

# 1. The Mood of the World

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The phrase, “epistemology of moods,” appears in Stanley Cavell’s writings in the late 1970’s, as *The Claim of Reason* is published and Cavell begins the direct engagement with Emerson around which his work will pivot for the rest of his career. Indeed, it is as an “epistemologist of moods” that Emerson first appeals to Cavell in his own right, and not as merely a “second-hand Thoreau.”<sup>1</sup> The phrase is an odd one. Most of us would not think that knowledge and mood are connected in the way it suggests: my foul mood may make it difficult for me to *concentrate* on, say, my taxes, but it does not appear to otherwise affect my ability to *know* how much or how little I owe—and the same could be said of Sextus’ honey, Descartes’ ball of wax, Price’s tomato, and Clarke’s block of cheese. The oddity of the phrase is, if anything, even more marked when coming from Cavell: though Cavell is deeply interested in questions of *self-knowledge*, and of our ability to speak for one another and in that sense *know* one another, he is not an epistemologist; and when he writes of epistemology he often uses phrases like *traditional epistemology* or *classical epistemology* that distance him from it. Cavell does not share the traditional epistemologist’s interest in determining what, if anything, might warrant our claims to knowledge of the empirical world or the existence of “other minds”; and “the truth of skepticism” that he announces and explores is not the truth of the claims of the epistemological skeptic regarding such matters. While the epistemologist seeks to assure himself of the *certainty* of his knowledge, Cavell seeks to understand our *disappointment* with the knowledge we have.<sup>2</sup> What, then, does Cavell mean by this phrase? What is the epistemology of moods?

The piece in which this phrase first appears is entitled “Thinking of Emerson,” words Cavell repeats in the first line of the essay. It soon becomes apparent that thin-

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1. Cavell, “Thinking of Emerson” and “An Emerson Mood,” in *Emerson’s Transcendental Etudes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 11, and 26 and 28.

2. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 44.

king of Emerson entails much more than having thoughts about him in the usual sense of the term. It is in this same essay that Cavell first notes the uncannily close relation between Emerson's line from "Experience," "Always our thinking is a pious reception," and the concluding line of Heidegger's "Question Concerning Technology," "questioning is the piety of thinking."<sup>3</sup> For both, thinking is a kind of thanking, "a thanking," as Cavell puts it, "for the gift of thinking, which means for the reception of being human."<sup>4</sup> "Possessing a self," he goes on to write, is "an act of creation, . . . the exercise not of power but of reception."<sup>5</sup> The essay "Thinking of Emerson" is thus announced as an expression of gratitude and a moment in the ongoing reception of its author's humanity—one that is intended or hoped to make a similar contribution to the reader's own.

It is in this context and in this way that Cavell thinks of Emerson and of Emerson's own thinking of moods and knowledge. The role of Heidegger is plainly important here, especially given *Being and Time's* discussion of *Stimmung* or mood; and Cavell dedicates the piece to the members of a graduate seminar he had taught that year on Heidegger's later writings. But Heidegger—whose wholehearted dismissal of epistemology in and after *Being and Time* is well known—appears in a setting established by Kant; and, like a surprisingly large amount of Cavell's work, this study of mood and reception is part of an ongoing engagement with Kant's critical thought, in particular its understanding of finitude and experience.<sup>6</sup> As Cavell indicates, it was on this ground that he initially dismissed Emerson in favor of Thoreau: "The most significant shortcoming among the places [*The Senses of Walden*] mentions Emerson is," he writes, "its accusing him of 'misconceiving' Kant's critical enterprise" as Thoreau had not. Cavell had proposed that Thoreau's line, "The universe constantly and obediently answers to our conceptions" be taken as both invoking Kant and going beyond him, suggesting

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3. Cavell, "Thinking of Emerson," 15.

4. *Ibid.*, 16.

5. *Ibid.*, 17. Among other things, this raises questions about what the *experience* is like of *reading* an essay of Emerson's—or of Cavell's.

6. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (SUNY Press: New York, 1996), 190 and 210; cf. 56-8. I pursue this in Norris, "Skepticism and Critique in Arendt and Cavell," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 44, no. 1 (2018): 81-99. Concerning Heidegger, Cavell writes, "The only philosopher I knew who had made an effort to formulate a kind of epistemology of moods, to find their revelations of what we call the world as sure as the revelations of what we call the understanding, was the Heidegger of *Being and Time*. But it was hard to claim support there without committing oneself to more machinery than one had any business for." Cavell, "Thinking of Emerson," 11. Some will be tempted to equate Cavell's epistemology of moods with Heidegger's account of attunement. Other will emphasize Cavell's note that the "machinery" of *Being and Time* is, for better or worse, not his business.

“that the universe answers whether our conceptions are mean or magnanimous, scientific or magical, faithful or treacherous.” This is a word-for-word repetition of the second passage in *Senses of Walden* in which Cavell discusses the line he quotes from Thoreau, a fact that indicates Cavell’s confidence in his phrasing—a point to which we shall return. In the Emerson essay he goes on to suggest that this implies

that there are more ways of making a habitable world—or more layers to it—than Kant’s twelve concepts of the understanding accommodate. But I make no effort to justify this idea of a “world” beyond claiming implicitly that as I used the word I was making sense. The idea is roughly that moods must be taken as having at least as sound a role in advising us of reality as sense experience has; that, for example, coloring the world, attributing to it the qualities “mean” or “magnanimous” may be no less objective or subjective than coloring an apple, attributing to it the colors red or green. Or perhaps we should say: sense experience is to objects what moods are to the world.<sup>7</sup>

What, in this Kantian context, is the force of this comparison between moods and colors? In the first *Critique*, Kant advances—on the empirical but not the transcendental level—a version of the empiricist distinction between primary and secondary qualities, according to which space is the only “subjective representation related to something external that could be called *a priori* objective.” What Kant refers to as the empirical “object in itself” has spatial properties, but it is no more colored than it is pleasant or unpleasant to see: “Colors are not objective qualities of the bodies to the intuition of which they are attached [but rather] mere alternations of our subject, which can be different in different people.”<sup>8</sup> Though I can truthfully say both that I *know* that the vase is a certain color and that I *know* that it is a certain shape, and though I say both on the basis of my own *experience*, the claims and their referents are categorically distinct.<sup>9</sup> If moods play a role analogous to colors in our experience of the world, something like

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7. Cavell, “Thinking of Emerson,” 11.

8. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) and Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft 2* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), A45/B 62 and A28-9/B44-5.

9. In the third *Critique* my aesthetic pleasure in the vase will be shown to be (potentially) *public* rather than private; but this will not be a matter of knowledge.

this will be true of them as well: whatever epistemic status they have, it will not be that of sense perception. Significant differences between moods and colors will of course remain: moods vary not just across different people, but across time, as one's mood changes over the course of the day, the week, the month. And this variety is obviously much greater than that found with colors, where (as Cavell reminds us) what is seen as red by one person is seen as a green or brownish yellow by another, and what some see as yellow or red are seen by others as pink. Finally, where our color experiences tell us something about what *type of subject* we are—"normal" or "color blind"—moods tell us at once something about who and how we are as *individuals*.

What of the idea that moods "color," not our experience or knowledge of discrete objects like Descartes' block of wax, but the world as a whole? As a student of ordinary language, Cavell would have been familiar with the discussion of mood in Gilbert Ryle's 1949 classic, *The Concept of Mind*. Ryle notes that though we speak of *feeling* moods like depression, and though the avowal of neither moods nor feelings could conceivably be supported by evidence, moods are not feelings, and do not, for instance, come and go as quickly as do feelings (of, say, delight or surprise). Nor are they motives, which can be combined, as when I seek desperately to say something not only plausible but also deeply impressive to my audience. As Ryle puts it, "Moods monopolize [...]. Somewhat as the entire ship is cruising south-east, rolling, or vibrating, so the entire person is nervous, serene, or gloomy. His corresponding inclination will be to describe the whole world as menacing, congenial, or grey. If he is jovial, he finds everything jollier than usual; and if he is sulky, not only his employer's tone of voice and his own knotted shoe-lace seem unjust to him, but everything seems to be doing him injustices." And of boredom, Ryle—who sympathetically reviewed Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* in 1929—writes, "it is the temporary complexion of the totality."<sup>10</sup>

As an account of mood in general this is slightly exaggerated. I at least sometimes experience a kind of irritability in which I am painfully well aware that the problem is not with the world, but with *me*: the irritating quality of the knotted shoelace is not evidence of—not a manifestation of—anything about the world other than the fact that *I* don't seem to fit in it. A similar gap between self and world characterizes certain giddy moods of affection, or moods in which one feels disposed to be cruel.

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10. Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1949), 99-100 and 104.

The world is not feeling loving or mean; *I* am. But, that said, it is surely true that, for many moods, what Ryle writes is quite true, and quite widely accepted. When one is depressed, the world itself seems a depressing place, and every sad-eyed dog and awkward loner at a dirty bus stop are evidence of its dreary emptiness.<sup>11</sup> If, then, Cavell feels it necessary to insist that “sense experience is to objects what moods are to the world,” he must mean something *different* by this than what Ryle had already said.<sup>12</sup> It is not just that “I am inclined to describe the whole world” in terms that match my mood, nor just that my general mood will color my experience of particular events like greeting my dean or tying my shoes. But what then does Cavell mean? In what way do moods color the world?

The moods of which Ryle writes are those of being sulky, bored, cheerful, happy, and depressed. This may reflect his concern with comparing and contrasting moods and feelings, like those of being tickled or pinched. But it is, in any event, consistent with the common assumption that moods are (just) subjective states. Something in the world may set me off, and throw me into another depression or fit of the sulks, but they do not, strictly speaking, *cause* the depression or the sulks, and the same kind of things may well leave me quite unmoved at other times. At least some of Cavell’s examples are of what he describes as *conceptions* of the world as mean or magnanimous, scientific or magical, faithful or treacherous.<sup>13</sup> Not only are these terms “attributed to” the world and not the person; none of them even refers directly to a subjective state in the way that *happy* or *sulky* does. Cavell says these *conceptions* contribute, like Kant’s *concepts* of the understanding, to the making up of a habitable world—an idea he notes in turn that he has left unclarified. These conceptions are, we can conclude, not just a matter of what one feels; or, perhaps better, they are no more one’s own feelings than the concepts of unity and plurality are one’s own concepts. But this is not to say that we, whoever *we* are, share these conceptions and these concepts in the same way or for the same reasons.<sup>14</sup>

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11. For the rest of this essay, when I write of *mood* it is to this sort of world-disclosive mood that I refer.

12. Cavell is not an author who relishes repeating commonplaces, and he will court paradox to avoid doing so.

13. The emphasis upon moods that function as *conceptions* explains why Cavell writes of seeing Emerson’s “Experience” as being “about the epistemology, or say logic, of moods.” Cavell, “Thinking of Emerson,” 11.

14. Though I will not always share your mood, we share a common language and repertoire of moods, not all of which we experience in quite the same way or to the same degree.

How, in this context, might one begin to clarify the idea of a habitable *world*? Kant distinguishes between two ways of thinking about the world: as “the mathematical whole of all appearances and the totality of their synthesis,” on the one hand, and as what he terms the *Weltganzen selbst* or “*world-whole itself*” on the other. The first is the world of objective experience as analyzed in the first *Critique* in terms of reality, substance, causality, and necessity. The second, in contrast, cannot be so understood, as it is not “an object of possible experience.”<sup>15</sup> It is, however, (relatively but not absolutely) implied by the first, as the infamous *thing-in-itself* is implied by the phenomena we experience. Indeed, as the thing-in-itself could be distinguished from the *world-whole itself* only by being particularized by concepts of the understanding which by definition do not apply to it or “make it up” in a determinate, schematized fashion, the two could be said to name the same non-*thing*. Such, at any rate, appears to be Cavell’s assumption when he writes, “The idea of the thing-in-itself is the idea of a relation in which we stand to the world as a whole, call it a relation to the world’s externality [...] *a world apart from me in which* objects are met.”<sup>16</sup> The difficulty of clarification here is obviously quite real. If moods in Cavell’s sense of the term concern the *world-whole itself*, and not the experience of phenomena within the world, such as my lonely irritability or Price’s tomato, they are no more “objective” than they are “subjective.” They somehow express both the knower and the known in an experience that exceeds the “empirical cognition” (*Erkenntnis*) with which Kant defines *experience*.<sup>17</sup> But what kind of experience is this that is not known?

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15. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason/Kritik der reinen Vernunft 2*, A418/B446 and A676-7/B704-5: “Denn, da kann ich das Dasein dieses Dinges niemals an sich selbst annehmen, weil keine Begriffe, dadurch ich mir irgend einen Gegenstand bestimmt denken kann, dazu gelangen, und die Bedingungen der objektiven Gültigkeit meiner Begriffe durch die Idee selbst ausgeschlossen sind. Die Begriffe der Realität, der Substanz, der Kausalität, selbst die der Notwendigkeit im Dasein, haben, außer dem Gebrauche, da sie die empirische Erkenntnis eines Gegenstandes möglich machen, gar keine Bedeutung, die irgendein Objekt bestimmte. Sie können also zwar zu Erklärung der Möglichkeit der Dinge in der Sinnenwelt, aber nicht der Möglichkeit eines *Weltganzen selbst* gebraucht werden, weil dieser Erklärungsgrund außerhalb der Welt und mithin kein Gegenstand einer möglichen Erfahrung sein müßte.”

16. Cavell, *The Senses of Walden* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1981), 107. Following Cavell, I gloss over here numerous questions regarding the relation between the regulative ideas of pure reason and the problematic hypothesis of the *ding an sich*, which Kant refers to in both the singular and the plural; and my reference to *implication* here is quite loose, if, again, in line with Cavell’s own approach. On Cavell’s use of Kant, which is both freer than any Kantian scholar would tolerate and more attentive than a casual reader might credit, see Paul Franks, “Cavell, Fichte, and Skepticism,” *Reading Cavell*, ed. Alice Crary and Sanford Shieh (New York: Routledge, 2006). It is noteworthy that both Franks and Paul Guyer, the leading policeman among Kant scholars, wrote their dissertations under Cavell’s direction.

17. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft 2*, B147.

As I have noted elsewhere, when Cavell writes of the truth of skepticism, the object of that truth is not a particular thing like Price's tomato or Descartes' ball of wax, but rather *the world*.<sup>18</sup> Here I would add that, in perhaps his most famous formulation of this truth, in *The Claim of Reason*, he echoes the Kantian phrase, the *world-whole itself*: "the truth of skepticism or what I might call the moral of skepticism [is that] the human creature's basis in *the world as a whole*, its relation to the world *as such*, is not that of knowing, anyway what we think of as knowing."<sup>19</sup> The *totality* or *whole world* of which Ryle writes is nothing more than the aggregate of the objects of our experience; and it is not itself the object of either skepticism or knowledge, Ryle sharing Heidegger's lack of interest in either epistemology or skepticism.<sup>20</sup> Cavell's *world as a whole as such*, in contrast, is the object or subject of the truth of skepticism. In "Thinking of Emerson," the idea that we need to "reconceive" skepticism is linked with reception, as noted above, and with *acceptance*: "It is true that we do not know the existence of the world with certainty; our relation to its existence is deeper—one in which it is to be accepted, [...] received, [...] acknowledged."<sup>21</sup> Indeed, it is acceptance rather than acknowledgment that is associated with the world in Cavell's first formulation of this idea in "The Avoidance of Love": "[W]hat skepticism suggests," Cavell writes, "is that since we cannot know the world exists, its presentness to us cannot be a function of knowing. The world is to be accepted; as the presentness of other minds is not to be known, but acknowledged."<sup>22</sup>

These formulations encourage the assumption of many of Cavell's readers that the experience of the world of which he writes is an emotional or personal commitment quite distinct from knowledge or cognition. Just as the good friend *accepts* the limitations of her friend, so the good Cavellian *accepts* or *acknowledges* the reality of a world that she cannot know. On this account, acknowledgment is to the unknowable aspect or "back side" of the known world what acceptance is to the unlovable aspect of the beloved friend. As tempting as this account is, it fails to bring out the differences between Cavell's analysis of skepticism and of epistemology more broadly

18. Norris, *Becoming Who We Are: Politics and Practical Philosophy in the Work of Stanley Cavell* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 190.

19. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 241 (emphases mine).

20. Cf. Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, 317.

21. Cavell, "Thinking of Emerson," 16.

22. Cavell, "The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of *King Lear*," in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 324.

and that of a skeptic (that is, almost any skeptic) who admits that he cannot *live* his skepticism—someone like Hume, who argues that though neither causality nor the self can be objects of our knowledge, for *practical* purposes, while actually *doing something* like playing backgammon, we must live as though they were. Moreover, while this reading is supported by some of Cavell's formulations, it neglects the final line of the passage we just quoted from *The Claim of Reason*: "not that of knowing, *anyway what we think of as knowing*."<sup>23</sup> And in one of the first essays Cavell writes after the Emerson pieces under consideration here, he emphasizes, "I do not propose the idea of acknowledging as an alternative to knowing, but rather as an interpretation of it, as I take the word 'acknowledge,' containing 'knowledge,' itself to suggest (or perhaps it suggests that knowing is an interpretation of acknowledging)."<sup>24</sup> Acknowledgment cannot be hived off so easily and completely from knowledge.

But this raises almost as many problems as it forecloses. A knowing that is not knowing sounds suspiciously like Kant's thing-in-itself, a thing that is not a thing. *The world* is not known *as the traditional epistemologist conceives of empirical knowledge*, or experienced *as Kant conceives of objective experience*, but it is nonetheless known and experienced after its fashion. Our proper relation to the world-whole itself is not *exactly* like our knowledge of the tomato or the ball of wax, but *very like it*.<sup>25</sup> And, indeed, in a long footnote in *The Senses of Walden* attached to the discussion of Thoreau and Emerson's relations to Kant that we have been discussing, Cavell writes, "A thing which we cannot know is not a thing. Then why are we led to speak otherwise? What is the sense that something escapes the conditions of knowledge? It is, I think, the sense, or fact, that our primary relation to the world is not one of knowing (understood as achieving certainty of it based upon the senses). This is the truth of skepticism."<sup>26</sup> This can make it sound as if acknowledgement—our proper relation to the *world-whole itself*—is knowledge, just not *certain* knowledge based upon *the senses*. And this interpretation, too, has been advanced of Cavell's idea of the truth of skept-

23. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 9, 241; cf. 47.

24. Cavell, "The Philosopher in American Life (Toward Thoreau and Emerson)" *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 39.

25. Note that it is precisely on account of the limitations of such formulations that Hegel distinguishes between the false and the true infinite, an analysis he applies to the relation between the whole (the world) and the objects in it. Cf. Herbert Schnädelbach, *Hegel zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius, 1999), 14-17; on Cavell and Hegel, see Norris, *Becoming Who We Are*, 246-247.

26. Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*, 106-7.



ticism. And here, too, what is original and fruitful in Cavell's thought is lost, and he is left sounding like one of his predecessors—here perhaps Shaftesbury.

Cavell suggests that knowledge and acknowledgment *interpret* one another, not that they *supplement* one another, the one providing an intuitive (or affective) knowledge to round out the other's discursive knowledge.<sup>27</sup> But what kind of interpretation? Our troublesome phrase *the epistemology of moods* may help us here. As we have seen, Cavell uses this phrase to characterize the way mooded conceptions help make up the habitable world. In *The Senses of Walden* he characterizes this world as “a world apart from me in which objects are met,” noting that Thoreau registers this apartness by noting how *near* the world is to him.<sup>28</sup> The epistemology of moods is not the epistemology of tomatoes and blocks of cheese; but it is an epistemology nonetheless—that is, it makes a necessary contribution to our understanding and experience of our knowledge of such things. Since the world-whole itself cannot be known, (the non-knowing of) it must perform its epistemological function in the knowledge of what *can* be known. Its function is to color that world. As our relation to the world “is to be” one of acknowledgment, I take it that this coloring is the expression or manifestation of our acknowledgment. Cavell's claim is that the objects of our knowledge are known only within a world that must be acknowledged *in a mooded way*. Conversely, that world is nothing more than the context within which objects are so present to us—that is, it is itself nothing. Acknowledgement and knowledge are, on this account, quite inseparable; it is as conjoined aspects of our worldly life that they interpret or *serve* one another. Acknowledgment is not, as many readers of Cavell assume, something quite distinct from knowing, something *optional* that might be taken up after first reading *The Claim of Reason*, or *Gelassenheit*, or the *Daodejing*.<sup>29</sup>

But why, one might ask, does it so often *sound* that way? Why does it seem as if the “moral claim” or fervor of Cavell's prose is directed at getting us to (begin to) acknowledge the existence of the world as we (should) accept the shortcomings of a

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27. Crucial here is the fact that the objects of intuitive knowledge (e.g., the other person's feelings, the best strategy to adopt) are not inappropriate or impossible objects of discursive knowledge. They are both, as Kant would put it, within the “sphere” of the “field of experience.” Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason/Kritik der reinen Vernunft* 2, A762/B790.

28. Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*, 107.

29. Note how this distinguishes Cavell from Heidegger, whose moods do not seem to be tied to knowledge in this way. *Stimmung* is also tied to *thrownness* in Heidegger, not (immediately) to *existence* and *futurity*.

friend?<sup>30</sup> The answer, I think, is that, as we now see, *acknowledgment is mooded*.<sup>31</sup> If acknowledgment is the other side of knowledge, in so far as we experience (knowable) objects, we experience, *in some way*, mooded acknowledgment. The evident fact that we are not always aware of being in a world-disclosive mood (that is, of acknowledging the world) demonstrates that our experience is not always conscious, that *we do not always know (or feel) what we are experiencing*. In reviewing Emerson's response to Kant's limitation of knowledge (with the exceptions of our certainty in the moral law and the results of the critique) to the sphere of experience, Cavell writes, "Well and good, but then you had better be very careful what it is you understand by experience, for that might be limited in advance by the conceptual limitations you impose upon it, limited by what we know of human existence, i.e., by our limited experience of it."<sup>32</sup> I take this to say *both* that we do not know what experience might prove to be possible for us, *and* that our experience of our (current) existence is limited—that is, that our experience of our lives as they stand, our experience *of our experience* in the widest sense of the term, is limited.<sup>33</sup> Bringing our experience to consciousness—awakening us to our lives, to ourselves—is at the heart of Cavell's effort "to cheer, to raise, and to guide" us.<sup>34</sup>

This entails giving the existence of the world the only kind of proof that it can receive: "The succession of moods is not tractable," Cavell writes, "by the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity Kant proposes for experience. [...] The fact that we are taken over by this succession, this onwardness, means that you can think of it as at once a succession of moods (inner matters) and a succession of things (outer

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30. Cavell, "Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow," *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2005), 219.

31. Though, looking back, I have come close to saying this, this is a feature of Cavell's account that I at least have not seen or appreciated up to now. It was clear to me, in part because of helpful conversations in Frankfurt with Jan Müller, that acknowledgment is not something that one might *begin* for the first time. But I did not see until now that acknowledgment is as such mooded.

32. Cavell, "Thinking of Emerson," 12.

33. We are, as Emerson says, partial versions of ourselves, not yet Man Thinking. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar," *Nature and Selected Essays* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 84f. In one of his very finest passages, Cavell writes of the need of "consulting one's experience and . . . subjecting it to examination," a process that requires your "momentarily *stopping*, turning yourself away from whatever your preoccupation and turning your experience away from its expected, habitual track, to find itself, its own track: coming to attention. The moral of this practice is to educate your experience sufficiently so that it is worthy of trust. The philosophical catch would then be that education cannot be achieved in advance of the trusting." This trust, he concludes, is "expressed as a willingness to find words for one's experience." Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (London: Harvard, 1981), 12.

34. Emerson, "The American Scholar," 95.

manners). This very evanescence of the world *proves its existence to me; it is what vanishes from me*. I guess this is not realism exactly; but it is not solipsism either.”<sup>35</sup> If my moods were only a matter of my subjective condition, Cavell’s account would amount to solipsism; and if they were only a matter of the objective facts of the matter, it would amount to realism. But in the account of the world of mooded acknowledgment they are, to put it as provocatively as possible, neither and both. Further, the proof of which Cavell writes is found *both* in my awareness of my mood *and* my forgetting of it, its *vanishing before me*. Indeed, the failure is fully as essential as is its overcoming in recollection: to be aware of the world-disclosive quality of my mood is to be aware of something that is not a constant feature of my experience of the objective world like, e.g., space and time, but that glows and dims as I am more or less aware of my mood—and that changes within that awareness as one mood gives way to another, sometimes with my indirect help.<sup>36</sup>

I have noted that in *Senses of Walden* Cavell twice quotes Thoreau’s line, “The universe constantly and obediently answers to our conceptions,” and that it is around this line that he positions the emergence to him of Emerson’s epistemology of moods.

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35. Cavell, “Thinking of Emerson,” 13 (emphasis mine). The role of the world’s *vanishing* may point to the influence of Hegel, where *vanishing* is another name for *Aufhebung*; cf. Norris, “The Disappearance of the French Revolution in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*,” *The Owl of Minerva: Journal of the Hegel Society of America* 44, nos. 1-2 (2012-13): 37-66.

36. The inconstancy of mood that distinguishes its conceptions from the concepts of the understanding is manifest not only in my growing and dimming awareness of my being in a mood, but also in the rise and fall of *particular* moods. This rise and fall over time is something I receive, where reception has both an active and a passive component. While our moods are not entirely within our direct control, they are not wholly impervious to our influence. Over time, I have learned that accepting a sad or bad mood and giving it the time it needs is the best thing to *do* about it. Fighting or resisting it, pretending that it is not there, only makes matters worse. It is obvious that moods can become better and worse. But it is not obvious which moods are better when: as wonderful as it is, a cheerful, giddy mood is the wrong mood in which to listen to Shostakovich’s Fifth, or Coltrane’s “Alabama.” One cannot in a very basic way *hear* the music when one is so out of tune with it. The same is true for watching *Badlands*, or reading Primo Levi’s *If This is a Man*. It may also be the wrong mood in which to philosophize; as Cavell repeatedly suggests, there is a (at least one) *philosophical mood*. He writes in “An Emerson Mood” of the objection—which he raises at least three times in these essays—that it was easy for Emerson “with his connections” to strike the poses he did, “this is not my present mood, or I will not, if I can help it, call upon this mood.” Cavell, “An Emerson Mood,” 31. One can control to some extent the way one experiences one’s own mood—that is, one’s own experience. If mood or mooded acknowledgment is as tightly tied to knowledge as I have argued, one way of affecting our mood would be to *know* or to *focus on knowledge* in an inappropriate or unhelpful way. One might think here of the way someone’s insistent questions regarding the factual circumstances regarding the production of an artwork—a painting in a museum, or a piece being performed in a hall—can ruin one’s experience of the art. Or the way Lear’s demands for proof make it impossible for him to actually *hear* Cordelia. One way of summing up Cavell’s brilliant early work on other minds skepticism is to say that the Millian epistemologist’s focus on *knowing* to a certainty whether the person in pain is minded makes it impossible to *acknowledge* that pain in anything but a mode of dismissal and avoidance. But a more human response to that pain does not mean that one cannot know, and say one knows, that the other is in pain.

He silently cites it once more in “Thinking of Emerson”: “you can say,” he writes, that “the soul is solipsistic; surely it is, to use [a] critical term of Emerson’s, partial. This no doubt implies that we do not have a universe as it is in itself. But this implication is nothing: we do not have selves in themselves either. The universe *is* what constantly and obediently answers to our conceptions. It is what *can* be all the ways we know it to be, which is to say, all the ways we can be. [...] The universe contains all the colors it wears.”<sup>37</sup> Cavell emphasizes the *is* and the *can* here: The universe *is* what constantly and obediently answers to our conceptions. It is what *can* be all the ways we know it to be, all the ways *we* can be. The universe is not over and done, but in process, pregnant with the possible, *partial*, as we are. To acknowledge the world as *habitable* is to see that this is true of it—and of us. As is plainer when one speaks of *mood* than when one uses the more generic *acknowledgment*, neither the universe nor we can be seen as it or we are *once and for all*; and neither of us can be seen as we are now—becoming something we are not yet—in isolation from one another. I use the word *we* here to include the universe in response to Cavell’s use of the same word (*acceptance, acknowledgment*) to characterize my relation to the world and to the other with whom I share it.

Little surprise, then, that when Cavell first cites this line from Thoreau, he does so in the context of a discussion of how *Walden* undoes our myths about *fate*: “men [...] mythologize their forces, as they always have, project them into demigods, and then serve their own projections. [...] It is, you might say, their inability to trust themselves to determine their lives; or rather, their inability to see that they are determining them.”<sup>38</sup> This may sound like Feuerbach or Marx; it should also sound like Kant, who diagnoses Christianity to be a form of self-alienation in which we attribute the glory of our own moral nature to an alien deity.<sup>39</sup> What Cavell adds is that the al-

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37. Cavell, “Thinking of Emerson,” 13. Cavell continues: “In ‘Circles,’ we are told: ‘Whilst the eternal generation of circles proceeds, the eternal generator abides. That central life. . . contains all its circles. The universe contains all the colors it wears. That it can wear no more than I can give is a fact of what Emerson calls my poverty. (Other philosophers may speak of the emptiness of the self.)’” When the essay is reprinted in *Emerson’s Transcendental Etudes* the final parenthetical remark is dropped. I suspect the reference to other philosophers is to Sartre. This would explain the remark being dropped, he having gone out of fashion, and no longer serving as a reliable shared reference. It would also confirm the interpretation above, the emptiness of the self in Sartre being a function of its negativity and orientation towards the future and the fulfillment of its “plan.”

38. Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*, 97.

39. As is observed in Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Dark Riddle: Hegel, Nietzsche, and the Jews* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 67-68.

ternative to this self-alienation is not knowledge and self-mastery—an enlightened moral culture, a leftist humanism, a communist proletariat—but recognition of the role mooded acknowledgment plays in our lives. Or, better, who argues that without attention to the latter our dreams of the former will serve only to condemn our present state, not to lead it to its transformation and fulfillment.<sup>40</sup> In this context is significant that Cavell's last references to Emerson as an epistemologist of mood in these essays are in made in regard to Emerson's suggestion that we must follow our *whims* or moods or the "call of our genius" if we are to overcome nihilism enough to muster "the heart for a new creation."<sup>41</sup> Cavell reaches here back to Kant—who writes of the *world-whole itself* in connection with the idea of God's *creation* of the world—and to the beginning of Emerson's "Experience," where Emerson attributes our lethargy and our incapacity for "new creation" to the fact that "genius" gave us lethe to drink. It is, I think, no coincidence that "Experience" closes with a call for "the transformation of *genius* into practical power."<sup>42</sup> As always in Cavell and Emerson, failure is not overcome, but transformed.

Let me close by noting a point at which Cavell seems to point beyond his own analysis, as if inviting us to speculate in his absence. In the section of *The Senses of Walden* on which I have focused, he praises Thoreau for "getting Kant right" but also moving beyond him in suggesting that the objects of our knowledge require "a transcendental (or may we say grammatical or phenomenological) preparation. [Thoreau's] difference from Kant on this point is that these *a priori* conditions are not themselves knowable *a priori*, but are to be discovered experimentally; historically, Hegel had said."<sup>43</sup> The erudite Cavell takes an apparent misstep here: while Heidegger does write of the historical *a priori*, Hegel does not. For Hegel, the categories of the *a priori* and the *a posteriori* are, like those of form and content, only more bina-

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40. In this context it may be helpful to note Cavell's diagnosis of the modern condition in *Disowning Knowledge*: "The issue posed is no longer, or not alone, as with earlier skepticism, how to conduct oneself best in an uncertain world; the issue suggested is how to live at all in a groundless world. Our skepticism is a function of our now illimitable desire." Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 3. The fact that mooded acknowledgment is close enough to emotion or feeling to be mistaken for it points to its ability to provide a break or redirection of desire that retains an affective element, and hence promises not to leave desire unsatisfied.

41. Cavell, "An Emerson Mood," 28 and 30 and "Thinking of Emerson," 16.

42. Emerson, "Experience," in *Nature and Selected Essays* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 286 and 311 (my emphasis).

43. Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*, 95.

ries that need to be overcome or “sublated” if we are to see our situation aright. But Cavell’s point is nonetheless valid: the idea of the historical *a priori* is the idea of an *a priori* that takes an *a posteriori* form. What is significant for our purposes is the considered manner in which the turn to Hegel—the turn from *empirical* to *historical*—changes the temporal register of the experience in question. Empirical discoveries can be made in the course of an afternoon in the woods; the same cannot be said of *historical* discoveries: though they may come to us suddenly, they require years, even ages before they arrive there. The grammatical or phenomenological accounts of the preconditions of their experience occurs on the level of both personal and cultural change. The latter is not a primary focus of the Emersonian texts on which Cavell concentrates, but it is one to which this passage directs our attention.

Given this, let us return once more to the terms which I have noted Cavell carefully repeats six years after first writing them: “the universe answers whether our conceptions are mean or magnanimous, scientific or magical, faithful or treacherous.” I suppose it is possible for an individual to experience the world as “scientific” and “magical.” But it is more natural to speak of a *culture* in these terms, as Max Weber does when, following Friedrich Schiller’s “Die Götter Griechenlands,” he characterizes modernity as a disenchanted, technological age.<sup>44</sup> I take Cavell’s implicit suggestion to be that Weber is discussing one of the *moods* of the modern world. This may seem a baffling suggestion: surely speaking of the agency or mood of the world is already speaking of it in magical terms, something the *Entzauberung* of the world ought to preclude. But, given Cavell’s evident ambition not to dismiss Kant but to go beyond him, perhaps there is a distinction to be made here like that between the empirical and transcendental which would allow one to at once deny that magical forces exist (in the world, in the forest) and nonetheless assert that one inhabits a (scientific) world that is (magically) mooded in Cavell’s sense of the term. For those of us who wish to limit the real to the play of Weber’s control through calculation, this would be a loss; but for the rest of us, perhaps not. For us, to recognize this as our

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44. Schiller writes of an *entgötterte* nature, Weber of the *Entzauberung* of the world: “The growing process of intellectualization and rationalization [...] means that in principle [...] we are not ruled by mysterious, unpredictable forces, but that, on the contrary, we can in principle *control everything by means of calculation*. That in turn means the disenchantment of the world.” Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” in *The Vocation Lectures*, trans. R. Livingstone (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 2004), 12-13.

mood and not our fate may release us from at least some of the despair that is Cavell's and Emerson's constant preoccupation—but do so without losing what is living in that despair.<sup>45</sup>

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45. For helpful comments on an earlier draft of this essay I am grateful to the other participants at the conference “Democratic Affections: Film, Philosophy, and Religion in the Thought of Stanley Cavell” held in February 2019 at UCSB’s Center for the Humanities and Social Change.