief-stricken. In these and many other circumstances, people might report an all-enveloping sense of insignificance, estrangement, unfamiliarity and so on. Sometimes, such talk refers to the way in which a particular situation is experienced, but it can also be used to convey a more encompassing way of finding oneself in the world.

Alterations in Heideggerian mood are especially pronounced in a range of psychiatric conditions, including schizophrenia, depression and depersonalisation, as exemplified by many descriptions that are offered by sufferers (Ratcliffe, 2008). For instance, almost every account of severe depression includes references to changes in mood or feeling that are inextricably bound up with profound alterations in how one finds oneself in the world. For some, the possibility of encountering things as mattering in
certain kinds of way is altogether gone from experience. People often report that all sense of practical significance has vanished and, alongside it, a sense of the potential for emotional connectedness with other people. At the same time, other ways of mattering can become more pronounced, even all-encompassing. For instance, everything might be encountered through a sense of threat, where threat is no longer a contingent possibility but an inescapable shape that all experience takes on (Ratcliffe, 2008; Ratcliffe and Broome, forthcoming). Similar descriptions frequently appear in literature too. For instance, when Hamlet famously announces, “I have of late—but wherefore I know not—lost all my mirth, for gone all custom of exercises” (Hamlet, Act 2, Scene 2), he is not referring to a mood or emotion that he experiences within an already given world. Instead, the possibilities of gaining happiness from anything and of engaging in purposeful practical activity are gone from his world, which now appears but a “sterile promontory”.

Mood, Understanding and Discourse

Heidegger maintains that mood is not the sole determinant of Being-in-the-world. Equally important are ‘understanding’ [Verstehen] and ‘discourse’ [Rede]. These, together with the having of a mood [Befindlichkeit], comprise the structure of care [Sorge], ‘care’ being Heidegger’s term for that in virtue of which Being-in-the-world is possible. Discourse, understanding and mood are not separable components but inextricable aspects of care. ‘Understanding’ refers to the way in which we are always oriented towards concrete future possibilities. We understand both ourselves and the things we encounter in terms of possibilities. This is not an explicit, cognitive accomplishment, a matter of “comporting oneself towards a plan that has been thought out”, but something that is implicated even in routine and unthinking encounters with pieces of equipment (BT, p.185 / p.145). I encounter the keyboard I am using now in the context of a project that is directed at a particular outcome and, in using it, I understand it in terms of the salient possibilities that it offers.

In Division Two of Being and Time, Heidegger explicitly prioritises our orientation towards future possibilities over our “thrownness”: “the primary item in care is the ‘ahead-of-itself’” (BT, p.279 / p.236). So it might seem that future-oriented ‘understanding’ has some kind of primacy over thrownness-constituting ‘mood’. However, I suggest that this is not the case. Mood is not only responsible for a sense
of ‘being there’; it is also essential to our sense of what the world can offer us. Indeed, the possibility of pursuing possibilities itself depends upon mood. Things only appear significant in specific ways against the backdrop of actual or potential projects, as the significance of an entity is inextricable from a sense of salient possibilities involving that entity. For example, a mallet would not appear enticing in the context of brain surgery. Thus it is understanding that determines the kinds of significance that particular entities have for us in particular situations, and one could not inhabit a significant world without understanding. However, what understanding takes for granted is that these kinds of significance are themselves possible. And their possibility depends upon mood, in so far as it determines the range of ways in which things are able to matter to us. Regardless of whether what one finds practically significant is a football, a novel, a radio or a fast car, the mood-constituted possibility of finding anything practically significant is presupposed. To take the extreme case, a world that did not matter in any way and thus offered no significant possibilities would be a world where pursuit of all projects was unintelligible. Hence, although understanding determines whether or not a given entity does appear significant in some way, it is not what determines whether an entity can be significant in such a way. If anything, it is mood that has primacy over understanding, as mood is responsible for determining the shape of the possibility space within which understanding operates.

What Heidegger calls ‘discourse’ [Rede] similarly depends upon mood. Discourse, for Heidegger, is not spoken language but a condition of possibility for spoken language, the coalescing of a world into structured patterns that are amenable to linguistic expression (BT, pp.203-4 / p.161). The scope of what discourse can make intelligible is constrained by a space of mood-determined possibilities. However, Heidegger also maintains that modes of interpretation enabled by discourse can serve to determine the range of possible moods. For instance, ‘inauthentic’ immersion in public ways of doing things - unthinkingly doing ‘what one does’, aspiring to achieve what one ought to achieve and interpreting all of one’s activities in terms of pre-prescribed public norms - restricts the kinds of moods that one can have, the ways in which things can matter:
The dominance of the public way in which things have been interpreted has already been decisive even for the possibilities of having a mood – that is, for the basic way in which Dasein lets the world ‘matter’ to it. (BT, p.213 / pp.169-70)

Hence the dependence between mood and discourse seems to be symmetrical. How things matter constrains the possibilities for discourse which, in turn, constrains how things matter. However, it is not clear how strong a claim Heidegger wishes to make regarding the influence of interpretation upon mood. The strong version would be that some modes of interpretation render some kinds of mood unintelligible and thus impossible. A weaker version would be that certain pervasive ways of interpreting oneself and the world actually dispose one against or prevent one from entering into certain kinds of mood, but that those moods remain amongst one’s possibilities. This latter version is, in my view, more plausible. Hence it is arguable that the kind of dependence that mood has upon discourse is not as strong as the dependence that discourse has upon mood.

**Depth of Mood**

Some of Heidegger’s discussion seems to contradict my claim that our moods determine the ways in which things are able to matter to us. He dedicates a great deal of attention to the mood of ‘fear’, which is surely a way of encountering something within the world, rather than a space of possibilities in the context of which such encounters are intelligible. In fact, fear does not seem to be a mood at all but an occurrent emotion (at least if we adopt the commonplace view that emotions are brief episodes with specific objects, whereas moods are longer-term states that either do not have objects or encompass a wide range of objects). Heidegger does not explicitly distinguish the categories ‘mood’ and ‘emotion’. However, he does seem to acknowledge that those emotional states we have within a pre-given world presuppose mood-constituted ways of mattering:

…nothing like an affect would come about […..] if Being-in-the-world, with its attunement, had not already submitted itself [sich schon angewiesen] to having entities within-the-world ‘matter’ to it in a way which its moods have outlined in advance. (BT, p.177 / p.137)
How do we reconcile this with the emphasis upon fear? In fact, Heidegger’s discussion of fear is consistent with a distinction between emotional states that presuppose a world and background moods that make them possible. He does begin by describing fear as a kind of experience that we have within a world. There are, Heidegger says, three complementary ways of viewing fear: we can focus upon (a) what it is that we are afraid of, that which is threatening, (b) the attitude of ‘fearing’ or (c) what it is we are afraid for, which Heidegger takes to be ourselves (BT, p.179 / p.140). In addition, he emphasises that fear is essentially future-oriented, insofar as we are afraid of what might happen rather than what is already the case.\(^6\) Heidegger also distinguishes different kinds of fear. If the threatening possibility appears suddenly, there is “alarm”; when we are threatened by something unfamiliar, we experience “dread”; and when we are confronted with something that is both sudden and unfamiliar, there is “terror”. He adds that there are further varieties of fear, including “timidity, shyness, misgiving, becoming startled” (BT, p.182 / p.142). At least some of these seem to be occurrent emotions directed at specific objects, rather than ways of belonging to a world. However, Heidegger makes an important distinction between encountering a specific threat and being in the mood of “fearfulness”:

… in fearing, fear can [.....] look at the fearsome explicitly and ‘make it clear’ to itself. Circumspection sees the fearsome because it has fear as its attunement. Fearing, as a slumbering possibility of Being-in-the-world in an attunement (we call this possibility ‘fearfulness’ [“Furchtsamkeit”]), has already disclosed the world, in that out of it something like the fearsome may come close. (BT, p.180 / p.141)

The possibility of fearing something depends upon already finding oneself in the world in a way that incorporates the possibility of being threatened. ‘Fearfulness’ is not an occurrent emotion but a mood in which it is possible to encounter something as threatening and thus to be afraid:

All modifications of fear, as possibilities of having an attunement, point to the fact that Dasein as Being-in-the-world is ‘fearful’ [“furchtsam”]. This ‘fearfulness’ is not to be understood in an ontical sense as some factical ‘individualized’ disposition, but as an
existential possibility of the essential attunement of Dasein in general, though of course it is not the only one. (BT, p.182 / p.142)

Referring to that in virtue of which fear is possible as ‘fearfulness’ is a little confusing though. A mood that allows fear is also a mood that allows feelings of safety and security. Being a vulnerable entity that cares about its existence is a precondition for feeling safe just as much as it is for feeling afraid. An indifferent or invulnerable being could feel neither safe nor unsafe. So what Heidegger is referring to as fearfulness is not just presupposed by fear but also by various other ways of encountering things.

The distinction between focused emotions and the moods that make them possible is unclear in some cases. Consider the love one has for one’s child. This might be described as a focused emotion but, at the same time, it is something that can ‘change one’s world’. Similarly, intense grief is specifically focused and, at the same time, a radical shift in how one finds oneself in a world. It could be argued that such cases involve interaction between two different aspects of experience: specifically focused experiences reshape background mood, thus enabling different kinds of experience, and so on. Perhaps this is what happens when major life events ‘sink in’ – what starts off as a focused emotion leads to a change in how one finds oneself in the world.

However, it is likely, I suggest, that some emotional states are directed at a situation within the world and at the same time operate as backgrounds that shape other experiences. What is needed is not a simple contrast between background moods and focused emotions but a more complicated account of emotional ‘depth’. We can understand comparative depth in terms of possibility. For example, a mood incorporating the possibility of threat is presupposed by fear. Conversely, a mood in which all sense of threat was absent would render fear impossible. More generally, a deeper kind of mood or emotion is presupposed by the intelligibility of a shallower kind or, alternatively, renders the shallower kind unintelligible. And we need not settle for just two levels of depth. Suppose that y constitutes a space of possibilities presupposed by x and that y itself presupposes a space of possibilities constituted by z. This is not something that Heidegger considers in Being and Time. However, in a 1929-30 lecture course, published in English as The Fundamental Concepts of
Metaphysics (Heidegger, 1995), he offers a detailed analysis of three different kinds of boredom [Langeweile], which seems to indicate that moods can be understood in such a way.\footnote{The first form of boredom, being bored “by” something, is directed at a particular spatiotemporal situation. Heidegger offers the example of sitting in a “tasteless station of some lonely minor railway”, where we explicitly feel “unease” and make an effort to “pass the time” with various idle distractions (FCM, pp.93-5). Here, the boredom is directed at something – one’s current situation. However, it also serves as a background that shapes how one experiences entities in the context of that situation. Events in the station take on the significance they do against the backdrop of boredom. Nevertheless, the boredom alone does not add up to how one finds oneself in the world, given that one retains a sense of the boredom as contingent and of there being other possibilities. Indeed, one is all too aware of the boredom, as things continue to matter in ways that are not encompassed by it but obstructed by it.}

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The second form of boredom, being bored “with” something, is deeper. Heidegger offers the example of being invited out to a social occasion that you do not really want to attend. You have a pleasant evening but are later struck by the fact that you were bored all night, despite not having been conspicuously, uncomfortably bored at the time. This lack of awareness, Heidegger says, arises because the whole evening is structured by the mood of boredom and so no possibilities offer themselves that might be contrasted with those encompassed by boredom. It is “our entire comportment and behaviour that is our passing the time – the whole evening of the invitation itself” (FCM, p.112). Here, the boredom is less conspicuous or ‘intense’ than in the first case but it is deeper, in so far as the entire situation is shaped by the boredom and other possibilities do not even present themselves. In this second mood of boredom, it would not be possible to be bored “by” something that occurred in the context of the evening, as the shallower form of boredom requires the presentation of alternatives, kinds of significance that can be contrasted with the possibilities that the boredom offers. The “seeking” that might confront the boredom is gone (FCM, p.119) and “the evening itself is our passing the time” (FCM, p.121).

Finding the evening boring is compatible with retaining a sense that what it offers does not exhaust the space of possibilities. But the third form of boredom is deeper still. Heidegger refers to this as boring “for one”. Here, the boredom is not just a
mood that determines the possibilities offered by a contingent situation. Everything is encompassed by it, and no sense remains of there being any possibilities for anyone that fall outside of the boredom. We find ourselves “in the whole of this indifference” (FCM, p.138). Boredom this deep is not something that one can be made easily aware of, given that there is nothing to contrast it with. This is why Heidegger (FCM, p.68) maintains that the most “powerful” moods are those we are oblivious to.

Drawing on the example of boredom, we can offer an account of depth of mood, according to which deeper moods either facilitate or exclude kinds of mattering and therefore possibility that shallower moods presuppose. Other kinds of mood are also amenable to this kind of analysis. For example, Garrett (1994, pp.73-4) addresses the nature of despair and distinguishes three varieties: despair in relation to a specific project or state of affairs; personal despair that encompasses one’s entire life and thus all of one’s projects; and finally philosophical despair, a more encompassing predicament that involves a sense of all life being irrevocably bereft of meaning. Garrett does not divide up despair in quite the same way that Heidegger does boredom. The first form of despair could be subdivided along the lines of Heidegger’s first and second forms of boredom, whereas personal despair perhaps points to a fourth kind of boredom between forms two and three: being bored with oneself. Steinbock (2007) offers a different but equally complementary analysis of despair, which he distinguishes from disappointment and hopelessness. Disappointment involves the loss of a particular hope whereas hopelessness is wider reaching, as it is also future-directed and incorporates a sense of certain outcomes as either impossible (if good) or inevitable (if bad). But hopelessness does not eradicate the possibility of hope. Indeed, it is only in so far as hope remains intelligible that a given scenario can appear hopeless. Despair, in contrast, is described by Steinbock as a “loss of the ground of hope” (2007, p.446), a mood where the possibility of hope has gone. It is arguable that the same kind of depth-analysis can be offered for a range of other emotions and moods. Hence, although Heidegger is not clear about this in Being and Time, I suggest that his conception of mood can be developed in a potentially fruitful way by means of a strata theory, where moods are understood in terms of the possibilities that they offer or close off.10

**Ground Moods**
Although Heidegger does not explicitly offer a detailed account of the depth of mood, he does acknowledge that only some moods have the status of being fundamental or ‘ground’ moods [Grundstimmungen]. However, it is not entirely clear what the criteria are for being a ground mood. Heidegger does emphasise what I have called ‘depth’ but he also maintains that ground moods can play an important philosophical role, and this role seems to contribute to their status as ground moods. According to Heidegger, although moods determine how we find ourselves in a world, most moods do not make salient to us how we find ourselves in the world. They are inconspicuous and dispose us to overlook the relevant phenomenological accomplishment. Thus, in order to bring to light the role of mood and, more generally, the structure of Being-in-the-world, a mood is required that serves to reveal rather than just to constitute that structure. So Heidegger searches for a “way of disclosure in which Dasein brings itself before itself”. He finds this in the mood of anxiety [Angst], which he takes to be a ground mood (BT, pp.226-7 / p.182).

Anxiety plays the role of shaking us out of pervasive self-misinterpretations by eradicating the kinds of significance that more mundane moods take for granted. The everyday mood is, Heidegger says, one of evasion or “falling” (BT, p.178 / p.139), by which he means that it does not facilitate explicit recognition of the achievement of Being-in-the-world and that we consequently misinterpret ourselves in terms of the entities we discover within the world. However, in anxiety, all practical significance falls away and what we previously took for granted becomes salient in its absence. Everything appears as no longer “relevant” in any way; the world “has the character of completely lacking significance”; “everyday familiarity collapses” (BT, pp.231-3 / pp.186-189). We can no longer misinterpret ourselves as worldly entities, given that the kind of significance that such interpretations quietly presuppose has gone. Anxiety thus facilitates the possibility of an authentic [Eigentlich] self-understanding, involving the recognition that we are not simply entities within the world whose behaviour is dictated by the public norms into which we are enculturated. Heidegger also suggests that anxiety is philosophically illuminating, as it makes conspicuous the ordinarily presupposed structure of Being-in-the-world: “that in the face of which one has anxiety [das Wovor der Angst] is Being-in-the-world as such” (BT, p.230 / p.186). Hence, through anxiety, we can bring Being-in-the-world into view and make it accessible to philosophical study. However, it is not clear why the capacity to
facilitate any kind of insight should make something a ground mood. Enabling Being-in-the-world is not the same as revealing Being-in-the-world. Surely there could be equally fundamental moods that are characterised precisely by their tendency to obscure rather than enlighten. Hence the kind of emotional depth that I described in the previous section can come apart from the potential to facilitate insight. Which, if either, makes something a ground mood for Heidegger?

Consider Heidegger’s contrast between fear, which is not a ground mood, and anxiety, which is. Fear, Heidegger says, is in fact “anxiety, fallen into the ‘world’, inauthentic, and, as such, hidden from itself” (BT, p.234 / p.189). This might sound odd - one could surely be confronted with a threat, regardless of whether or not one has misinterpreted oneself in terms of the kinds of entity that one discovers within the world. What Heidegger means, I think, is that when one is afraid of something, one fears for oneself, and that this is only possible if one already matters in a particular kind of way. Yet the kinds of mattering that enable fear do not facilitate a sufficient appreciation of ourselves as Dasein, as beings that are thrown into a space of significant possibilities, some of which we choose to make our own. This is made clearer in Division Two, where Heidegger discusses fear of death. This, he says, does not incorporate an adequate understanding of death, given that what one fears is the end of an entity that resides within the world, with which one identifies oneself. A realisation of the potential loss of one’s own possibilities, of “the possibility of the impossibility of every way of comporting oneself towards anything, of every way of existing” (BT, p.307 / p.262), is altogether different.

Anxiety removes the kinds of worldly concern that make fear possible, and so also removes (temporarily, at least) the possibility of misinterpreting one’s death in a certain way. One cannot be afraid and anxious at the same time, as the possibility of fear requires that the possibilities made salient by anxiety remain hidden. However, Heidegger sometimes indicates that we do not become anxious at all but are somehow anxious all the time. In addition to claiming that fear rests upon a “turning away” from anxiety and that it thus depends upon anxiety, he later indicates that anxiety is never absent but is instead “covered up” (BT, p.322, p.277), as though it were something lying dormant, with the threat of its awakening quietly permeating all our experiences. But what I think he is saying is that the possibilities which are made
conspicuous to us through the mood of anxiety are tacitly there in the absence of anxiety. Also present all along is the possibility of their becoming conspicuous through anxiety. Hence we might distinguish an inescapable disposition towards anxiety from an occurrent anxiety that may be rare. It is the former upon which the possibility of fear depends.

Drawing on this example, we could maintain that what makes something a ground mood is its being a condition of possibility for the presence or absence of other moods, which does not itself presuppose a further mood. Anxiety takes away possibilities that fear presupposes. This, rather than its capacity to illuminate philosophically or to offer up the possibility of authenticity, is relevant to its ‘ground mood’ status. Hence anxiety is both a ground mood and a mood that has additional attributes which are of interest to Heidegger. It is a “basic attunement of Dasein” and “one which is significant from the existential-ontological standpoint” (BT, p.179 / p.140). However, Heidegger also runs these two criteria together in various places. He never claims that anxiety is the only mood suited to doing philosophy, but he does suggest that philosophy, or good philosophy at least, “in each case happens in a fundamental attunement [ground mood]” (FCM, p.7). He adds that there are several different ground moods, but does not list them all (FCM, p.59). Here, there is clearly an emphasis on revelatory capacity as a criterion for being a ground mood, in addition to depth. Hence my proposal that we understand ‘ground moods’ in terms of conditions of intelligibility alone is, to some extent, a revisionary one. This, I suggest, is preferable to switching between two or more different criteria that often come apart.

It is not actually clear whether we can do philosophy during a mood such as anxiety. For example, in the essay ‘What is Metaphysics?’ Heidegger states that anxiety “robs us of speech” and that the “lucid vision sustained by fresh remembrance” is something that can inform us philosophically (WM, p.101). However, I propose that it is neither being in the mood nor having a memory of the mood that serves to inform. What does the work is the contrast between moods. It is shifts in the sense of belonging to a world that serve to illuminate; what one previously took for granted becomes salient and thus amenable to phenomenological reflection when it is lost or distorted. Heidegger does at least hint that mood changes more generally can play a role in revealing how we find ourselves in a world: “It is precisely when we see the
‘world’ unsteadily and fitfully in accordance with our moods, that the ready-to-hand shows itself in its specific worldhood, which is never the same from day to day” (BT, p.177 / p.138). Of course, not all mood changes will be equally illuminating. For instance, the descent into a deep depression is unlikely to be philosophically enabling, although the process of recovering from it might well be.

Given that mood changes play an important phenomenological role, the question arises as to how they might be evoked. The dynamics of mood are no doubt very complicated indeed, with moods disclosing the world in ways that then allow those moods to be transformed by experiences, activities and happenings. The understanding required to influence a mood need not add up to an understanding of that mood. One could misunderstand a mood completely and yet reliably influence it in any number of ways. Heidegger recognises that we are not completely passive before our moods, that we are responsible to some extent for regulating them. At the same time, he emphasises that some mood is always presupposed. Our thoughts might influence our moods but we would not be able to think at all unless we were already in a mood:

Factually, Dasein can, should and must, through knowledge and will, become master of its moods; in certain possible ways of existing, this may signify a priority of volition and cognition. Only we must not be misled by this into denying that ontologically mood is a primordial kind of Being for Dasein, in which Dasein is disclosed to itself prior to all cognition and volition, and beyond their range of disclosure. And furthermore, when we master a mood, we do so by way of a counter-mood; we are never free of moods. (BT, p.175 / p.136)

Heidegger also refers more specifically to the effects that written and spoken language can have upon mood. The orator, he says, “must understand the possibilities of moods in order to rouse them and guide them aright” (BT, p.178 / p.139). He also claims that, in poetic language, “the communication of existential possibilities of one’s attunement can become an aim in itself, and this amounts to a disclosing of existence” (BT, p.205 / p.162). An implication of his discussion is that the role of philosophical prose is not just to convey information. The prose can serve to attune a reader or listener, to instil a mood through which the philosophy is best understood. Hence we
cannot cleanly divorce the style from the content of a philosophical work, as the style can serve to evoke a mood through which the content is intelligible and without which it can only be misunderstood.

The Varieties of Mood
Heidegger only discusses a few kinds of mood in any detail. Consequently, he neglects to convey the wide range of ways in which we can find ourselves in the world. One might wonder why he focuses only on anxiety and, two years later, on boredom as ground moods through which to philosophise. What about wonder or awe, the simple amazement that “that there is something rather than nothing” (Staehler, 2007, pp.423-4)? However, the range of moods (and most likely the range of philosophically informative moods too) is much greater. Neither the everyday English term ‘mood’ nor the German ‘Stimmung’, regardless of their differing connotations, succeed in capturing all of the relevant phenomena. In English, ways of finding oneself in the world are more commonly referred to as ‘feelings’. Many references to feeling communicate neither an awareness of bodily states nor a way in which some specific part of the world is experienced as being. Instead, they convey a felt sense of belonging to the world, which varies subtly from person to person and time to time, sometimes changing quite dramatically. People talk of all-enveloping feelings of significance, insignificance, detachment, estrangement, absence, isolation, alienation, belonging, unreality, disorientation, disconnection, familiarity, unfamiliarity, anxiety, objectless dread, awe, ecstasy, and many, many others. There are all sorts of more nuanced and lengthy descriptions too, as exemplified by good literature.

Most of these ‘feelings’ have, to date, escaped tidy classification. But how many kinds are there - are most of the above just different ways of describing the same thing? There is every reason to suspect that we can find ourselves in the world in a diverse range of ways, as there are many different kinds of mattering that can be intensified, diminished, gained or lost. For example, a world that is bereft of enticing possibilities might still take on the form of threat; a world bereft of effortless, comfortable, practical belonging might be a place in which things still present themselves as to be done, but in every case as difficult or impossible. The overall framework of mattering is susceptible to many subtly different kinds of change. Because this aspect of experience is most often referred to as a kind of feeling, I have
referred to it as “existential feeling”, rather than mood (Ratcliffe, 2005, 2008). Another reason for using the term ‘feeling’ is that, in addition to constituting how one finds oneself in a world, many or all of these predicaments seem to incorporate changed bodily awareness. This is not to say that they are experiences of the body. As Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* and Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* both make clear, bodily awareness can be a way in which the body *perceives* rather than a way in which it is *perceived*. It is through the feeling body that we experience the world, and so a bodily feeling need not be contrasted with experiencing something in the world or, for that matter, with a background sense of belonging to a world.

Heidegger avoids explicit discussion of bodily experience in *Being and Time*, stating only that our bodily nature [*Leiblichkeit*] “hides a whole problematic of its own, though we shall not treat it here” (BT, p.143 / p.108). This is a serious omission when it comes to understanding mood, as some account is surely needed of what moods actually *are*, in addition to what they do, and of how they relate to the feeling body. Heidegger returns to the phenomenology of the body in his *Zollikon Seminars*, which were held at the home of the psychiatrist Medard Boss between 1959 and 1969 (Heidegger, 2001). Here, he quotes his reference to the body in *Being and Time* and acknowledges that it is indeed an important and difficult topic, and deserving of further study. However, despite offering several lengthy remarks on the body, many of which resonate with themes in Merleau-Ponty and Sartre, he still says nothing about the bodily nature of mood.

A problem that arises from Heidegger’s neglect of the diversity of moods is a lack of clarity over exactly which moods he *does* address. For instance, the psychiatrist Gerritt Glas (2003) distinguishes a number of phenomenologically different forms of basic anxiety, including anxiety as painful disconnectedness, anxiety before death, anxiety in the face of freedom, and anxiety before meaningless. All of these themes feature in Heideggerian anxiety and yet the phenomenological descriptions offered by Glas indicate that there are significant differences between them. Given the central methodological role that anxiety plays in *Being and Time*, it would be problematic if Heidegger’s description of it failed to distinguish between several different forms of anxiety. Of course, one might retort that there is a difference between clinical anxiety and the kind of deep anxiety addressed by Heidegger. Real anxiety, as Heidegger
says, is rare (BT, p.234 / p.190). However, it is important not to trivialise the kinds of anxiety that are reported in psychiatric contexts, which can indeed be deep moods that have a profound effect upon how one finds oneself in the world.

A related issue is that of whether and how Heidegger’s ‘anxiety’ can be distinguished from kinds of experience that many people report while suffering from depression. As Blattner (2005, p.315) recognises, the two are very similar, in so far as they both involve the “total insignificance of the world”. To further complicate matters, there are of course considerable variations in the experience of depression, and depression is itself intimately associated with anxiety. There are certainly similarities between many people’s experiences of depression and what Heidegger calls ‘anxiety’. Severe depression can involve a radical transformation of the ordinarily taken-for-granted sense of belonging to a world, where the usual sense of things as practically significant is gone from experience. In addition, both depression and Heideggerian anxiety involve not only a loss of possibilities but also a conspicuous awareness that something has been lost (Ratcliffe, in press). Heideggerian anxiety seems to be a brief episode, rather than an enduring state. However, its structure is very similar to that of depression. And, if it is not to be identified with (some kind of) depressed mood, the question arises as to which, if any, form of clinical anxiety it most resembles. Heidegger explicitly acknowledges that he has circumvented the issues of how many different kinds of mood there are and how they interrelate:

The different modes of attunement and the ways in which they are interconnected in their foundations cannot be interpreted within the problematic of the current investigation. The phenomena have long been well-known ontically under the terms ‘affects’ and ‘feelings’ and have always been under consideration in philosophy. (BT, p.178 / p.138)

However, in avoiding this task, he also fails to sufficiently acknowledge the diversity of and subtle differences between these “modes of attunement”. Consequently, the referent of the term ‘anxiety’ starts to look a little unclear.

**Mood and Time**
I will conclude by very briefly raising an issue about the relationship between mood and time. In Division Two of *Being and Time*, Heidegger analyses the structure of care in terms of ‘original temporality’. This is not clock time or time conceived of in any kind of ‘present-at-hand’ way, but the unified structure that renders Being-in-the-world possible: “Dasein’s totality of Being as care means: ahead-of-itself-already-being-in (a world) as Being-alongside (entities encountered within-the-world).[….] *The primordial unity of the structure of care lies in temporality*” (BT, p.375 / p.327).

Hence having a mood, along with the other aspects of care, is to be analysed in terms of temporality.

However, it is questionable whether the role of mood can be adequately analysed in terms of time, even a ‘primordial’ sense of time that is quite different from everyday understandings of time. It is clear that mood changes can significantly alter how time is experienced. For instance, people suffering from depression frequently complain that the experience of time has changed, sometimes describing it as a slowing down or cessation of time: “Time moves like treacle, running thick and heavy through my days” (Brampton, 2008, p.26). In severe depression, the possibility of anything appearing as practically significant is gone from experience, as is the possibility of certain significant kinds of interpersonal connectedness. The world therefore offers nothing and one’s sense of the future is correspondingly altered. Without meaningful transitions from future to past, awareness of the difference between them is eroded. Hence the overall structure of temporal experience is changed. Distortions in the perception of time’s passing, and also in the sense of ‘past’, ‘present’, ‘future’ and how they interrelate, occur in various other psychiatric conditions too, as well as in more mundane circumstances. Consider, for example, the difference in how time is experienced when listening to a boring talk and when giving the talk.

That moods have such effects is something Heidegger readily acknowledges, and he suggests that the mood of boredom is characterised by alterations in the sense of time. Moods, he says, are modifications of time and can thus be understood in terms of time. Although one might feel tempted to maintain, in the case of profound boredom, that “one feels timeless, one feels removed from the flow of time”, a temporal structure still remains (FCM, p.133). However, many first-person accounts of depression not only report that things *no longer* appeared significant. They also
describe an inability to conceive of things ever having been significant: “There was and could be no other life than the bleak shadowland I now inhabited” (Shaw, 1997, p.25). The loss of practical significance from experience is something that applies equally to a sense of past, present and future. Consider the following: “What time is it? A little after ten in the morning. I try to remember what ten in the morning means, how it feels. But I cannot. Time means nothing to me anymore” (Brampton, 2008, p.29). Of course, clock time, which is what the author refers to, is not original temporality. But the reason she finds clock time meaningless is that she has lost the presupposed sense of practical significance that makes timing and scheduling one’s activities intelligible. Granted, practical significance itself has a temporal structure: one finds something significant in so far as one encounters its possibilities in the context of a situation that is already the case. But it is not clear that a mood which renders practical significance no longer intelligible depends upon time in such a way as to warrant the view that time is somehow more fundamental than mood. The loss of significance is not a way of experiencing time but something that determines the ways in which time can be experienced. Numerous authors describe depression as somehow atemporal:

When you are depressed, the past and future are absorbed entirely by the present moment, as in the world of a three-year old. You cannot remember a time when you felt better, at least not clearly; and you certainly cannot imagine a future time when you will feel better. Being upset, even profoundly upset, is a temporal experience, while depression is atemporal. (Solomon, 2001, p.55)

This is partly because practical meaning is altogether gone from experience. The sense that anything is significant, ever was significant or ever could be significant is absent. The overall structure of temporal experience presupposes this absence of significance; the loss thus seems irrevocable, prior to time, outside of time. One possibility is that mood and time are inextricable but that neither is wholly analysable in terms of the other. A stronger claim that might be made on behalf of mood is that it is more phenomenologically fundamental than time, that mood is presupposed not just by the ways in which temporal experience is organised but by the possibility of any kind of temporal experience.
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References

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1 The German term ‘Stimmung’ does not have quite the same connotations as ‘mood’. In any case, Heidegger’s analysis certainly does not encompass all of the phenomena associated with everyday uses of the term ‘mood’, and so it is important not to place too much weight upon choice of this particular term.

2 Throughout this chapter, I refer to Macquarrie and Robinson’s 1962 English translation of Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit*. English page numbers appear first, followed by the original German.

3 This choice is to some extent arbitrary and other terms, such as “disposedness” would serve equally well. However, no English term has quite the same connotations as *Befindlichkeit*.

4 I am using the term ‘experience’ in a broad and non-committal way here, so as to encompass both how we encounter things in the world and the background sense of belonging to a world.

5 Heidegger distinguishes between inauthentic and authentic modes of understanding (e.g. BT, p.186 / p.146), but both depend upon kinds of possibility that are already laid out by a mood. If one could not find anything practically significant in any way, neither authentic nor inauthentic pursuit of projects would be possible.

6 However, in Division 2, Heidegger makes clear that fear is also essentially past-involving. When we are afraid, we are “bewildered” by the possibilities that we are faced with. So we fall back on habitual (and thus past) ways of dealing with things (BT, pp.391-2 / pp.341-2).

7 There is also a distinction to be drawn between having a mood in the context of which being afraid is a possibility and having a mood that one might call *living in fear*. In the latter case, the fear is the mood. One does not merely encounter certain entities within the world as threatening. Instead, all experience is structured by a background sense of threat.

8 See Ratcliffe (in press) for a more detailed account of emotional depth.

9 The German term *Langeweile* (literally translated ‘long while’) better conveys the temporal aspect of boredom that is central to Heidegger’s discussion.

10 See Strasser (1977) for an account of ‘levels’ of feeling, which treats pre-intentional mood [*Stimmung*] as fundamental and complements Heidegger’s discussion in several respects.
See Ratcliffe (2008, Chapter 8) for an account of how such changes might be incorporated into phenomenological method and into philosophical method more generally. Jaspers (1962, Part I, Chapter 1) describes several kinds of alteration in temporal experience that can occur in conditions such as depression and schizophrenia. However, he claims that time is always experienced, even though it can be experienced in a range of different ways. This is Heidegger’s view too.