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THE NATURE OF *STIMMUNGEN*[1]

The concept of *Stimmung*

Otto Friedrich Bollnow

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THE CONCEPT OF *STIMMUNG*

1 *Stimmung* as the most basic layer of mental life

The collapse of faith in reason as the fundamental core of humanity meant that now thinking and the other higher faculties of the mind could no longer be taken as domains that rest in themselves and are to be understood from within themselves; instead, these faculties referred back to a deeper foundation of life, which they had emerged from and remained rooted in. The situation that then arose expressed itself symptomatically in the appearance of the question about the relationship between thinking and life, and generally between mind and life. In this context, philosophical attention necessarily directed itself towards the previously neglected deeper foundations of life so as to make the entire inner structure of human life transparent.

At its most basic level, all of mental life rests on "feelings of life" (*Lebensgefühle*) or "*Stimmungen*".[2] They constitute the simplest and most original form in which human life comes to know itself – and this always already in a specific colouring, with a specific evaluation and assessment. At this point, the purely bodily feelings (of hunger, thirst, fatigue, etc.), in which the human being becomes aware of a specific state of its body, can be set aside. These bodily feelings constitute a comparatively self-contained domain that does not come into consideration in the construction of the higher faculties (or at least not substantially so). *Stimmungen* in the true sense differ from bodily feelings in that they constitute the basic condition that evenly permeates the whole human being, from the lowest to the highest domains, lending all his emotions and stirrings a specific, distinctive colouring. We are therefore appropriately speaking (following Heidegger) about the "basic existential orientations" of human existence.

To these belong, to mention only a few preliminary examples, the *Stimmungen* of cheerfulness and sadness, of merriness and exuberance as well as dejection and hazy dizziness, of quiet relaxedness as well as tense anxiety and worry. Language often illustrates *Stimmungen* with the image of elevation, and it thereby characterizes them as a specific level of feeling. It speaks, for example, of *Stimmungen* that are "high", "lowered", or "depressed"; of "flat" and "deep" *Stimmungen*. In doing so, it often evokes the image of a burden that bends people down in dejected *Stimmungen*; a burden from which they then feel freed in happy *Stimmungen*. *Stimmungen* are often described by the linguistic elements of "*Sinn*" (sense) and "*Mut*" (mood) (which were still used almost synonymously in Middle High German): *Trübsinn* (gloom), *Frohsinn* (cheerfulness), *Leichtsinn* (frivolousness); or *Übermut* (audacity), *Wehmut* (woefulness), *Schwermut* (melancholy), *Gleichmut* (equanimity), *Missmut* (moroseness) as being in low or high spirits ("*Zu-Mute-sein*"). The "spirit" (*Gemüt*), as it has been recently developed, after long neglect, by Lersch[3] and Strasser[4] as a basic psychological concept, therefore appears as the true seat of *Stimmung*.

2 The differentiation from emotions

One best understands the strict sense of *Stimmung* as the basic condition of human existence, when one seeks to distinguish it from the related concept of emotions in their true sense.[5] Emotions in the true sense are always "intentionally" directed towards a specific object (Brentano); they are "object-related emotions" (Klages) or "directed emotions" (Lersch). All joy is joy about something (and, in fact, about something specific); all hope is hope for something; all love, love of something; all aversion, aversion to something; etc. *Stimmungen*, in contrast, do not have any specific object. They are states of being, colourations of human existence as a whole, in which the ego comes to know itself directly in a particular way,[6] but they do not refer to something outside themselves.

Thus, fear is a (directed) emotion because human beings always fear something that they feel threatened by (an attack, a loss, an exposure, or the like). Anxiety, in contrast, is distinguished from fear in that one is unable to identify any particular object that one is anxious about. It was nothing, really, people accordingly say when the anxiety is over, thus unconsciously identifying the heart of the matter quite well. That is why one tries to bridle anxiety with rational considerations: How can one allow oneself to be plagued by something that cannot be shown to be in the world? Yet precisely through such considerations that try to relegate the indeterminate and hence uncanny aspects of *Stimmung* to the clearer level of determinate emotions, one misconceives the essence of anxiety from the very start. But as much as one may try to talk people out of their anxiety, it is unquestionably given as a hard fact in real life. That is why, in contrast, the existentialist understanding (Kierkegaard, Jaspers, Heidegger)[7] starts precisely with this "nothing", with this indeterminacy. It is not something determinate in the world that humans are anxious about; it is the uncanniness of existence per se that flares up in anxiety.

But the same distinction that becomes evident in this (philosophically already rather well developed) example generally holds between emotion and *Stimmung*. In this way, the emotion of joy (for example) about an unexpected and pleasant visit is distinguished from the *Stimmung* of cheerfulness in that cheerfulness "comes over a person" as a general all-embracing state and, without being directed at anything specific, lends all of the person's stirrings a specific style: a specific fast rhythm and a peculiar "rosy" gleam. Cheerfulness has the same indeterminacy with respect to objects as anxiety does. And even if specific close connections (which are still to be examined) were to exist between the two sides, one can still clearly see the fundamental difference. Closely following Lersch, Strasser also emphasises this when he stresses that "this concept of *Stimmung* ... has to be carefully distinguished from the concept of directed emotions".[8]

To be more precise, the relation between *Stimmung* and emotion is not one between equals, but it is rather a very specific relation of one being built upon the other. Only *Stimmungen* belong to the layer of the sustaining foundation of life; the emotions, in contrast, are already part of the "higher" faculties that develop from and build on that foundation. This relation was once described with a comparison that fits in many ways:

> If the state of a *Stimmung* is the foundational bass that strides along uniformly and evenly then the emotions are the changing colourful fluctuations and melodies built upon it. Or: if we imagine the state of a *Stimmung* as a uniform curve on a line chart, then the change and sequence of emotions constitute a secondary curve over the first. From the perspective of the emotions, we can also say: the prevailing *Stimmung* is the backdrop of psychic conditions in which only certain groups and directions of emotions are possible.[9]

The emotions thus develop – alongside the other faculties of the mind – only on the basis of the foundation of *Stimmung* that precedes them, and they are determined in character by this foundation. Lersch also stresses this when he observes that

> the entire cycle of experiences is carried by something that itself is not a process, namely by stationary *Gestimmtheiten* (moods).... [They] are the endothymic background against which the execution of striving, observing, being impressed upon, and active behaviour stand out while being at the same time embedded in that background.[10]

Strasser correspondingly writes: "Intentional acts with their directedness and attunement to their objects stem from this dispositional subsoil."[11] At the same time, he also points to the reverse process: that the individual experiences, as they arose from this general foundation of life, then also in turn impact on it. A painful loss reverberates in a sad mood (*Gestimmtheit*) even when the specific occasion is no longer present, and likewise in other cases: "But ultimately everything lived

through and experienced condenses itself into the form of a no longer intentional being-in-a-mood."[12]

A certain qualification must, however, be made with regard to these observations. Notwithstanding the fundamental separation between *Stimmung* and emotion, which must be held on to, the transitions can, in a few cases, be quite fluid, and with many stirrings one can be in doubt about which side one should assign them to. This includes grief and heartache, happiness and satisfaction, etc. Although they are not as clearly indeterminate with respect to objects as pure *Stimmungen* are, they are usually still to be counted among *Stimmungen*. For even when grief and heartache are directed at something particular, this happens in a different way from how, for instance, pain is directed at something. Grief and heartache do not have their reason and cause in view in the same way that, for example, pain is inseparably directed at its cause; instead they have become, exactly like other *Stimmungen*, a general colouring that permeates the whole soul and lends all of its stirrings a specific uniform character. The directedness is here, accordingly, not towards an (intentional) object but towards a cause, which may be fully conscious, yet need not be the target of current attention. Only in this way can grief and heartache, happiness and satisfaction, become longer-lasting total conditions of a human being. One could consider avoiding this indeterminacy by distinguishing between grief and a general state of grief, between happiness and a general state of happiness, etc., as Strasser proposes in the interest of improved conceptual clarity. But such a definition would entail an unjustified restriction of natural language. That is why I refrained from doing so here. In the following, such stirrings are referred to as *Stimmungen* without every time offering a special justification when they can contribute to clarifying our problem as appropriate examples.

In a similar sense, people can also be anxious about something specific, for example, about a spider. This does not contradict the distinction between anxiety and fear; rather, when one calls such a stirring anxiety, what one has in mind is exactly that it is inappropriate and unjustifiable, and so more of a compulsive nature. The individual object is not actually the cause but rather the occasion for anxiety, and it is the much more profound character of uncanniness that crystallises here around a relatively accidental nucleus.

3 The encompassing unity of life and world

This general basic character also corresponds to the literal meaning of the word *Stimmung*, which originally is a simile-like transfer of a musical concept onto the human soul. Listening to this literal use, Novalis can say: "The word *Stimmung* pertains to the musical relations of the soul."[13] As an instrument is in tune when it is tuned to another (and then in the derivative sense to a specific norm), and only able to fulfil its particular function in the state of being in tune, so one also says of a person that he is "in *Stimmung*" or "not in *Stimmung*" for a specific undertaking, depending on whether or not the entire constitution of his spirit is such that it shows an inner readiness and disposition for this undertaking.[14]

Every *Stimmung* is harmony (*Übereinstimmung*), and the "*Stimmung* of the spirit" thus has to do with such a constant harmony of the whole human, who, in his different ways, is evenly tuned to a specific "tone". This then allows a more precise threefold distinction: (1) the harmony between the inner and outer world; (2) the harmony between the states of the body and the soul; and, finally, (3) the harmony of all the individual faculties of the soul that are all tuned to a uniform base tone. Here it is exactly the lack of direction, which distinguishes the foundation of *Stimmung* from (directed) emotions and seemed to pose such difficulties in the initial attempt at capturing this foundation, that now proves to be the expression of greater originality and simplicity. In *Stimmung*, the world has not yet become an object as it appears in later forms of consciousness, especially in knowing; rather, *Stimmungen* still live entirely in the unseparated unity of self and world with a shared colouring of *Stimmung* pervading both. That is why it is also wrong to account for *Stimmung* solely on the subjective side and to assume that it then, as it were, rubs off on the world.

Likewise, it is also not a belated, merely simile-like transfer but a direct and, in terms of origin, apt characterisation to ascribe a specific *Stimmung* to a landscape (particularly under certain atmospheric conditions) or to a living space, or when one emphatically describes a visual representation of a landscape as an evening or moonlight *Stimmung*. In doing so, one does not bestow the landscape with a soul; one is thinking, rather, of their mutual permeation by the specific content of a *Stimmung*, which encompasses both the human being and the world. *Stimmung* therefore does not belong to an isolated "inner life" of human beings; instead, human beings are incorporated into the landscape as a whole, which in turn does not exist separately, but rather relates back to human beings in its own way.

Particularly characteristic for the original unity of human beings and the world, which *Stimmungen* reveal, is the connection of *Stimmungen* of the soul to weather phenomena. It is no coincidence that one often tries to describe the emotional state of a person by designations originally referring to weather phenomena, such as "bright" or "sunny" on the one hand, "gloomy" and "clouded" by grief on the other. It is not without reason that joy appears light, grief dark.

Heidegger most strongly emphasised this unity of the inner and outer world in *Stimmung*:

> Being *gestimmt* (attuned) is not initially related to something psychical, it is itself not an inner condition which then in some mysterious way reaches out and leaves its mark on things and persons.... *Stimmung* comes neither from "without" nor from "within", but rises from being-in-the-world itself as a mode of that being.[15]

The great philosophical significance of *Stimmung* lies precisely in the fact that it goes beyond the separation of subject and object, which theoretical consciousness takes for granted, back into the level of an original unity between the two. It

makes a foundation visible that had already become invisible (although not inactive) from the theoretical stance, a foundation that one could also never discover from a purely theoretical stance.

Strasser also makes a point of emphasising the unity of the human spirit and the surrounding world that exists in a *Stimmung*. According to him,

> in actual *Gestimmtheiten*, no I, no object, no boundary between I and object really appear. One must say, though, that the boundaries of the I blur and vanish in a peculiar way. I and the world are embedded in an undivided experience of totality. *Stimmung* is the feeling of I-and-world together.[16]

Binswanger most notably elaborated these connections from a medical perspective.[17] He calls this form of environment, which human beings do not yet confront as an object out there, but which they feel affectively connected to and not yet at all separate from, "attuned space". Binswanger sets this space apart from the vital space of action and the homogeneous cognitive space of the theoretical stance (as well as from further derivative forms of space). In every moment, this "attuned space" is steeped in a specific affective colouring that evenly permeates everything within it, people as well as things. He explains this unity very convincingly with Goethe's verses:

> Alas, how world and heavens are constricted
> When our own heart's held captive by its fear.[18]

> Goethe does not at all envisage this how-when relation as a causal connection as if the fear of the heart were the "cause" of the constriction of the world and the heavens.... In this essential relationship of the ego's attunement ... and the spatiality of the world, nothing is genetically primary or genetically secondary, nothing is the cause or the effect, the condition or the conditioned, the inducing or the induced, not even the ground or the consequence. Instead, what we call the trembling of the heart also exists precisely in a constriction of the world and the heavens in the trembling of our hearts.[19]

Binswanger also emphatically stresses that *Stimmung* neither resides originally in the inside, to then rub off on the world, nor does it reside in the world to then encompass human beings. It is, rather, only possible because of this original essential unity that, in individual cases (for example, through sad news), a psychic change makes the previously bright and cheerful world suddenly appear darkened; conversely, a change in external nature (for example, a rising storm) can bring about a corresponding change of a person's inner state. "These ontic-genetic interconnections are only possible on the basis of natural phenomenological relations, which we entitle attuned space."[20]

4 The primordial unity of soul and body

The unity of body and soul is, however, equally significant to *Stimmung*.[21] The importance of bodily conditions to *Stimmung* is exceptional. Disturbances to corporeal well-being and their remedy have a direct effect on psychic attunement even though psychic attunements cannot simply be reduced to them; rather, the psychic state of *Stimmung* also affects the constitution of the body. Romantic psychology in particular repeatedly pointed out this reciprocal dependence. Carus writes, for example:

> A lively heartbeat, the free flowing of blood in its finest paths, and freer breathing, all having originated in the unconscious, attune consciousness to joy, and are themselves stimulated, in turn, when consciousness apprehends joyous ideas; indeed, one must call such stimulation nothing less than the unconscious joy of the organism itself, as one says metaphorically of a plant: it greens and blooms happily.[22]

In his *Psyche*, Carus generally sought to interpret this rising of *Stimmungen* in humans profoundly as an initial consciousness of what was, up until then, unconscious so that for him, too, *Stimmungen* play a key role for the structure of the soul. Hence, his characterization may be placed here:

> Everything that our soul forms within us in the night of unconsciousness, creates, does, suffers, surges, and broods; everything that stirs there, – not just what is made known to one's own organism, but also what is aroused by the influences of other souls and the whole outer world, all of which also permeates our inner unconscious life, one moment more strongly, the next more mildly, all of this resonates in a certain way out of the night of unconsciousness up into the light of conscious life, and we call this sound, this wonderful message of the unconscious to consciousness – emotion.[23]

In Carus, the word emotion bears the already mentioned vagueness of ordinary language, and it refers to precisely what in the present investigation is called *Stimmung* as can be seen by its characterisation as "this wholly unique colouring of the conscious soul", which he uses interchangeably with "*Stimmungen* of our spirit".

In a similar manner, Baader has emphasised the influence of atmospheric phenomena on *Stimmungen*. Alongside many individual observations that refer to these connections in the diaries from his youth, he at one point quite explicitly says "that the atmosphere has a powerful influence on our psychic processes". "Everything within us depends so much on the outside; or rather everything outside and inside hangs together, is but one."[24] Especially through the medium of the weather do human beings live in immediate unity with the life of nature surrounding them.

5 The happy *Stimmungen*

A system of *Stimmungen* that would know how to arrange them in all their extensive variety according to a comprehensive scheme of classification is impossible; for, with sufficiently careful analysis, each one leads – in a way that was generally anticipated above with regard to the method of philosophical anthropology[25] – directly to the essence of humanity in a new and unpredictable way, and it does not fit with the others to form a symmetrically structured system. As everywhere else, dividing mental phenomena according to the simple logical scheme of "species" and "genus" also proves to be impossible here.[26] Nevertheless, we cannot avoid classifying *Stimmungen* – of which one or the other has so far come under consideration rather at random – even if it is in a merely preliminary manner, and ordinary language already provides some hints for doing so. Such an approach also gives no cause for concern as long as one always keeps in mind the preliminary-orienting character of such a classification.

If one tries to survey – in this restricted sense – the diversity of *Stimmungen*, then they initially sort themselves into the two large groups of happy and sad *Stimmungen*; or, perhaps better, as one says in an even less determinate manner of expression: into elevated and subdued *Stimmungen*. A person's *Stimmung* fluctuates in a more or less pronounced manner between these two poles.[27] Further research would have to differentiate much more exactly on both sides. On both sides, there are different forms of *Stimmungen* that are not at all to be understood as mere differences of degree; rather, they display radical differences in their essence and take hold of people in quite different deep layers of their being.

On the side of elevated *Stimmungen*, there are, to begin with the most superficial forms, foolishness and exuberance, which only satisfy people on the surface and therefore often leave behind a dull aftertaste. These forms are usually perceived as lacking in "seriousness" and one therefore tends to judge them disparagingly. And, indeed, they primarily belong to a youthful form of life. Their expression is a typically pointless giggling that spreads as if through contagion. While one may find them natural in young people, they appear contemptuous in adults. These *Stimmungen* then lead to other forms of forced and often even pained merriness, which spread noisily and appear unnatural since they usually are only supposed to drown out a secret anxiety. Then there is the group of merriness, gaiety, and cheerfulness, which are louder in one moment and softer the next, sometimes overcome people only momentarily, other times belong to their persistent natural predisposition; they all are given to people, however, as a gift of their nature and as a sign of their vital well-being. Their expression is liberated laughter, which is itself manifold in its manifestations, from quiet relaxedness to loud and resounding guffaws.

Next come the various forms of *Glück* (happiness).[28] Although there is a somewhat disturbing semantic ambiguity to the word *Glück* – since it refers, on

the one hand, to external conditions of good luck (in the sense of *fortuna*), but then also, on the other hand, to a person's inner state that corresponds to external fortune (in the sense of *felicitas*) – it still seems appropriate to stick with this expression because it most comprehensively describes this layer of elevated *Stimmung*. We distinguish happiness from the *Stimmungen* mentioned above – cheerfulness, merriness, etc. – by how the latter spread within a person from purely vital existence and can be present without the person being particularly conscious of them. Happiness, in contrast, arises from engaging with the conditions of life. Happiness is therefore, by its very nature, perceived happiness, not merely an elevation of the person's inner state, but also a satisfaction with the external conditions of life, and for that reason it is also dependent on them.

In the case of happiness, we also distinguish between extremely different forms with a wide range of levels of profundity, which we will come back to in more detail in our discussion of Nietzsche. First of all, there is small happiness, which is content with little and has purchased its harmony with external conditions by renouncing its own demands. Closely related to it is the happiness of a comfortable existence, which, satisfied with its achieved state, has lost all energy to go on striving. Deeper than this is the quiet and calm happiness that grows out of the satisfaction of a fulfilled existence in nature. And different again is the great and more forceful happiness that comes from effort and risk itself, a happiness no longer simple and clear, but rather enigmatic, dark, and heavy. And different yet again is the "glazed" happiness that, similar to aesthetic existence, arches over the burden of existence on rare occasions like a breakable vault; and in it, a secret trembling of the soul, the awareness of frailty is felt as an integral part of this form of happiness. And then, above all of them stands the form of contentment that permeates people into their final depths and can no longer be shaken by any external fate. This is best referred to with the name beatitude taken from the religious sphere: it has its facial expression in a hardly perceptible quiet smile.

6 The sad *Stimmungen*

Opposite the elevated *Stimmungen* is a corresponding series of subdued ones. Despondence and dejection, also downheartedness, belong to the vital domain of this series. These *Stimmungen* generally consist in a weakening of the feeling towards life, which causes people to doubt the success of their undertakings and makes them listless or unable to do their usual work. Here, too, belongs a sadness, also emerging from the vital sphere, that can lay itself like a light breath over people, and which they often do not know how to account for. In its softer variations, this sadness has close ties to poetic creation and feeling. It develops further into the forms of melancholy and wistfulness, which can then often again contain within themselves a secret undertone of sweetness.

Sadness is, like the *Stimmungen* strongly anchored in the sphere of vitality in general, a predominantly youthful form of life. In old age, sadness becomes

increasingly coloured by the result of a spiritual engagement with life. This produces forms of resignation and submissiveness to fate, which also belong to the circle of subdued *Stimmungen*. The *Stimmung* of grumpy querulousness, in which people go about with an unfriendly face and nothing can please them, is also a form that tends to solidify with increasing age. The states of annoyance and irritability also belong in this context, where a hostile tension with the outside world has accumulated in people and is ready to be discharged at the slightest opportunity.

Corresponding to the various forms of happiness, we find various forms of unhappiness on the side of subdued *Stimmungen*, provided, again, that one does not understand unhappiness as an external case of bad luck but as the internal state of the unhappy person's soul. To the unhappy, everything is gloomy. To them, the world appears grey and drab. But like happiness, unhappiness too can have very different degrees of depth. There is a petty woe that makes a person petulant and always contains something contemptible. But there is also a deep sorrow that takes hold of a person and ennobles him; there is a reserved and often proud mourning in which the inner discipline of a person proves itself; there is a grief that secretly gnaws at his soul, and also an endless pain that lifts a person out of the crowd and always exhibits the awesomeness of a great fate.

Seriousness is only to be subsumed under subdued *Stimmungen* in a certain way.[29] Seriousness is the opposite of jest, and since jest doubtlessly belongs to the side of elevated *Stimmungen*, seriousness would correspondingly have to count as a subdued state of life. A sad person makes a serious face, so seriousness might appear as a form of contained and controlled sorrow. This side of seriousness connects it to darkness and heaviness. The serious person also feels the burden of existence. But not every kind of seriousness is, conversely, also an expression of sadness. Seriousness is the opposite of the playful, and, as such, it is the expression of a sense of responsibility and usually also of a certain age. The direct involvement of a child is not yet seriousness; seriousness first arises, rather, out of an awareness of the responsibility one has to bear. Everything ceremonial, everything elevated and solemn, especially the sublime, presupposes seriousness. Its antagonist is the ridiculous, which threatens to discompose it and to destroy the pathos of seriousness. Laughter ruptures the composure assumed by seriousness, and this makes it especially clear that seriousness is not only a *Stimmung* but also simultaneously an attitude in which human beings give their existence an intended form.

7 Anxiety and despair

But there are other *Stimmungen* in addition to these forms of sadness in the broadest sense: boredom, which permeates a person as an agonising indifference and freezes all sympathy with people and things so that the person appears dead; furthermore, and more penetrating, there are anxiety and despair, which seize a person and throw him so far out of the familiar security of his life's context that

all rational thought is thereby suppressed. These *Stimmungen* will have to be considered later in greater detail, so at this point, in anticipation, a preliminary discussion of their relation to other *Stimmungen* suffices.

On the one hand, anxiety and despair are closely related to subdued *Stimmungen*; they are themselves forms, indeed intensified forms, of depression. On the other hand, however, they differ so distinctly from subdued *Stimmungen* that treating them collectively would distort what is essential to each of these two groups. While happiness and sadness refer to two poles of *Stimmung*, between which human life oscillates in regular or irregular intervals, and while seriousness also has its counterpart in jest, these new *Stimmungen* exhibit no such polarity. They do not have a real opposite. One could, if anything, contrast them with calmness and security and the equanimity based on them, but this would no longer be a relation of equal poles; instead, anxiety and despair distinguish themselves as disruptions to the state of equilibrium that otherwise constitutes the stable continuity of *Stimmung*. They lack the gentle and uniform perfusion that gives even the strongest sorrow a certain balance and characterises it as a genuine *Stimmung*. In anxiety and despair, however, this even oscillation of the real *Stimmungen* is distorted. It is as if *Stimmung* as such is broken here.

Because of this disruption, one might consider renouncing anxiety and despair from the circle of *Stimmungen* altogether and juxtaposing them to *Stimmungen* as "*Verstimmungen*" (discordances). But *Verstimmung* is, strictly speaking, something else yet again (which will be returned to shortly), and it is therefore appropriate to forego this misleading concept at this point. A specific *Stimmung* is destroyed in *Verstimmung*, which refers back to that *Stimmung* and still contains it in some hidden form. In anxiety and despair, in contrast, the feeling of life as a whole comes apart.

This is also connected to the second aspect that distinguishes anxiety and despair from other subdued *Stimmungen*, namely their comparatively shorter temporal duration at heightened intensity. One could therefore, following Lersch, be tempted to distinguish anxiety and despair as "forms in which the feeling of life is aroused"[30] from the steadier *Stimmungen*. But that does not provide a fundamental difference, for during their shorter life span, these "forms of arousal", which are individuated by their specific intensity, serve as life's formative foundation just as *Stimmungen* generally do. It therefore seems more appropriate to retain Heidegger's terminology and count anxiety and despair among the genuine *Stimmungen*. One just has to keep in mind that, in the simplifying contrast between elevated and subdued *Stimmungen*, much more profound differences are taken together on the side of subdued *Stimmungen* than are distinguished on the side of happy *Stimmungen*.

Finally, there lies "between" the two groups of elevated and subdued *Stimmungen* another, so to speak, "middle" register of *Stimmungen*, in which the arousals of both sides have come to rest. The *Stimmungen* of balanced calm, of security in one's current life situation, or of equanimity, which still allows one to

be touched by things, belong in this group, which itself can sometimes tend more to the one side of *Stimmungen* and sometimes more to the other side.

8 Devotion, solemnity, and festiveness

In addition to these large groups, there is still, finally, a good number of *Stimmungen* that cannot be organised into such a coherent schema of oscillating *Stimmungen*; instead, they stand for themselves with respect to their content. Only a very few examples can be singled out here to clarify these possibilities, which are, moreover, in themselves very diverse. One example is the *Stimmung* of devotion. Devotion is not an elevated *Stimmung* per se, but rather a very specific attitude; it is an attunement to the reception of religious or what is generally perceived as "higher" truths. In contrast to the forms of *Stimmung* mentioned so far, the decisive aspect here lies in being attuned to a very specific content; hence the musical comparison with the *Stimmung* (tuning) of an instrument is especially applicable. Devotion is a readiness to hear. But precisely therein is devotion a genuine *Stimmung* and not merely a theoretical stance, because it affects, exactly like other *Stimmungen*, the human being as a whole, including his demeanour and gestures. Even externally, devout people's eyes are lowered or, more correctly, withdrawn into the inside, for it is not out of humility or diffidence that they do not dare to look up; rather, devotion transpires out of inner concentration, which makes the outer world recede. For the devout person, everything that is loud and noisy melts away, and a composed stillness comes over him. It is as if the noise of the "world" only reaches him from afar and is no longer able to distract him. That is why devotion can also be fostered by appropriate external conditions, by suitable music or appropriate rooms, and generally even through mere silence. Yet devout concentration is more than mere concentration of the soul on a specific content; the content is distinguished from the sphere of "normal" everyday life as a specifically religious content. Hence, devotion is open-mindedness to such specific contents and, correspondingly, close-mindedness to the rest of life's demands. This gives the *Stimmung* of devotion its very specific sanctity, which is experienced along with the *Stimmung* and constitutes an inseparable part of it.

Other *Stimmungen* of this type – forms of a very specific mode of human readiness – include solemnity and festiveness.[31] These too are forms of an elevated feeling towards life, but they differ from the elevated *Stimmungen* mentioned so far through an inner self-restraint that takes the place of uninhibited and relaxed cheerfulness. These *Stimmungen* do not arise directly out of the natural foundation of life, but rather emerge, like devotion, only on the basis of a very specific human attitude, and they receive from this attitude a specific way of disciplining and shaping the manifestations of life, which then constitute, in turn, an inseparable part of the experienced content of the *Stimmung*. In this sense, solemnity is a form of elevation that receives its specific consecration from an awareness of the event's special significance. A feeling of being carried

results from the weight of this significance. It is expressed in the slowness and restraint of all movements, which prohibits everything fast and rushed, and transforms normal walking into a measured pace. To solemnity belongs the emphasised cultivation of external form; the ceremonial that is alone appropriate to its dignity. All carelessness in external behaviour, even the uninhibited expression of emotion, can destroy the solemn *Stimmung*. As an artificial form wrested from natural life, it is always at risk of flipping from the sublime into the ridiculous.

Festiveness is then a specific enhancement of solemnity. In it, the meaning-laden heaviness of solemnity is dissolved into a certain brightness and joyousness. The feeling of an exceptional moment of happiness is festive. But it is also essential that the festive *Stimmung* never springs from the escalated joy of individual human beings. Incorporation into an overall context, which gives objective meaning to what happens in a moment, belongs to solemnity and festiveness. They are therefore only possible in a community that experiences the organised pinnacles of its life within these *Stimmungen*. Whereas more serious solemnities can still be consciously organised, the festive *Stimmung* only ensues in the favourable moment, which is also why festivities can only be prepared but never "organised".

This brief sketch of the diversity of *Stimmungen* shall not be unfolded further in the present context. Rather, as a methodological preparation for a fully developed philosophy of *Stimmungen*, their influence on the entire life of the human soul shall be pursued here using a single and simplified contrasting pair – for the degree of their influence will best be seen from the range spanned by two extreme cases. In this sense, the following investigation consciously restricts itself to the simplified schematic contrast between elevated and subdued *Stimmungen* without going into the finer distinctions that are certainly highly significant in themselves.

STIMMUNGEN AS THE SUSTAINING FOUNDATION OF THE SOUL

1 The philosophical-anthropological significance of *Stimmung*

After these initial preparatory considerations, designed to show the unique nature of *Stimmungen* in contrast to emotions, we now have to go further into their philosophical-anthropological significance. We have Heidegger to thank for the first philosophical account of *Stimmungen* that goes right through to the crucial anthropological heart of the matter; indeed, he is responsible for their philosophical discovery at all. In Heidegger's "analytics of Dasein", *Stimmungen* play a foundational role as the "*Befindlichkeiten*" (attunements) of human existence. Our presentation of the first elaboration of the problem must therefore follow him. His insights essentially boil down to two major points.

First is the assertion that "Dasein is always already *gestimmt* (attuned)".[32] This means that *Stimmung* is not something external that occasionally affects

and then leaves people while the true nature of humanity is based on something independent of such *Stimmungen*. *Stimmungen* are, rather, a necessary and indispensable part of the original essence of humanity, and it is in no way possible to escape the dependence on *Stimmung*, for example, by assuming a purely theoretical stance whose perspective is not "clouded" by *Stimmungen*. There is absolutely no state of human life that is not already tuned in a certain way.

The second major insight builds on this first finding: this layer of always-present *Stimmungen* constitutes the sustaining foundation out of which all the rest of the life of the soul develops and remains continuously determined by in its essence. Through a particular basic *Stimmung*, certain experiences are made possible and certain others are excluded from the outset because they cannot be reconciled with the framework of this *Stimmung*. Through this basic *Stimmung*, all individual experiences are guided in a very particular direction. Which higher faculties can develop in the soul, and the manner in which they develop, depends on the foundation of *Stimmung* that prevails in a person.

This connection has also been extensively pursued and confirmed by psychological research. Because of their particular importance to the present context, the sentences in which F. Krüger summarises the outcome of his investigations in this field are to be quoted at greater length:

> The "actual genesis" … universally shows, first, that separate feelings, perceptions, relations, also memories, clear thoughts, decisive stances of the will – in brief, all parts of experience – split off from a diffuse emotional base line, albeit for a short period of time, and, second, that they always remain functionally dominated by this emotional base line; in any case, they consistently remain more or less intimate and embedded in emotions that, so to say, fill the "gaps" in the entire continued existence of experience and constitute the common "background" for everything that eventually emerges. Emotion is the maternal origin of all other types of experience and their most productive breeding ground. When something happens psychologically to a living being, we always observe, or infer with good reason, an emotional mood.[33]

It should be noted again that Krüger does not differentiate (like we do) between emotion and *Stimmung*, and that what he designates as emotion, or "emotional mood", corresponds exactly to what in our account differentiates *Stimmung* from (directed) emotion. What Krüger calls the "holism of experience" builds upon this pervasive colouring of all experience by the underlying *Stimmung*: "An emotion that really appears must colour everything that one concurrently experiences with it."[34]

2 The interpretation of the world in *Stimmung*

Stimmungen therefore determine how the world and life appear to people from the outset. Precisely this was highlighted by Heidegger in the strongest

philosophical terms: "*Stimmung* has always already disclosed being-in-the-world as a whole and first makes possible directing oneself toward something."[35] How I face a thing and how it appears to me is, from the outset, determined by the state of *Stimmung* I am in. Only in a fearful *Stimmung* do I encounter threatening things; and only in a bright state of mind do cheering experiences come my way as if of their own accord. That is why it is so difficult to console someone who is seriously dejected. In this state of *Stimmung*, he is just not receptive to the thoughts and emotions and activities with which one wants to pull him out of his situation. It is as if he has become "blind" to all the bright aspects of reality.

The extent to which a subdued state of *Stimmung* leaves someone open only to very specific, that is, sad and unhappy experiences, and closes him off to positive experiences, has been very fittingly illustrated by Wilhelm Raabe (to give just one example):

> It is an error or even a lie to claim that a beautiful scenery and a marvellously sublime view suffice for the well-being and recovery of an unhappy person beset by hardship and worry. It is simply not true. On the contrary, nothing is worse for someone full of heartache and laden with pain than a lofty, sunlit, clear view, shimmering in all the sweet colours of the earth, from high up on a mountain peak. It is dreadful, and actually terrible, but it is so: one puts up with a storm and rain when one is in a bad *Stimmung*, but one takes nature's beauty as mockery, as an insult, and starts to loathe all seven days of creation.[36]

This tells us that not only does their gloom close people off to the beauty of nature (just as gloomy people usually go about with their heads lowered, thereby already closing themselves off to an open view), but also that their gloom only abides when attuned to new gloomy impressions from the outside world. Other impressions that are essentially foreign to this *Stimmung* are encountered as foreign substances to such an extent that they may even, through contrast and opposition, escalate a still-contained sadness into pure desperation. The effects of loud cheerfulness and merry music on a gloomy mind are along the same lines.

Because of this selecting effect of *Stimmung*, it is hardly possible to gain a direct cheering influence on a sad or desperate person's state of *Stimmung*. At best, one succeeds indirectly by captivating his attention with another subject at the right moment. But if one succeeds at arousing his interest, which seemed to be lumbering during his woe, just once for something else, then the critical step has been taken; for with the awakening interest, a new open-minded *Stimmung* necessarily radiates out and extinguishes his woe.

If we try to determine this dependence of all understanding on the state of *Stimmung* more precisely, then we see that it is not the case that an initially perceived thing only receives a specific emotional colouring in a subsequent overlay; instead, *Stimmung* is the origin, and the perception of a single thing only takes place within the framework and under the conditioning of *Stimmung*.

Perception itself is thus already thoroughly attuned, and even the seemingly autonomous theoretical stance has not disengaged itself from *Stimmung*; on the contrary, the theoretical stance even presupposes a very specific *Stimmung*, namely that of "calm lingering". The same holds for all the faculties for understanding life and the world. In every *Stimmung*, the world is already "interpreted" in a very particular way; and all understanding is always already guided by this original interpretation of life and world in a *Stimmung*. There are thus, as is to be examined more closely, certain kinds of knowledge that human beings cannot gain on their own accord, try as they might; rather, such knowledge "dawns" on them only in a *Stimmung* suitable to it. Heidegger summarises his important discovery accordingly: "Indeed, we must *ontologically* in principle leave the primary discovery of the world to 'mere *Stimmung*'."[37]

3 *Stimmung* and *Laune*

But these claims so strongly contradict all traditional habits of thought that it is not surprising when such a positive evaluation of *Stimmung* provokes initial opposition; because what seems the most evasive and unsettled aspect of mental life known to us is now supposed to serve as the sustaining foundation of the entire life of the soul. Just as shadows of clouds and spots of sunlight roll across a landscape – now lighting up and singling out one thing, now letting another step back into darkness again – so too do good and bad *Stimmungen* alternate in people. Just like the shadows of clouds and spots of sun, *Stimmungen* also appear as something external that sweeps across the human soul without touching its essence, its stable, unchangeable core. That is why *Stimmung* and *Laune* (mood) may be used almost synonymously – a person can be in a good or bad mood – and this emphasizes even more the unpredictable changes in *Stimmung*, which carry the person along with them. For that reason, we describe as "moody" a person who lets himself be driven in his behaviour by the fluctuating variation of his moods. Bahnsen, who has investigated these phenomena with particular care, thus describes mood as follows:

> We usually call the will a mood because its manners of expression seem to defy logical consistency. As such, it will arouse either the aesthetic appeal of unconstrained freedom or the pathological frustration of unsubstantiated capriciousness, depending on the conditions of our practical stance towards it.[38]

Bahnsen therefore describes mood as a

> characteristic of the soul whose only abiding attribute consists in a never-the-same unreliability. Because what one complains most bitterly about with respect to mood is that it rejects today what it approved of yesterday, and today condones what it yesterday widely dismissed. To treat the same differently, to approach and treat identical matters differently at different

> times, to chide now what was previously laughed at, or, conversely, to enjoy at one moment what brings to tears in the next: these peculiarities define the moody being. What is missing is consistency of volition and, with it, uniformity in desire and aversion.[39]

In understanding *Stimmung* as foundational, philosophical anthropology thus seems to have opened the floodgates to such existential moodiness and inconstancy.

We find a similar warning in ordinary language where it speaks of "moonlight *Stimmung*" and other "*Stimmung*-laden" moments, and thereby aims at a certain pleasure one takes in one's own sentimental state of *Stimmung*, a pleasure that softens the harshness of reality into a vague mist of sweet feelings. Here one seeks out and enjoys a "*Stimmung*" for its own sake, but in this case *Stimmung* is no longer the background for the other faculties, a background that itself remains unnoticed. Instead, *Stimmung* is pursued here (in a peculiar inversion of the natural perspective) for its own sake. In this form, it remains infertile and must necessarily corrode the entire healthy life of the soul.

Yet another related aspect is indicated when one speaks of a "fabrication of *Stimmung*" in the sense of propaganda for something, or of an "advanced *Stimmung*". This alludes to a person's capacity for critical thought being overwhelmed by *Stimmung*, or a person's letting himself be carried away by *Stimmung*, a phenomenon related without clear-cut boundaries to the complete clouding of consciousness in intoxication (by a poison, but also by enthusiasm).

4 The persistent *Stimmungen* of life

An account of philosophical anthropology that takes *Stimmung* as its basis is thus subject, from the start, to the suspicion of solving the matter in a subjectivist way, and the traditional view then seems fully justified in its belief that *Stimmungen* involve nothing more than superficial disturbances or a clouding of consciousness that comes over people from somewhere – for example from the disturbances of bodily functions – and that it is therefore imperative to free oneself from the disturbing influence of *Stimmungen* – entirely or at least as much as possible. It is rightfully emphasised in this context that, time and again, life itself places human beings in situations that demand a particular answer, regardless of whether or not the situations accord with the inclinations of a person's original *Stimmung*, and with an urgency that does not allow any postponement to a more suitable *Stimmung*. It is therefore rightfully emphasised that there is, for example, a harshness in moral demands on human beings, which does not ask about their *Stimmung*-related readiness and lies altogether on a level that in no way can be reached through *Stimmung* alone.

Indeed, something crucial has been touched upon here, which will require special treatment later. In the unsteadiness of *Stimmung* lie truly serious moments of danger, which have to be recognised clearly and preclude from the

very start a "surrender" to "mere *Stimmung*". At the same time, an ambiguity already contained in the concept of *Laune* (mood) should not be overlooked in *Stimmung*: as is expressed in the double meaning of "*launig*" (humorous, in the sense of being in a good mood) and "*launisch*" (moody, in the sense of being exposed to the fluctuation of mood), a distinction that, by the way, only evolves late from an originally still undifferentiated use,[40] so too does *Stimmung* have a corresponding double meaning: both the foundation of *Stimmung* and the change of *Stimmung*; *Stimmung* applies to both the persistent and the changeable within the human soul.

In this situation, it seems first of all appropriate to avoid this ambiguity by wholly excising the one meaning of *Stimmung*, namely, that of fluctuating variation, and to assign to the concept only the meaning of the (relatively) persistent foundation. This would be supported by the observation that, even with all the changes of *Stimmungen*, particular foundational *Stimmungen* or life *Stimmungen* nevertheless tend to assert themselves (melancholy, for example, or cheerfulness, but also querulousness, etc.); after all the fluctuations of single transient *Stimmungen*, they tend to set in as a type of natural state of equilibrium. These foundational *Stimmungen*, be they determined by natural predisposition or by life's fortunes, are characteristic of the nature of a person, and constitute, in turn, the lasting foundation on which the other, merely transient *Stimmungen* are built, a foundation that continues to determine them in their specific colouration to a great extent. In this regard, Dilthey, for example, established a direct connection between the "universal" or "life *Stimmungen*" and the formation of a person's stable world view. But as important as the formation of a relatively consistent life *Stimmung* in people may be from a characterological standpoint for the differentiation of typical human possibilities in life, the transition from the more fleeting to the comparatively more persistent *Stimmungen* is all the less capable of taking away the acuity of the deeper philosophical problem. The distinction still remains only relative, and the doubts concerning a retreat to *Stimmungen* in general are just as valid with respect to the comparatively persistent forms.

5 *Verstimmung*

One gets more deeply into the subject if one tries to see that none of the possible objections are able to weaken the validity of the first of Heidegger's quoted propositions, namely that "Dasein is always already *gestimmt* (attuned)".[41] What changes in the fluctuation of *Stimmungen* is the particular content of the currently present *Stimmung*. A specific *Stimmung* can transition into another specific *Stimmung*, but this transition always only leads to a new *Stimmung* and never beyond the *Gestimmtheit* of a person itself. It thus remains fundamentally and universally true that a layer of *Stimmung* belongs, as the lowermost foundation, necessarily and indispensably to human existence, wherever and in whatever state it finds itself.

There are undoubtedly certain other phenomena in life that seem to be in a certain kind of opposition to the state of *Stimmung*, at least in its usual meaning. But more meticulous reflection always reveals that these forms are also related to *Stimmung* as the more original state and fall, even if in a modified manner, within the scope of *Stimmung*. There are thus, in addition to *Stimmungen*, certain other states that one calls *Verstimmungen* (discordances), but even in them human beings do not break through the framework of universal human attunement. It is often overlooked that discordance is, admittedly, something different from an unpleasant *Stimmung*, which goes away with time, and the switch from *Stimmung* into discordance therefore differs from a simple change of *Stimmung*. For while in the mere change of *Stimmung*, every single state of emotion rests independently in itself and does not refer beyond itself to another past or coming *Stimmung*, it is in the nature of discordance that it necessarily refers to the preceding *Stimmung* of which it is a discordant version. I cannot, for example, be discordant in my relationship to another person if I am newly entering into a relationship with him; rather, the relationship can only be discordant when we already live with each other in a specifically coloured relationship, and new or newly known events pull the rug out from under it. This differs from a mere change because new experiences prove that the basis of the earlier relationship was deceptive. I am discorded, for example, when I have shown considerable gratitude towards someone for his supposedly self-sacrificing behaviour, and I am afterwards forced to realise that it was only a mere by-product of cold calculation. I am discorded, for example, when I confide certain facts to a person on the basis of total trust, and he afterwards plays it off against me in ridicule. And this state of discordance is markedly different, for example, from the anger that would arise in the face of the same behaviour if the element of undercutting the preceding trust fell away. But despite all these differences from a simple *Stimmung*, discordance also does not refer to a state beyond being attuned as such; rather, it is precisely a particular and even emphasised manner of being attuned that not only refers as something derivative back to the preceding *Stimmung*, which is detuned in it; it also has itself the accentuated character of a *Stimmung*.

6 *Ungestimmtheit*

Related to discordance, yet different from it, is the state of a peculiar *Ungestimmtheit* (lack of *Stimmung*), which Heidegger has referred to as "the often persistent, smooth, and pallid lack of *Stimmung*" in which "Dasein becomes tired of itself".[42] This lack of *Stimmung* differs from *Stimmung* but also from discordance by how it lacks the cohesive, unifying force through which the whole world is interpreted uniformly in *Stimmung*. In a state of lacking *Stimmung*, life seems to flow asunder unformed. Lack of *Stimmung* differs from discordance by how discordance still remains a mode of *Stimmung* while in the lack of *Stimmung* even this form is broken apart. This also distinguishes lack of *Stimmung* from

the *Stimmung* of boredom, which is otherwise close to it. Baader once described boredom – to illustrate it with a random example – as follows:

> Dull silence, in which I just live out my life, like under a bedcap, you are beginning to disgust me. It is unbearable to watch the performance of a play that the author did not know how to make interesting. The farce of our life, when stimulation and interest are gone from it, bores us even more.[43]

While boredom and total lack of *Stimmung* share a "pallidness" in which the colourfulness of life disappears like in a fog, in boredom this pallidness is still a certain continuous tone that demands an answer from human beings, and enduring it engenders a new life force. In contrast, in a lack of *Stimmung*, there is absolutely no point of reference for a human answer. A person can turn this way or that way without ever encountering fertile ground. In this state, a person is truly no longer attuned. And yet, precisely in its "no longer", this state is not indifferent towards *Stimmung*; as a broken and unrestored *Stimmung*, it remains essentially linked to *Stimmung*.

7 The *Stimmung* character of the theoretical stance

We should also mention the quiet and equable state, on which, for example, the purely theoretical stance is based. In its case, the suspicion is strongest that it has to do with a solid base that eludes the influence of *Stimmungen*, a state in which human beings, free from *Stimmung*, know things "as they are", and the colouring influence of *Stimmungen* can then be estimated by measuring it against this state. Yet, even though this state lies equally far from the strong exertion in both elevated and subdued *Stimmungen*, and hence appears to rest in the middle between the two, this state of rest and equanimity is not a state of the soul beyond being attuned. It is, rather, itself a very particular way of being attuned, a state of "dead calm" attained through the "soft tuning down of individual overwrought forces".[44] As a state of equilibrium that is only achievable with a certain maturity and is always particularly sensitive to disturbances, this state itself represents an exceptional mode of attunement.

And finally, the fact should be considered that, to a certain degree, human beings can have a mastery over *Stimmungen*, just as is expected of them with respect to the natural demands of ethical life mentioned earlier. The ethical and general anthropological problems associated with this can only be developed sufficiently at a later point. But that this too does not fall outside of the pervasive connection of human beings to *Stimmung* can already be seen clearly now. All mastery over *Stimmung* does not happen as a direct acting upon them or an explicit shutting them off; instead, it is always only through the indirect route of a regulation that says yes or no to approaching *Stimmungen*, that makes preparations for the appearance of more favourable *Stimmungen*, and knows how to

neutralise causes that give rise to unfavourable *Stimmungen*. Nietzsche's concern about climatic conditions favourable to his work constitutes a clear example. In this sense Heidegger explicitly states: "We never master a *Stimmung* by being free of a *Stimmung*, but always through a counter *Stimmung*."[45]

Notes

1 [Translators' note: This translation of chapters 2 and 3 from *Das Wesen der Stimmungen* is based on the eighth edition (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1995). The German term *Stimmung*, plural *Stimmungen*, can be used to refer to the (internal) mood of a person and the (external) atmosphere of a place. We retain the German *Stimmung*, instead of mood, which is the term Stambaugh uses in her translation of Heidegger, Martin *Being and Time*. Trans. Joan Stambaugh. Rev. Dennis J. Schmidt. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010. Use of the German term *Stimmung* aims to underline the fact that, as far as this basic concept is concerned, Bollnow considers moods as equiprimordial to the "inner" and "outer" worlds and also invokes the meaning of *Stimmung* in music as the "tuning" of an instrument; see section 3 of this chapter.]

2 These two concepts can be used in the present context without distinction. On their necessary differentiation for other purposes and particularly for the characterological representation of the feeling of life, see Lersch, Philipp *Der Aufbau des Charakters*, after the fourth edition entitled *Aufbau der Person*. Munich: Barth, 1951: 246ff.

3 Lersch, 1951: 233ff.

4 Strasser, Stephan *Phenomenology of Feeling: An Essay on the Phenomena of the Heart*. With a foreword by Paul Ricoeur. Trans. with an introduction by Robert E. Wood. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1977: 194ff.

5 For the purpose of clear conceptualisation, distinguishing the two in this manner seems most appropriate, even if ordinary language and also, to a great extent, scholarly language, remain indeterminate in this case. In addition to the narrower sense of a (directed) emotion employed here, ordinary language also uses the word emotion in a broader sense that also encompasses (undirected) *Stimmungen*. Because of the indeterminacy connected to this broader sense, it should not figure wherever precise concepts are at stake in the following. The separation cannot, however, be strictly upheld in some compounds that are deeply entrenched in common parlance, such as feeling of life, feeling of well-being, sense of self, etc. For that reason, the following cites some textual evidence (without having been able to justify every single instance) that speaks of "emotion" in general while aiming only at the special meaning distinguished here as *Stimmung*. On the meaning of "emotion" in ordinary language, see Volkelt, Johannes Immanuel *Versuch über Fühlen und Wollen*. Munich: C. H. Beck, 1930: 3–4; and Schröder, Paul *Stimmungen und Verstimmungen*. Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth Verlag, 1930.

6 See Volkelt, 1930: 12–13.

7 See also the account from a medical perspective in Sauerbruch, Ferdinand, and Hans Wenke *Pain: Its Meaning and Significance*. Trans. Edward Fitzgerald. London: Allen & Unwin, 1963, 67–9.

8 Strasser, 1977: 183 [translation modified].

9 Schröder, 1930: 11. The validity of the comparison expressed here is not reduced by the fact that, in the cited context, Schröder does not yet conceive of the relationship between emotion and *Stimmung* in the exact sense advocated here, but rather tries to distinguish between the two in a medically common-sense manner according to their shorter or longer duration. In a later account – Schröder, Paul "Gefühle und Stimmungen." In *Die*

Wissenschaft am Scheidewege von Leben und Geist: Festschrift Ludwig Klages zum 60. Geburtstag. Ed. Hans Prinzhorn. Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth Verlag, 1932: 201–3 – Schröder eliminates this ambiguity and, in the same sense as advocated here, distinguishes "the dependent emotions that merely accompany and do not effect anything" – and always refer to something and cannot exist "in themselves" – from the "independent, endogenous *Stimmungen* that are not bound by perceptions or experiences" and "are indicators for states of readiness to particular emotions". He also refers to language use for this separation: "Common parlance also uses *Stimmungen* for *Gefühle* (emotions), but it does not use *Gefühle* for *Stimmungen*" (205).

10 Lersch, 1951: 247.
11 Strasser, 1977: 182.
12 Strasser, 1977: 185.
13 Novalis *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia: Das allgemeine Brouillon*. Trans. and ed. David W. Wood. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007: 186 [translation modified]; see also Plato *The Republic*, Book III.
14 This being in *Stimmung* for something is under no circumstances to be confused with the intentionality of emotion. While the intentionality of emotion has to do with a direction that is contained in the original essence of the emotion and is constitutive of the emotion itself, being in *Stimmung* is the harmonisation of a *Stimmung*, which is itself not yet directed, with a (belatedly accompanying) faculty, which is essentially different from the *Stimmung* and does not originally belong to it.
15 Heidegger, 2010: 133 [translation modified].
16 Strasser, 1977: 188 [translation modified].
17 Binswanger, Ludwig "Das Raumproblem in der Psychopathologie." In *Ausgewählte Vorträge und Aufsätze*. Vol. 2. Bern: Francke, 1955: 174ff.
18 Goethe, Johann Wolfgang *The Natural Daughter*. In *Verse Plays and Epic*. Ed. Cyrus Hamlin and Frank Ryder. Trans. Michael Hamburger, Hunter Hannum and David Luke. New York: Suhrkamp, 1987: 191.
19 Binswanger, 1955: 200–1.
20 Ibid.
21 Rudolf Bilz has emphatically drawn attention to the inner unity of bodily and psychic phenomena from a medical perspective: "Die Stimmung als leib-seelisches Phänomen: Dargestellt am Beispiel der Magenneurose." *Deutsche Medizinische Wochenschrift* 68 (1942): 640–3. There Bilz defines *Stimmung* as nothing less than a "harmony between the physical and the emotional" (643). Also see Bilz, Rudolf *Pars pro toto: Ein Beitrag zur Pathologie menschlicher Affekte und Organfunktionen*. Schriftenreihe zur deutschen medizinischen Wochenschrift 5. Leipzig: Thieme, 1940.
22 Carus, Carl Gustav *Psyche: Zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der Seele*. Pforzheim: Flammer und Hoffmann, 1847: 270–1.
23 Carus, 1847: 263.
24 Baader, Franz von *Seele und Welt: Franz Baaders Jugendtagebücher 1786–1792*. Ed. Margarethe Jarislowsky and David Baumbart. Berlin: Volksverband der Bücherfreunde Wegweiser-Verlag, 1928: 37, 23.
25 [In this footnote, Bollnow refers the reader to the introduction of *Das Wesen der Stimmungen*, which treats the concept and method of philosophical anthropology. The Introduction precedes the extract that is translated here.]
26 For an explanation, see Bollnow, Otto Friedrich *Einfache Sittlichkeit: Kleine philosophische Aufsätze*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1947, 107–8.
27 On this, see the taxonomy of *Stimmungen* provided by Lersch, 1951: 251ff. In line with the book's characterological aims, Lersch limits himself, however, to the habitual, foundational *Stimmungen* of life and so arrives at a comparatively small group. He distinguishes four main types: cheerfulness, merriness (amusement), sadness (melancholy) and sullenness (querulousness). Lersch then distinguishes this "atmospheric

foundation of *Stimmung*" from "forms in which the feeling of life is aroused", which, as "causes of a sudden disruption", "interrupt the normal and ordered course of the rest of psychic life in a critical and shocking manner" (first edition, 1938: 55). For him, anxiety and ecstasy belong here to these two sides, respectively. They are "the dramatic outer poles of the feeling towards life" (1951: 260). On the side of subdued *Stimmungen*, see Binswanger, Ludwig *Über Ideenflucht*. Zürich: Orell Füssli, 1933. This work extends well beyond the problem named in its title into the domain of the non-pathological experiences of happiness, and in that regard above all treats what Binswanger calls "festive attunement".

28 On the forms of feeling happy, also see the chapter "Phenomenological Typology of the Experience of Human Happiness." In Strasser, 1977, 349ff.
29 On seriousness in greater detail, see Bollnow, 1947, 75ff.
30 Lersch, 1951, 260ff.
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32 Heidegger, 2010: 131 [translation modified].
33 Krüger, Felix *Das Wesen der Gefühle: Entwurf einer systematischen Theorie*. Leipzig: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft, 1928: 20–1.
34 Krüger, 1928: 21.
35 Heidegger, 2010: 133.
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18

ON CALMNESS

Dealing rationally with what is beyond our control

Friedrich Kambartel

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Kant captured the fundamental questions that we ask ourselves when we try to gain a rational self-understanding with three formulae: What can I know? What should I do? What may I hope for? In Kant, the third formula particularly encompasses questions that underlie religious orientations. The continuing erosion of traditional religions and religious self-understandings has brought us into a situation in which thinking rationally about questions of the form: What may we hope for? – is becoming impossible and will soon be forgotten, even when the questions themselves are independent of the traditional religious answers given to them. The matter of "rational faith," to again speak with Kant, has been largely abandoned. But when unavoidable problems with the orientation (or comprehension) of our actions are at stake, forgetting is only *theoretically* possible. *Practically*, the problems of our lives are always answered; in the worst case, they are answered in an incomprehensible and irrational manner.

The reflections that I would like to engage in here belong in this context. To anticipate my argument: philosophical *Gelassenheit* – the calmness of the soul – consists in not striving to control things that are beyond our control and in living with an unwavering trust that the course of events beyond our control does not affect the meaning of a rational life.

In a rational life, our actions are only geared to changing or preserving what can be changed or preserved. This statement seems unassailable but also insignificant; for how would it be possible to violate such a basic principle? Obviously not by *doing* what we *cannot do*. – But the forms and cases of dealing through action with what is beyond our control that are significant here are not, as a rule, of the simple kind of directly attempting to do the obviously impossible. Instead, we can falsely relate our actions to things in our lives that are beyond our control in a different, *indirect* manner, namely by allowing ourselves

to be guided by orientations or forms of orientation that do not seriously consider certain things beyond our control or that contradict them in unquestioned illusions.

We know that our lives are *finite*; and yet we can still lead our everyday lives in a way that always postpones coping with the fundamental problems of life into the unforeseeable future; we thus shy away from taking the whole, the completeness of our lives, into account in a relevant manner. As it happens, the skulls that used to be in many a scholar's study have also been banished from them. – Changing our *pasts* is not within our control. And yet we can hang on to lost alternatives of past situations in our thoughts or not adapt our present to an event in our past. Forms of anger or also of an inability to mourn may then take the place of real actions. The past cannot be undone. We can therefore only cope with it in a rational way by learning what is necessary for our present actions from it and, thus, by continuing it differently in the present. As represented in the Christian myth of exculpation, "new life" and not action within a framework of guilt and atonement is the appropriate practical orientation toward the past. We cannot undo the "sins" of our past in a better present and future; for that reason, they are, in the end, forgiven and to be forgiven, according to the principle of "ultra posse nemo obligatur." – We cannot ensure our *future* through our present actions. We cannot prevent failing, time and again, to achieve the ends of the actions we most care about. Nevertheless, we are familiar, on the one hand, with forms of individual and social rule-fetishism that are dictated by our fear of the pragmatic openness of any rational future; as, on the other, with illusionary needs for security that produce an incapacity to act, a hesitation to become involved in any significant action at all. – Lastly and relatedly, the scope of our actions is immutably *local*. From a rational perspective, no-one can make themselves the subject of all of history; and yet constructions in the philosophy of history and global speculations of strategy are effective at destroying life in orgies of unrecognized powerlessness.

Thus, *reality*, which each of our actions takes as its starting point, is the way it is and as such always beyond our control. Even talk about changing the present presupposes that this present is a specific one and is to be taken into account as this one. On the other hand, it is humanly possible that orientations come between what is unalterably the case and our actions, thereby effectively protecting us from rationally arranging our lives on the basis of reality.

The examples I have given concern practically acknowledging relevant conditions of human action, conditions that are themselves thoroughly and not merely contingently inaccessible to action. But problems beyond our control also present themselves in situations that are *accessible* to us through action. We may be able to attribute the phenomena cited so far primarily to extreme living situations or pathologies of everyday and social life (which, by the way, I would not like to do). But now we come to the heart of my reflections: to problems of self-understanding that always accompany our actions.

At the basis of our practice often especially lies a false understanding of *how*, in acting, we control the ends of our actions. We then understand our active

interventions, which aim to bring about intended situations or activities, in the sense of a control that is actually not within our control. If we want to go beyond impenetrable wordplays, we must state more precisely what it should mean *to control something*.

I would like to apply the word *control* to the results and preconditions of actions, as is also commonly done. We are, first of all, familiar with the idea that we can regularly, or at least with a predictable rate of success, bring about certain situations through certain actions. In this respect, we control them as planned results of our actions. The basis of such pragmatic control does not have to be causally or statistically founded knowledge about the consequences of our actions. The normally assured success of our actions can also be based on human orientations of action, for instance, on arranged rules or on carrying out the instructions for constructing something. In this sense, we especially control, in multiple ways, the acquisition of a competency for action since we can be certain of the success of our actions of learning on the basis of our own or others' experiences.

Such controllable results of actions can, in turn, serve as an assured starting point for future actions, which is particularly important for planning. But since we also know what is the case without our influence, we naturally have access to it or control over it as a certain basis of our actions. In short: we control the preconditions of our actions to the extent that they already really exist or can be brought about through our actions in the sense explained.

That we have control in this manner over the conditions and consequences of our actions makes *instrumentally rational strategies of action* possible. In these means–end strategies, we align our actions with bringing about or preserving certain situations that we control or at least believe we control, in short: with *ends*. Accordingly, controllable situations as well as actions, which guarantee control over certain ends, can be seen as possible or actually employed *means* to these ends. The fact that the ends of our actions can be understood, in turn, as the starting point for the realization of further ends, and thus as means, yields complex nexuses of pragmatic control that are organized according to a hierarchy of ends. *Instrumentally rational action actualizes these nexuses*.

It then seems obvious to call only such situations *uncontrollable* that we do *not* control in an instrumentally rational sense. The problem of such a use of language lies in the fact that we thereby let other meaningful possibilities of intervening in situations in our lives through action disappear into the great ocean of uncontrollability, with the question of the *how* of our pragmatic control no longer up for discussion. Let us consider an essential example here.

In *argumentation* that does not rest on an arranged schematic application of rules, the assent of an interlocutor cannot be understood as the endpoint of instrumentally rational control, at least not when what matters in a conversation is that the interlocutor is really convinced and not just persuaded or manipulated by psycho-technical means. Furthermore, a *connection* apparently exists between the arguments that we present in order to justify something and the insights that

we ascribe to them. As we say, we "bring about" insights through arguments. Do we thus "control" insights through our argumentative actions and then also control the actions performed in accordance with these insights? And in what sense do we do this?

The metaphor of the *course* or *path* is traditionally used to describe argumentation: arguments are steps on the paths that lead us from insight to insight, paths that we are following or planning (to follow). It must be *possible* to walk these paths; paths must not, for example, have any gaps. For this reason, paths are always "methodical," meaning they must be walkable *step by step*. This especially applies to courses of argumentation. – Even the demand that the courses of argumentation be free of circular reasoning can easily be taken from the figural image: if we want to go from A to B, by foot or with our understanding, paths that begin with B are excluded.

Rational argumentation points out passable paths of understanding without – for how would it? – being able to guarantee that an addressee will actually walk along these paths; just as a signpost does not force anyone to follow it. On paths, one step also makes the next step possible, *prepares it* – without us thereby *having* to take it. The "force" of an argument is only as irresistible as an action necessarily depends on its being possible.

What the case of conviction through argument demonstrates has *general* significance for the essential connections between actions in a rational life. *Rational* action, especially when it is meant for orientation, is based on a shared practice of those who do not want to control one another in an instrumentally rational way. Reason is thus impossible in the hands of one person alone; reason requires cooperation from others that is not procured in an instrumentally rational way. We can *prepare* this cooperation and, in particular, each shared insight, by acting, especially through reflection, but this does not guarantee the onset of such insights by way of instrumentally rational action directed toward them. And the preparation relates to the resulting practical insight not as pushing relates to falling, but rather, as already stated, as one step to the next. What is pushed falls by itself, but we must always first take the next step.

And now we could of course agree to apply the word "control" also to the described mode of *preparing action*. The distinction just made is, however, essential; although we can miss it in practice when, for example, we strive to surpass merely preparing an insight or, more generally, something practically shared by trying to cause it in an instrumentally rational way. We then live beyond our human condition. For that reason, I would not wish to subsume preparatory actions in the sense discussed under actions that are oriented toward control, so that it becomes evident in language that preparatory actions which try to surpass themselves are cases of such futile efforts to control the uncontrollable.

If we act in a way that prepares practice, then we do not act on the basis of knowledge or a proven prognosis that our preparations will be pragmatically fulfilled. The appearance of that which our knowledge makes neither impossible or improbable nor certain or probable can merely become the meaningful object of

hope. But on what can we then base the *confidence* that we certainly need for giving meaning to our actions even if it does not contribute to realizing the ends of our actions? – This question makes it seem as if the uncontrollability of rational practice were a belated, sad insight; so that it now only remains to be tested whether we should "nevertheless" risk it with reason or rather go back to the safe ground of instrumentally rational action.

But actually the renunciation of instrumentally rational control and the peculiar security that pertains to it does not belong to the contingent qualities of rational sharing; rather it belongs to its definiens. Rational action in this sense is, eo ipso, unavoidably based on hope. With Kant, I would like to call preparatory action that is based on hope and that cannot end in disappointment (through the associated course of action) a practical *faith*. Insofar as it belongs to the practical foundations of a rational life, it may be called a *rational faith*. According to Kant's analysis, which is still relevant today, it is only rational faith that can provide a life-supporting basis for morality. For that reason, Kant also believed that he could draw conclusions from the posited fact of imperturbable moral practice for the legitimacy and mythically composed content of a rational faith. Even if reconstructions of the Kantian philosophy of religion are no longer convincing in their details, the demystifiable problem still remains whether and how a rational faith can "support" a rational life without wavering.

A life that wants to see a rational future guaranteed beyond its serious preparation and, in this sense, wants to control the uncontrollable, can be disappointed. In contrast, reason becomes *calm* by orienting itself toward what is already achieved when we do it, and cannot be disappointed, namely *currently possible rational action*. As a rule, this will include actions that rationally prepare future action. In this sense, we *exert* ourselves for the sake of our future in the present. This exertion can always fail "in the future"; but as a present action it is successful if it is done *earnestly* at all.

The only way that we can practically relate to the *future* success of our present exertion is to take our *present* action seriously. Recognizing this reality in an imperturbable life consists in understanding the *form of* present *action* and not the *realization of its ends* as what matters in life. It is no coincidence that the successful life is thus traditionally, and also in Wittgenstein's ethical reflections, identified as life "in the present." Like the virtuous person in Aristotle or the person who "has faith in God," "nothing can happen" to whomever lives in the present in this sense; he experiences himself as, in the words of Wittgenstein's lecture on ethics, "absolutely safe."[1]

It could now seem that, while *calmness* thus has much to do with certain argumentative and personal situations of action, it hardly has anything to do with everyday actions that are largely ordered in an instrumentally rational way. It could seem that all our actions are only affected to the extent that they are limited or distorted by an illusionary association with the uncontrollable. But this view of the human situation ignores the fact that, with regard to *all* of our

actions, including, for example, everyday technical activities, we must take into account an uncontrollability that belongs to all action.

Even when we can be certain about the outcomes of our actions, this does not apply in the same sense to the corresponding actions themselves. We bring a rock into motion with a push, but no push exists that we could give *ourselves* so that we then push the rock, even though the figural expression suggests itself: he pushed himself and brought the rock into motion. – But who wants to cause even one's own actions? I am not concerned here with the kind of situations of action illustrated by the right arm lifting the left, that is, with "externally" causal actions; although an external causation of actions has achieved scholarly relevance in the context of so-called conditioning. Rather, I am concerned with understandings that have also been worked into our language in a practically effective way; according to these understandings, we produce, to a certain extent, our intersubjectively perceptible actions through actions that are only accessible to ourselves in an "inner" world. In our inner lives, we give ourselves, so it seems, pragmatically decisive pushes: we intend, decide, make an effort and so on. All in all, according to this illusion, we sit at an inner control desk of the will, understanding our body, in particular, as a puppet of the actions of our will. Whoever attends in this internal way to his (externally perceptible) actions would have to be, so it seems, an individual *that is capable of action*. His actions, we might want to say, no longer befall him.

If we assign a private, internal act of the will to every action, then this idea is per se inaccessible to public control. This idea accompanies, without function, the world that we constitute together and live in, like a fifth wheel on a car. Wittgenstein already pointed this out, and he furthermore pointed out the absurdity that the unavoidable question of the will *behind* the acts of the will leads us into an infinite regress. If we want to apply talk about the "will" to actions at all, then it should be in a way similar to how talk about the truth is applied to asserting. The words "will," "wilful" and so on serve to emphasize the *action* character of an event, just as the word "truth," if we follow Frege and Strawson, emphasizes the *assertion* character. In Wittgenstein's words: "'Wanting' is not the name of an action, and so not of a voluntary one either. And my use of a wrong expression came from the fact that one is inclined to think of wanting as an immediate non-causal bringing about."[2] And later: "Willing, if it is not to be a sort of wishing, must be the action itself."[3]

Often, however, the word "will" refers, as a synonym of "decision" or "resolution" for instance, to a connection between our action and its *preparation*, especially to the considerations and consultations that end in actions of assent.[4] Here wilful actions are thus opposed to involuntary, stereotypically ingrained, confused, or unreflective actions. (And, apart from that, we have learned actions of assent as part of our shared *linguistic* practice, even if we then carry them out in an "internal" conversation with ourselves.)

If we can carry out the practical results of our thinking, then it is not because we have executed particular acts of the will beforehand. Someone who now

knows that by smoking he is headed for lung cancer does not merely have to make a right *decision*. On the contrary, the futile efforts of such illusionary acts of the will, which strive to produce a situation beyond our control, can permeate our life with a strain quite opposed to the calm life. The lack of calmness can then be accompanied by an incapacity to act: instead of *acting*, we want to *bring about our actions* and naturally cannot do so. In contrast, *calmness* entails a life in which we perform the actions, especially the actions that we have prepared, without additionally needing a particular internal transitional action.

I call insights about actions that are right for us *practical* insofar as we follow them by acting. According to what has been said, we cannot assure that our insights become practical through additional action. When it seems to us as if we need another pragmatic connecting link between our insights and our actions, then we merely know that we have not yet progressed to practical insights.

How, in acting according to practical insights, does preparatory action relate to action itself? – They follow one another, and here the word "follow" has the simple pragmatic sense of the word "then," such as in the instructions for constructing something: the actions "methodically" follow one another, like steps on a path. One step makes the next step possible or meaningful, and together they form the (particular!) path: here the whole is more than the sum of its parts.

We are the described connection between our actions if we understand ourselves correctly and thus calmly. We are not behind our appearance and therefore do not need to produce it. We lose this identity when we step out of our real practice into a world of internal actions and experiences. "There is no such thing as the subject that thinks or entertains ideas," as Wittgenstein formulates it.[5]

If we capture the last part of our reflections with the formula: We do not control ourselves – then we can say in summary: in *calm* practice, we are relieved of the endless, futile strain of controlling the inalterable conditions of our lives (our actions), of controlling others and of controlling ourselves.

Notes

1 Ludwig Wittgenstein, "A Lecture on Ethics," in *Philosophical Review* 74 (1965): 3–12.
2 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 1.613.
3 Ibid., 1.615.
4 This is the reconstructive proposal of Paul Lorenzen in *Normative Logic and Ethics* (Mannheim: Bibliographisches Institut, 1984), part 7.
5 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness, with an introduction by Bertrand Russell (London: Routledge, 1974), 5.631.