

NATURE'S MOODS

J. M. Howarth

INTRODUCTION

HOW CAN the sky be angry, the season melancholy, the brook joyful? A great deal has been written about the application of emotion terms to artworks, most especially to music, less has been written, at least philosophically, and at least since Hegel, about the application of such terms to nature. Hepburn, in his discussion of natural beauty, explores nature mysticism or our 'oneness' with nature.¹ One element in this, he observes, is that we do 'humanize' nature, and indeed 'naturize' humans by predicating emotion terms to nature and nature terms to humans. Dewey, in a similar vein, sees expressiveness in nature as an inevitable consequence of our interaction with it: 'Through habits formed in intercourse with the world, we also in-habit the world. It becomes a home and the home is part of our every experience. How, then, can objects of experience avoid becoming expressive? Yet apathy and torpor conceal this expressiveness by building a shell about objects'.² He goes on to claim that art 'throws off the covers that hide the expressiveness of experienced things'.

More recently, environmental philosophers have explored the notion of a significant environment, a field of meanings to which humans relate intentionally, and upon which they depend not just contingently for sustenance but conceptually for their very being.³ One aspect of this significance might be thought to show itself in the application of emotion terms to the natural environment.

It is in point, therefore, both for an exploration of an aesthetics of nature, and for environmental philosophy more generally, to ask what we mean when we speak of angry skies, melancholy seasons or joyful brooks? Are we, in making such ascriptions, finding something in nature, in ourselves or, as Hepburn and Dewey have it, in the relation or interaction between the two? And if so, what is the character of that relation?

I

I shall focus my enquiry on what I take to be the hardest cases to explain: inanimate nature. the weather, the wind, the sky, sea and rocks, with occasional reference to vegetation. The problem is, at first sight, that, given what 'angry' means, the sky cannot be literally angry, because anger is an emotion

and only creatures with minds are capable of having emotions. Nor can the sea and sky, or for that matter a cloud, be lonely, the wind grieve, be bewildered or forlorn, nor the river be lazy. So, if what these sentences are apparently saying is false or senseless, we need to look for something else they might be saying.

One suggestion must be got out of the way immediately. This is that the connection between human emotions and emotions we ascribe to nature is a causal one: an angry sky is one which causes anger in those who perceive it. Whether this is being offered as a definition, or as a causal hypothesis is unclear, and it is unclear how one would formulate or test a genuine causal hypothesis. But it is scarcely worth going into those sorts of detail to articulate a thesis which so widely misses the mark. An angry sky might be a cause of anger, if, for example, it ruins my photograph or threatens my afternoon's golf, but equally, it might not: it might just make my day, elate and delight me, or it might leave me emotionally unmoved. Conversely, a bright, sunny sky might make me angry because I have to stay in and work when I want to enjoy a walk. We would not on that count be inclined to call such a sky angry, or to suppose we had a counter-example to the claim that angry skies are dark and turbulent. Without going into detail, it is clear that these sorts of causal roles are not what we mean by 'angry sky'.

A more promising proposal is that, when we apply emotion terms to nature, we are to be construed as saying that nature is expressive of those emotions: the angry sky expresses anger, the babbling brook expresses joy. An initial problem with this proposal is that we do not use the language of expression and expressiveness of nature or natural features. Such language is firmly in place with respect to human behaviour and to artworks. It is not so for nature: it is not normal to say that the sky expresses anger, or that it is expressive. It is normal to speak simply of an angry sky.

None the less, perhaps light can be shed, if only by contrast, on the issue by looking at explanations of emotion terms which are construed as expressive uses. We ascribe emotion terms to human and some other animal facial expressions and gestures. When we say of a human face or gesture that it is angry, we mean that such a face or gesture expresses anger, typically the anger of the person whose face or gesture it is. The ascription of anger to the sky cannot be understood this way. The sky does not relate to a mind as a face or a gesture does.

We also sometimes apply emotion terms to things without minds in a way which can plausibly be construed as expressive. In so doing, we are treating those things as if they had minds, or fancying them to have minds. When a child claims that its teddy bear is sad, the emotion ascription is part of the ascription of a mind. Teddy is sad because his ear is falling off, and he wants someone to make it better again, and he wants an anaesthetic for the operation. Teddy has thoughts, pains, desires and, being a polite bear, no doubt post-

operative gratitude. Some emotion ascriptions to nature may be of this sort. When we say that the man in the moon is angry, we might plausibly be construed as projecting human feelings onto or into nature. We see the moon as having a more or less human face, which is looking angry. We imagine a man, with a mind behind the face, who is feeling angry; we perhaps wonder what he is angry about and what he is likely to do to vent his rage. Of course this 'projection' is fanciful; my point is that it is a different fancy from the fancy, if fancy it be, involved in ascribing anger to the sky. In most cases of emotion ascriptions to nature, we are not, or not obviously, imagining nature to have a mind: it is not in point to ask what the sky is angry about or how it might act out its anger. Someone who asks such questions is, wilfully or otherwise, misunderstanding the ascription.

Some cultures, but I think not our present one, have understood emotion ascriptions to nature as involving ascriptions of mind to nature, usually the minds of gods or spirits. That would be more like the man in the moon or the teddy bear case.

So, we cannot understand most emotion ascriptions to nature as we understand emotion ascriptions to faces or gestures. Can we interpret emotion ascriptions to nature as we interpret emotion ascriptions to artworks? That will depend on how the ascriptions to artworks are to be understood. We must surely dismiss some traditional theories of expressiveness in works of art as appropriate for nature. Tolstoy, Croce and Colingwood all put too much emphasis on the role of the artist or on the ideal character of the work for any acceptable application of their theories to nature to be possible. Even supposing nature had a creator, I find it implausible to suppose either that the creation was an expressive, aesthetic act, or that the application of *emotion* terms to nature commits one to the existence of such a creator.

More recent discussions of the expressiveness of artworks focus less on the artist and more on the artworks or the *responses* to artworks,⁴ and these accounts might be more helpful. Broadly, these accounts acknowledge that emotion terms do not apply literally to artworks, but do so in a metaphorical way, or in a secondary sense, which those who respond with sensitivity to the work will find an entirely natural extension of application of the emotion terms in question. The crucial difference between these two suggestions seems to be that proponents of metaphor will be obliged to find some similarities on which the metaphor can sensibly be based, while proponents of secondary sense will look rather to natural tendencies in us to transfer a vocabulary from one area of application to a different one.

As I understand these accounts, it appears to be a corollary of them that the literal or primary application can be fully understood but the metaphorical or secondary one not: that failure to grasp the application of emotion terms to artworks in no way casts doubt on the competence to apply emotion terms to oneself or to others. To comprehend the application to people but not to

artworks would be strange, unusual, perhaps insensitive, but not *logically* problematic.

I am not here concerned to explore or challenge those accounts of expressiveness for art. I do want to challenge such accounts as adequate for emotion ascriptions to nature. I want to claim that a failure to understand certain emotion ascriptions to nature implies a depleted concept of the emotion in question.

II

What, then, are emotions? The standard account of emotions is that emotions involve three elements: an inner feeling, an object, and some characteristic behaviour.⁵ So, for example, when one is angry, one feels angry, there is something one is angry about, and one's behaviour is motivated by anger. These three elements of emotion are not to be understood as separately identifiable events which might be causally related; the connection between the three is a conceptual one. The object does not cause but 'specifies' the emotion. Part of what this means is that it is the object, and not the character of the inner feel, which determines whether that feeling is one of anger or not.

So, for example, a small child rushes in shaking and out of breath. In general terms, its inner state of turmoil is evident. 'What is the matter?' we say. The story the child tells will enable us to identify which emotion the child is feeling. If it says, 'there was this dog and it was going to bite me and I had to run all the way home to get away from it', we conclude that the child is afraid, and might use the episode to teach the child what 'fear' means. Alternatively, the child might say, 'I was kept in after school and it wasn't my fault and I wanted to hit the teacher and I still want to get Johnny who landed me in it'. The child is clearly angry. Notice, here, that it is the object, together with the characteristic behaviour or intended behaviour, which serves to identify or 'specify' the emotion.

To generalize from the particular case, emotions have proper objects which specify them. The proper object of fear is perceived or believed danger; the proper object of anger is perceived injustice. The characteristic behaviour of fear is avoidance of the perceived danger; the characteristic behaviour of anger is attack or revenge.

Emotion concepts, so construed, serve an important role in explaining human activity. Behaviour is explained when it is shown to be motivated by some appropriate emotion and perception or belief. These explanations serve to render our behaviour rational. This emerges most clearly in cases where the emotion involves some misperception of its object. Here, what stands in need of explanation is usually some apparently unintelligible behaviour; for example, 'Why is Geoffrey talking to that tree?' There are various possible explanations. He is worried that the tree is not flourishing as it should and

believes that talking to it will help recovery. Or, he has just walked backwards into the tree, thinking that it was a person not a tree, felt remorse and is apologizing; as soon as he realizes his mistake, he will stop. These explanations make the behaviour not just intelligible but, given the beliefs, rational. Emotion concepts typically link proper objects to characteristic behaviour in such a way that the behaviour is a rational response to the object.

If this analysis of emotions is correct, it becomes even more obscure how we can or why we should apply emotion terms to nature. Nature has no inner feels. It is incapable of intentionality; its states do not have objects, they are not about anything. It does not have beliefs. It is not normally thought to engage in purposive behaviour. Overall, it is not susceptible to explanations geared to making its activity rational.

However, the standard account of emotion does not fit all cases of human emotion. The account applies reasonably well to those emotions which operate as motives. But the class of emotions is rather wider than that. Not all emotions motivate; some interfere with motivation, disrupt an organized life. Not all behaviour issuing from emotion is 'rational'; some is expressive, some decidedly irrational. Fear of the bull might motivate one to run to safety; but it might render one incapable of all purposive action, one might just freeze or become a gibbering wreck. Two recent accounts of emotions have focused on those emotions, or that aspect of emotions, which does not relate to rational activity. William James⁶ notes how emotional turmoil can disrupt rather than motivate sensible behaviour, and asks why we have these emotions. Sartre⁷ similarly begins with the problem of the apparent purposelessness of certain emotions in human life. But each of these thinkers then goes on, in different ways, to offer an account of emotions which makes them intelligible as inaugurators of purposive behaviour. For James, emotional behaviour has, or had, a point long ago in our evolutionary past. Emotional behaviour is an evolutionary 'left-over'. Frowning no longer protects the eyes against the expected blow, but we still do it because it once, when blows were more forthcoming and brows more outstanding, did. For Sartre, emotional behaviour serves no purpose in the real world of causes and effects; but is purposive, and effective, in the 'magical', social world, where shouting and banging doors can achieve one's aim, not directly, but by getting other people to do what one wants to be done.

It is taken for granted that the adequacy of an account depends on its fitting emotions into purposive explanation of human life. The problem is taken to be: why do these strange things arise, what is the point of them? This strikes me, whatever their attractions might be, as a weakness of such accounts. Having noted that there are such states which do not appear to be part of rational purposive life, it might be in point to consider the possibility that the appearance does not belie the reality; that an account of these states might be geared to some other end than discovering their purpose. It might, for

example, be geared to a rather broader understanding of ourselves and others. Such an account might also pave the way for an account of our application of emotion terms to nature.

III

A subclass of emotions is moods. Many of the emotion ascriptions we make to nature, I suggest, are most easily thought of as mood ascriptions. The standard account of emotions applies rather badly to moods. Moods may involve an inner feel, but they do not typically have an object, nor typically serve to motivate behaviour. What, then, are moods? Examples will not easily indicate the appropriate group since many words, melancholy, nostalgic, optimistic, cheerful, sad, can be used to indicate either a mood or an emotional state which is not a mood. The generic term may not be precise. A rough initial characterization of the affective states I mean is that they are states which tend to 'colour' everything we do, think and perceive. They last for a relatively substantial period of time: the limits are not precise, but five minutes of sadness is not long enough to be in a sad mood, a lifetime of sadness is too long—one is not in a sad mood, but, rather, a sad person. It is a characteristic of moods that we do not understand why we have them. They descend upon us without reason, stay without permission and leave without cause.

Focus first on the way moods 'colour' our entire surroundings. It is characteristic of moods that, when in a mood, one seeks out, attends to or focuses on, features of one's environment which form an 'appropriate' backdrop, setting or atmosphere for the mood. Sometimes the backdrop is nature, sometimes not. Since my concern is with mood ascriptions to nature, the cases where the setting is nature are the ones I am considering.

An appropriate backdrop for a mood of desolation would be a desolate landscape, and similarly for 'gloomy', 'sombre', 'dismal', 'serene', 'tranquil', 'excited', 'tense'. All these terms apply to people, identifying, broadly speaking, moods, and to nature: to skies, hills, countryside, to lakes, rivers, forest glades. We might not have used the same words for the mood and the atmosphere. My claim is that, given the correlation between moods and atmospheres, the way that moods characteristically 'spread' to colour one's environment, it is natural to use the same word for both. If you fail to appreciate the way moods spread, their all-pervasiveness, and have appropriate backdrops, you have not grasped what moods are.

In what does this 'appropriateness' consist? It is not a matter of usefulness in the way that, for example, a library might be an appropriate place to study, having books and desks, being quiet, facilitating one's needs. One does not use the grey sky to serve one's sadness. Nor is the appropriateness of backdrop to be understood as due to an inductive association. The blasted heath is an appropriate backdrop for the brooding machinations of the witches in Mac-

beth; but not, it must be clear, because that is where witches happen to hang out. One might say that the appropriate backdrop 'feeds' one's mood, helps to prolong it, whereas a different backdrop, bright sunlight, blues skies, balmy breezes, might snap one out of it. But then the question arises again: why do some backdrops nourish while others assault one's mood? There may be no answer to this question, any more than there is an answer to the question why perceived danger makes us afraid. Or maybe rather to ask the question indicates that one has not grasped the internal structure of the concept of mood.

What is the internal structure of mood concepts? Moods are often cited as counter-examples to the thesis that all conscious states are intentional or have objects. One can be sad or cheerful about nothing in particular, or about everything in general. Either way, the object will not serve to specify the mood. The question arises. how are moods specified? How do we learn to communicate them? They cannot be specified or communicated as emotions are, since they lack the specifying features. With emotions, proper objects specify them; is there anything comparable for moods? I want to claim that it is the appropriate backdrop which specifies the mood, different backdrops are appropriate for different moods, and that is in part what makes them different moods

Evidence for this claim might be the role of the backdrop in the communication of moods. We saw, with object-directed emotions, the importance of the object in communicating what the emotion is. How are moods typically communicated? If you ask someone to describe their mood, the most informative answer can be if they describe how the world looks or seems to them. They might talk about their life and thoughts, or about the social world, but they might most successfully communicate their mood by describing how the natural world appears to them. Certain features of the environment will be picked out as salient, as the most significant ones, as imposing on the attention: grey sky, decay, mortality, boring repetitiveness, hopelessness of human endeavour, misery. The bright light, the reflection playing on water, are seen as hostile, alien. The dark cloud, not the silver lining, is what matters. Immediately we know the person is in a dark, depressed mood. Moods may lack a specific object, but they somehow spread out over any object which might impinge upon consciousness. In different moods, we say, the whole world looks different.

If this is correct, that the atmosphere, the appropriate backdrop, serves to specify the mood, then a failure to discern different atmospheres will reflect upon one's ability to discern different moods. If you cannot recognize an appropriate backdrop, then you have not grasped the concept of the mood specified by that backdrop. That being so, you cannot properly ascribe the mood to others or to yourself. Similarly, a failure to recognize dangerous situations would reflect on one's ability to apply the concept of fear.

IV

We also say that the appropriate backdrop 'echoes', 'reflects' or 'chimes with' one's mood, while the inappropriate one 'clashes', 'jars', 'is hostile', 'fails to accord'. Lear finds in the raging elements a sympathy with his own rage. Where are these echoes or reflections to be found? I have claimed that moods are in part specified by their appropriate backdrop. There is another specifying aspect: this is behaviour. Moods have characteristic behaviour: not so much specific acts but, rather, different styles of doing what one does. If we are to find resemblances between us and nature, the obvious place to look would be behaviour, movement, since that is something we share with nature: nature moves. Nature can 'echo' our moods because it moves in detectably similar, if mysterious, ways.

There are many examples of using the same language of people's movements and the movements of nature. The angry sea rages, thunders, is turbulent, frenzied, destructive, forceful, dashes against the cliffs. Angry people behave in clearly similar ways. Brooding hills wait silently, unyielding, menacing much like brooding people. The cheerful brook moves much as a cheerful person might: it babbles and plays, pauses awhile, rushes on, darts, has a quick, light movement. These are similarities between human styles of behaving, and movements of nature.

Nature and people can also make similar sounds. The mournful wind moans, sighs, howls as do mournful people. The wind's moaning 'echoes' the human moaning. There is a sense in which the moaning wind can actually sound like a person moaning or sighing. That is, one might mistake the sound for that of a person. One might hear it as the sound made by a person, believe it to be made by a person. It is important to note that this would be a mistake, and hearing the moaning of the wind does not depend on making that mistake. One might not believe it is made by a person but still hear it as if made by a person. But hearing the moaning of the wind need not, and does not typically, involve either of these. And yet, I want to claim, there is a connection between the wind's moaning and a person's moaning. I also want to argue that the connection is important for an understanding of aspects of ourselves and of nature.

Consider the moaning of people. There is the moaning of pain, as a patient coming round from a serious operation. There is the moaning of grief at the unbearable loss of a loved one. There is the moaning of total exhaustion curable by a good night's sleep. There is also the moaning of the sheer weight of life: 'The Horror, the Horror!'. Only this last is characteristic of a mood. I would be suspicious of anyone who could not hear how the wind was moaning, for they would not understand my moaning at the horror of things. They would say things such as: 'It's not so bad', or 'You'll feel better in the morning', both of which might be true, but not the point.

That there are similarities between humans and nature is not just something incidental. It is something which enables us to recognize people's moods for what they are and to come to recognize and understand our own moods better. What I want to say is that *our* moods are part of our *nature*, our nature and not our understanding or our rationality, and our nature is more like nature than we may often think. Our moods ebb and flow like the tides, rise and fall like the wind.

There might seem to be an obvious problem: the dissimilarities between us and nature might seem to be too great: people have consciousness, nature does not. People's movements are crucially different, they are intentional, we are aware of them. This clearly is a difference; but it might not be as great as it appears at first sight. How conscious *are* we of our moods? How intentional is our moody behaviour?

We deny our moods. We are often genuinely unaware of them, unaware of the patterns or style of our behaviour. If we are aware of them, we often do not understand them. This is nothing new. Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* opens with Antonio's: 'In sooth, I know not why I am so sad'. Antonio's interlocutors try to 'explain' his sadness as worry about his ships, as love. Having failed to get his agreement, they conclude that he is sad because he is not merry, and he could just as easily be merry as be sad. They fail to understand that Antonio's sadness is a mood, and maybe Antonio himself does not understand this in wanting to know *why*

Moods descend upon us; *sometimes* they confront consciousness but often only to confuse it. So, to emphasize consciousness in an account of moods might be misleading. Mood *behaviour* is often something one is not aware of, not consciously directing. It is not typically intentional, even intentionally expressive. One's behaviour can rather 'betray' one's mood.

When we *are* aware of our moods, this awareness is often a bodily awareness. In different moods, one feels light or heavy limbed. The inner feel of moods is often best characterized as feeling like behaving in a certain way: feeling joyful is feeling like drawing a deep breath and throwing out one's arms expansively. In his poem *The Simlun Pass*, Wordsworth describes the storm: 'winds thwarting winds bewildered and forlorn'. This echoes how one acts and how one feels when bewildered and forlorn: one feels thwarted at every turn by forces which vie with each other and which one cannot control. The feeling and the moving are not as easily separable, nor the movement as obviously intentional as might at first be thought. In many cases, we characterize people's moods in physical ways. We describe people as sparkling, bubbly, effervescent, turbulent; as prickly, spiky, edgy; as wild, cool, up, down, bright, dull, downcast, crestfallen.

Our culture may not encourage, it may even discourage, sensitivity to moods. We are discouraged from showing them, or taking them seriously.

We are taught to mistrust them as distorting reality, encouraged to re-interpret them as rational reactions to good or bad fortune or as signs of physical ill or well-being. What I am suggesting is that we should see them as part of our nature rather than our understanding. We should stop asking why, looking for some rational explanation, some justification for them, for this is to misconstrue what they are. Some of our concepts of emotion are geared to explaining behaviour as rational; our mood concepts are not. They feature in explanations, not of purposive behaviour, but of natural behaviour which can best be understood as involving patterns, styles, complexes, similar to those we find in nature. So, what I am claiming is that we need to recognize styles and patterns in nature and the similarities between us and nature in order to understand ourselves, our moods.

One reason why I like this conclusion is because if, as I believe they are, these patterns and styles in nature are aesthetic features, it makes aesthetic appreciation of nature something serious: that is, it makes a serious contribution to the betterment of human life. Appreciating nature can help us to understand ourselves and each other. This seriousness is something which current 'aesthetic assessment' of the environment seems to lack in its obsession with 'subjective preference' and pleasure in the visual.

I have claimed that moods are specified by atmospheres and that these atmospheres resemble our moods. There are resemblances of overall pattern, and of more specific elements within the pattern. These patterns in nature, I want to claim, are 'fields of meanings' in which the character of the parts is determined by the character of the whole and the other parts

The specific resemblances make the ascription of mood terms to nature more intelligible. Wordsworth does not just use the mood terms of nature and leave it there. He spells out a basis for, or an elaboration of, the claims. In 'I wandered lonely as a cloud', glee and jocundity are not ascribed to the daffodils out of nowhere: there is a lead up to it. They are dancing, tossing their heads, fluttering, in a crowd, in an appropriate setting, beside a lake, beneath the trees just as gleeful, jocund people might be. And Wordsworth's heart, like the daffodils, dances. But the specific resemblances also depend on the overall resemblance. In a different whole, the daffodils' tossing their heads could have been haughty or indifferent rather than carefree and joyful.

Consider the variety of ways in which clouds can be on hills. They can hug them, shroud them, lurk around them, crown them, be held by them. Which they do will depend on the mood of the whole setting; whether it is cosy, desolate, suspicious, etc. Such patterns, fields of significance, are not hard to find, and finding them in nature, I want to claim, gives us a better understanding of nature.

What I have tried to show is that there are genuine similarities between our moods and nature's moods. If we recognize this, we will also recognize that

our moods are part of our nature, and might thereby come to understand our moods better. We will also recognize that nature has patterns, complexes, and so come to understand *it* better.

V

All this might seem fairly uncontentious, or at least it would have seemed so if I had operated entirely in linguistic mode, presented what I was doing as analysis of a particular conceptual framework or scheme. Internal or meaning relations, such as I have claimed there are, both between us and nature and within nature, are a perfectly respectable feature of linguistic or conceptual systems. Contentions arise when one wants to claim some other status for them.

To put the same point rather differently: what I have been describing, it might be claimed, is a system which we 'project' onto the world. Nature does not actually have moods; but it is part of our cultural heritage to 'read', interpret or speak of it as if it had. Heidegger,⁸ in sharp contrast, claims that moods 'reveal' the world, show us how it really is. This looks like a radical disagreement; but where exactly does it lie? 'Projecting' and 'revealing' are both metaphors. We need to ask what the literal disagreement is.

Look first at the 'projection' thesis? I have claimed that the relation between moods and atmospheres is an internal one: that moods are specified by atmospheres. The projection interpretation would typically interpret that claim as the claim that one's moods are specified by perceptions, interpretations, thoughts or beliefs about one's surroundings. These beliefs or thoughts represent the world. Being in a particular mood involves having in mind certain representations of the world. In so far as the representations ascribe internal relations, meanings, to the world, they go beyond, distort or embroider upon what is really there. The task of philosophical analysis is to explain these complexes of meanings. Successful analysis will show how meanings which might appear to be 'in the world' are really a feature of a system of thought representing the world.

Heidegger, in claiming that moods 'reveal' the world, is rejecting this entire metaphysics and method of philosophical analysis. He denies that experience is always mediated by a representation. Much of our experience might be, but it is thereby 'alienated' experience. He regards representational thought, useful though it may be for certain purposes, in the same light as Dewey regards apathy and torpor: it hides from us the richness of our world and our 'attunement' with it. So the task of philosophy, for Heidegger, is not just to explore our representations but to ask how we interact with the world, to uncover our unmediated relations with nature. Heidegger's aim was to strip away all representations of the world and to let the phenomena show themselves. The difficulty with this, as a philosophical enterprise, looks acute, at

least if one tries to *describe* what is 'revealed', for that would seem to involve producing yet another representation.

A more promising approach can be found in another existential phenomenologist, Merleau-Ponty.⁹ Rather than stripping away all systems of representational thought, Merleau-Ponty can be interpreted as asking: what are the necessary conditions for the possibility of forming representations of the world? One sort of condition he cites is that we respond to apparently complex similarities before we identify the similar, and apparently simpler, elements. The 'before' there is to be taken literally. Merleau-Ponty takes as evidence for his claim the behaviour of children prior to learning language. On the problem of our knowledge of other minds, Merleau-Ponty observes that a nine-month old baby, if you bite its finger, will respond by making biting movements with its jaw. It sees your biting, and can do the same. Merleau-Ponty takes this as evidence that humans are aware of being the same, being 'we', before they are aware of differences, being 'I' and 'you'. And this is not just a temporal priority, but a logical one: it is implicit in our possible later experiences of difference, isolation, or even solipsism, that they have resulted from a withdrawal from the social world, the implicit recognition of the similarities between people.

Extrapolating from what Merleau-Ponty says and applying it to the case of moods, children respond, by mimicking or copying, not just to other humans, but to patterns in nature. We have all encountered some version of a small child rolling and crashing round the room, knocking over the furniture and chipping the paintwork, claiming to be the sea. We have probably all at some early stage obeyed the instruction 'be a tree', or be a tree gently swaying in the breeze, or a tree battling to withstand the storm. Now be the wind, gentle, caressing; now the gale, furious, raging. Notice how extraordinary this is: one can, without the aid of mirrors, move like a tree. You know, as it were, 'from the inside', how to mimic how a tree looks or the wind feels 'from the outside'.

These are examples of producing similarities between us and nature. The ability lies not in detailed observation of nature and meticulous reproduction; but in simply being able to move like nature. Further, Merleau-Ponty would claim, it is that bodily ability which underlies our later conceptualized experience of nature's patterns, atmospheres and moods. We can, of course, as with the social world, withdraw from nature as meaningful, regard it, with Descartes, as brute mechanism or as 'standing reserve' as Heidegger has it; scientific rationality does; but it is a withdrawal, a refusal to acknowledge what is there to be experienced.

Our ability to mimic nature's patterns underlies our ability to use mood words. This should be reflected in the philosophical analysis. If the philosophical analysis is taken to be an analysis of systems of representation and projection, it will lose this element of prelinguistic but meaningful interaction with

a meaningful world. Phenomenology aims to make this explicit, to reveal meaningful interactions which necessarily underlie all systems of representation. And that, in a small way, is what my account of moods has been aiming to do. So, if it is to be properly understood, it must be understood as a phenomenological description not a conceptual analysis of a system of thought.

In conclusion, if we are to understand the nature of our moods and the moods of nature, the significance of nature and of our relations with it, we should become phenomenologists.

J. M. Howarth, Department of Philosophy, Lancaster University, Furness College, Lancaster LA1 4YG, England.

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- ⁹ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* transl. Colin Smith (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962).