Volume 20 Issue 46
Originally issued as A11



Global Journal of human-social science: A
Arts & Humanities - Psychology
Volume 20 Issue 11 Version 1.0 Year 2020
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals
Online ISSN: 2249-460x & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

The Spiritual Potential of Moods

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This reflection arises from an observation of Cassirer who pointed out that language, religion, art and myth, though they share the same structure, have in fact separate modalities of spiritual form (*geistige Auffassung* and *geistige Formung*) (Cassirer 1977, 7)[1]. The structural affinity of different realities is crucial in identifying their mutual relationships. As N. Hartmann points out, "The world has a shape given by the Spirit and, despite its unity, the world is by no means a simplicity, but it salvages a concrete multiplicity of different directions and actualizations" (Hartmannn 1938, 60)[2]. If this is true, one can say that spirituality is everywhere. What is needed is merely to discoverit. The truth of spiritual forms is to be measured by these forms themselves.

GJHSS-A Classification: *FOR Code: 130201p*



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The Spiritual Potential of Moods

Lukasz Sawicki

I. Introduction

Usually moods are associated with mental health. In this context they are often related to spirituality. An example of such an approach is found in the book of K. Raab Mayo, *Creativity, Spirituality, and Mental Health: Exploring Connections* (Routledge, 2016). In consequence, spirituality can be considered as a tool to improve mood. In this paper another approach towards moods is proposed: a philosophical one, based on phenomenological theory as developed by H. Schmitz, G. Böhme and T. Griffero. This vision of moods, called by these authors "atmospheres", will be interpreted in the context of spirituality and applied to a new perception of it (or perhaps, better, a new understanding). Thanks to this we will propose another key to the interpretation of classical spiritual texts with a hope that such interpretation will bring spirituality closer to life and refresh its important affinity with art.

This reflection arises from an observation of Cassirer who pointed out that language, religion, art and myth, though they share the same structure, have in fact separate modalities of spiritual form (*geistige Auffassung* and *geistige Formung*) (Cassirer 1977, 7)[1]. The structural affinity of different realities is crucial in identifying their mutual relationships. As N. Hartmann points out, "The world has a shape given by the Spirit and, despite its unity, the world is by no means a simplicity, but it salvages a concrete multiplicity of different directions and actualizations" (Hartmannn 1938, 60)[2]. If this is true, one can say that spirituality is everywhere. What is needed is merely to discoverit. The truth of spiritual forms is to be measured by these forms themselves. They are the measures and criteria of their own truth, which reveals their own significance[3]. The complexity and pluralism of the world include many similarities. This paper intends to explore one of them, with a hope of constructing a bridge between two disciplines which may seem remote but, in reality, are closer than one might think.

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II. The Enlargement of the Concept of Mood

The philosophical idea of mood we refer to is larger than the psychological one and refers not only to the mental health of a single human being but includes his/her interaction with the surrounding environment. Certainly it is a highly personal experience but it always depends on external factors.

Here we follow the distinction between "mood" and "climate", proposed by Gumbrecht and Butler. According to them,

> "Mood" stands for an inner feeling, so private, that it cannot be precisely circumscribed. "Climate," on the other hand, refers to something objective that surrounds people and exercises a physical influence. Only in German the word "mood" connects with Stimme and stimmen. The first means "voice," and the second "to tune an instrument"; by extension, stimmen also means "to be correct". As the tuning of an instrument suggests, specific moods and atmospheres are experienced on a continuum, like musical scales. They present themselves to us as nuances that challenge our powers of discernment and description, as well as the potential of language to capture them (Gumbrecht, Butler, 3).

The authors quoted above indicate a concept that can help to integrate "mood" and "climate", the German word "Stimmung". We follow this line, proposing, however, simply to substitute the German word "Stimmung" with English "mood". This approach integrates the two aspects mentioned above: the internal, personal one and the external, i.e. contextual one, rendering more external however, the psychological and clinical understanding of mood. Mood can be collocated between these two realms since it is, first of all, a matter of perception. The atmosphere (mood) is the object perceived first, we cannot distance ourselves from it, it does not disappear, it cannot be contracted into a thing. It is the object of perception (Böhme 2010, 87). Mood depends on perception (Grifero, 2017, pos. 239)

Going further, we arrive at the first consequence of such an approach, made clear by the authors quoted above: the experience and sense of presence. Gumbrecht and Butler describe this situation using two words "atmosphere" and "mood" which also suggest the "swing" outside in their understanding of mood. The two authors are interested.

[1] E.Cassirer, *Wesen und Wirkung des Symbolbegriffs*, Darmstadt, 1977, 7

[2] *..die Welt hat für uns die Gestalt, die der Geist ihr gibt. Und weil er bei all seiner Einheit kein bloße Einfachkeit ist, sondern eine konkrete Mannigfaltigkeit verschiedenartiger Richtungen und Betätigungen in sich birgt.* N.Hartmann, *Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit*, Berlin, 1938, 60

[3] E.Cassirer, *Wesen und Wirkung des Symbolbegriffs*, Darmstadt, 1977, 79

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> In the atmospheres and moods that literary works absorb as a form of "life"- an environment with physical substance, which "touches us as if from inside." The yearning for Stimmung has grown, because many of us-perhaps older people, above all-suffer from existence in an everyday world that often fails to surround and envelop us physically. Yearning for atmosphere and mood is a yearning for presence-perhaps a variant that presupposes a pleasure in dealing with the cultural past. To quell this yearning, we know, it is no longer necessary to associate Stimmung and harmony (Gumbrecht, Butler, 20).

The presence is connected here with an affective feeling: yearning. The emotional context of mood (Stimmung), so obvious in psychology, is clear also in our philosophical frame: "In summary, moods can be defined as affective states that are capable of influencing a broad array of potential responses, many of which seem quite unrelated to the mood-precipitating event. As compared with emotions, moods are typically less intense affective states and are thought to be involved in the instigation of self-regulatory processes" (Morris, pos.202).

Heidegger enlarged this emotional context of mood clearly associating Stimmung with "fear" and "anger", "hope", "joy", "enthusiasm", "cheerfulness", and "boredom". From here he makes the explicit reference to his favorite idea of the "thrownness" of human existence-that is, to a position between "ecstatic" dimensions of time: a future that has nothing to offer but "nothing," and the past, which, as "tradition," has always already limited and determined what we may do in the present. (Gumbrecht, Butler, 92).

H. Schmitz, writing explicitly about atmospheres mentions also hunger, thirst, fear, pain, lust, disgust, freshness and tiredness, and adds anger, trembling and grief, writing that "they are not parts of the body, because they have no surfaces (doesn't make sense: find another word); but nor are they internal to the soul, because spatially extended and more or less localized in parts of the body" (Schmitz, 8). So, mood is a matter of our existential and integral relationship with the surrounding world. In consequence it is an important, practical and inevitable context of our human existence. It might be compared to a hub of our interaction with the world. In this sense mood is more important than emotions: "In summary, moods can be defined as affective states that are capable of influencing a broad array of potential responses, many of which seem quite unrelated to the mood-precipitating event. As compared with emotions, moods are typically less intense affective states and are thought to be involved in the instigation of self-regulatory processes". (Morris, pos.200)

Naturally, one cannot deny that the character of mood is due to emotions. Their configurations assure the quality which is often described as "emotional tonality", a disposition of the soul (Böhme 2010, 84, 97). Its character is synesthetic (Böhme 2010, 153).

This existential meaning of mood is important for its interpretation in the spiritual context. It affects our relationship with space, thus constituting the forms of our presence. In this way mood (*l'atmosfera*, as Griffero puts it) is "a surplus effect of the difference between places". The problem is not only of presence, but of visibility, of activating and actualizing the subtle and intimate link we establish, more or less consciously, with the world: "The atmosphere then consists in making visible the unity of the difference that constitutes the space; therefore it also consists in making visible the invisibility of space as a medium for the construction of forms. However, it is not space as such, that as a medium can ever make itself visible". (Griffero, pos. 239) The visibility and the form are the tools of communication. They make our identity real and perceivable from outside.

However, this is not everything. Mood is not just neutral or merely instrumental. It contains an activity, a power. Our relationship with space is not neutral. We occupy space. That is why Schmitz talks about occupation rather than fulfilment (Schmitz, 30). We shape and transform it. Only in this active way can the presence be really felt and be real.

The active aspect of mood (*Atmosphäre* in Schmitz) is inevitably related to its passive, perceptual dimension. We can feel mood only when we are affectively involved (Böhme 2010, 82).

The play passivity-activity is also present on another level: mood can also mean an occupation of emptiness, as can happen in the state of personal desperation described by such categories as *acedia, ennui* (Schmitz, 85). These spheres of human interaction with the world, including involvement of the whole body, touch explicitly the spiritual realm. Here one can sense a striving towards unity and this is a very important quality of mood. It integrates, connects and reconciles. It happens not only at the ontological, structural basis of mood itself: mood (atmosphere) is something between subject and object (Böhme 2013, 103, 263). Mood is a totality which covers the whole scene and action, bringing about its unity (Böhme 2013, 139).

But yet, it is not everything. Mood necessarily goes beyond the basic situation by which it is constituted: it communicates and transmits. This is what comes out of things and of human beings and what gives to the space an affective tint. It permits the subject to guard his presence (Böhme 2013, 247) as well as to express it. At this point another perspective for spirituality appears: mood marks the whole person, his/her behavior and its meaning. Writing about this Böhme attributes moods (atmospheres) to four fields of human activity: physiognomy (Böhme 2010, 155-174 – there is a connection between the physiognomy of a

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person and the atmosphere which comes out of him/her), scene (Böhme 2010, 175-191), ecstasy (Böhme 2010, 193-210), signs and symbols (Böhme 2010, 211-227). All these cases demonstrate different, ever more complex, configurations of the human person in his/her environment. These configurations are something more than just interaction. They include activity, the possibility of transformation and, especially in the last case, the ability to go beyond the original context.

So, summarizing the discussion to this point, mood is a basic and particular interaction of a person with his/her environment: an interaction which is active, transforming and transcends its original meaning. It may be regarded as a basis of a more general, philosophical, transcendental or spiritual reflection.

III. Towards Modern Spirituality

It is not easy to define spirituality, especially today when it is becoming a more and more popular substitute of religion and faith. There are different approaches towards spirituality and researches on it. As an example, one can quote the definitions given by a group practicing spiritual activity. The participants of the group understood spirituality as: relationship (24 %), a way of life (16%), an action towards God (14,5%), awareness of God (11%), the inner essence of life (11%), seeking God (6,5%), encompassing every facet of life (3%), being with creation (3%), search for *conversatio morum* (3%), attitude of gratitude (3%), mystery (1,5%), living in the dimension of soul (1,5%). (Sawicki 275). Obviously different groups could propose other definitions, however those presented here show the vast range of understanding spirituality. What is striking is the prevailing relating of spirituality to normal human life (relationship, way of life). God appears only in second place. The members of the same group described spirituality as "accessing an internal interface with wisdom compassion, and insight, and seeing that there is something larger that connects" (Sawicki, 276).

This dilemma of spirituality and its relationship with life and theology is well presented in the following reflection: "What then is spirituality…? It is by no means to be confused with theology, which is chiefly an elaboration of concepts. Rather it is a life. All human existence has a spiritual aspect… Although the notion of spirituality is definitely a Christian notion, it by no means limits its attention to the Catholic world or even the Christian world[4]".

The most important conclusion from these words is the organic connection of spirituality with life. That is exactly what this paper intends to describe and examine. At the same time, it will thus be possible to enlarge the concept of spirituality. Such intuitions are already present in studies dedicated to this field. According to David Tacey, spirituality

> Becomes synonymous with spontaneity, openness and availability, based on a holistic understanding of the human being that promotes democracy, fullness and completeness. (…) Spirituality does not need the arguments of religion, the presence of the mystery in the world is enough, which is more important than rituals and liturgies. Spirituality is oriented towards an inner, intimate and intense encounter with the mystery of life that makes itself present through reality and everyday life (Tacey, 31).

This explanation expresses very well the present trend in understanding spirituality – as a purely human, personal and intimate experience. The difference in comparison to a classical, religious understanding of spirituality lies in the consequences, or impact, of such an experience of spirituality. In the religious, theological context, spirituality transforms a human being and brings him/her towards salvation. Today's perspective is deprived of such a transcendental horizon. M. Foucault expressed this with insight: "If we define spirituality as the form of those practices which presuppose that the subject, as he is, is incapable of attaining the truth, but that the truth, as it is, is capable of transfiguring and saving the subject, then we must say that the modern age, the age that connects the subject to the truth, begins as soon as we postulate instead that the subject, as he is, is indeed capable of attaining the truth, but that the truth, as it is, is not capable of saving the subject" (Foucault, 2000 [1982]). Here the epistemological perspective of spirituality, usually integrated with the classical anthropological one, is negated. So, one can hardly ask about the purpose of such a spirituality.

This dilemma in reference to classical, i.e. religious spirituality, was well expressed by A. Spranzi. He distinguishes two spiritualities: firstly, the religious one, synonymous with religious experience had in the ambience and according to the rules of a religious confession; secondly, one with an indifference towards religious confessions. In the first case it is a matter of a course of perfection, detachment from the materiality of life, a search for truth, within the context of the canons of a religious faith (Spranzi, 21). The laical a bad word to use: think of another spirituality may be defined as existential thought and a search for truth in independence of confessional religiosity (Spranzi, 22). This existential thought is dominated by an emotive reflection, a phenomenon both selective and targeted, the strategic one does "one" refer to thought, reflection or phenomenon?? It is not clear (Spranzi, 23). This approach, unlike that of Foucault, takes into consideration the search for truth but also, simultaneously, the emotional aspect. This expanding,

[4] The words of French journalist, Jacques Madaule, quoted after Jones, Ch., Wainwright, G., Yarnold, E. SJ, (editors), The Study of Spirituality, Oxford University Press 1986, xxvi

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almost universal character of spirituality, brings it closer to life, thus making it more open and susceptible to the entire reality of moods. In fact, the philosophical configuration of mood in the way we are proposing, offers a new way of looking at spirituality. Presence, emotions, visibility, activity, and transmission seem to provide a good existential framework for a modern understanding of spirituality. They connect tradition with modern, existential sensibility. In classical spirituality presence was associated with attention and vigilance. Emotions, usually associated with passions, have to be recuperated today. Modern spirituality cannot ignore them. They must be integrated. Visibility is a consequence of self-conscious presence and of identity well integrated with context. Successively, visibility leads towards interaction with our environment, i.e. with other persons and the world. Only in this way can we transmit something of ourselves, thereby influencing and transforming the world. Thanks to the reality of mood all this can be well understood and interpreted in the light of the Gospel, possibly in a new and efficient way.

To show how this vision of mood influences our understanding of spirituality we shall analyze some selected texts taken from different Christian spiritual traditions. We shall start with some remarks on the Bible before passing on to the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* and the classical text of Orthodox spirituality, the *Philokalia*, then concluding with a text of the Western spiritual tradition: a fragment from *A Spiritual Canticle of the Soul* by John of the Cross.

IV. Moods in Spiritual Texts

In the main source of Christian spirituality, the Bible, as in each great literary work, there are many different moods. There have been various attempts to read the Bible in this way, for example *Poems and Passages: A Bible Study by Moods* by Victoria Rahn. However, such readings usually have a therapeutic character, not taking into consideration the whole spiritual richness of the Bible. On the other hand, spiritual or theological readings of the Bible do not take into consideration the aspect of its moods. An attempt to integrate these two approaches towards the Bible was proposed by W. R. Brookman in his *Orange Proverbs and Purple Parables*. Referring to our perception, he gives attention to the phenomenon of synesthesia which he defines as "a bringing together or blending the senses" (Brookmann, 25). Synesthesia integrates our sensual impressions, in practice extending our vision into other senses (the author refers here to the research of R. E. Cytowic, Brookman, 27). Apparently the senses are the main factors of our mood. Their integration corresponds with the proper and full experience of mood. Synesthesia, however, goes beyond pure emotions. It reveals new perspectives of thought and creativity:

> Just as synesthetes have clearly been found to have an unusually high propensity for creative thought, highly unusual modes of perception, and just plain "seeing" things differently, so ought the Christian reader of the Holy Scriptures who authentically desires to follow the way of Jesus have different perceptual and interpretive senses that will be continually blended in new ways. The blending of these senses will result in a wildly creative desire and ability to draw upon the holy texts in such a way that new paradigms of thought and praxis will result (Brookman, 9).

Synesthesia also involves. Brookman writes that "perhaps, synesthesia provides a great analogy for thinking about the spiritual reading of the Bible, this enterprise of reading the Holy Scriptures as scripture in which we wish to engage" (Brookman, 30). If all these experiences are related to the Biblical text which, according to the classical Christian tradition, is a source and foundation of spirituality, we have here an example of an efficient integration of mood into spiritual experience. From such a perspective the spiritual meaning of the Biblical text can be enhanced by a concrete sense of mood. It is a matter not just of perception but also of attention, imagination and a certain openness. Let us take as an example the short Psalm 131:

> O LORD, my heart is not lifted up;
> my eyes are not raised too high;
> I do not occupy myself with things
> too great and too marvelous for me.
> But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
> like a weaned child with its mother;
> like a weaned child is my soul within me.
> O Israel, hope in the LORD
> from this time forth and forevermore.
> (English Standard Version)

The atmosphere of this psalm is unequivocal. One can describe it with such words as: peace, calm, trust, security, intimacy, tenderness. Different spiritual and theological motives, such as humility, abandonment, trust, submission to God resonate and vibrate with suggestive and poetic images. They compose a wave of concentric images: of raised eyes, of absence of worry, acquired quietness, a weaned child attached to its mother, the total trust of Israel in God. In all these images we have various circles of concrete experience of presence, expressed in a similar tonality with clear and moving emotions. The whole scene seems palpable and involving. It moves the deepest human feelings and activates memories: from our own childhood, from the carefree years when we felt safe, full of peace and without worries – just simply happy. The calming message of this psalm is convincing and overwhelming: it takes away the worries and brings hope.

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One could analyze and present many psalms in this way. Other Biblical books too, or at least some of their more poetic, or suggestive sections, could be analyzed in this or a similar way. One can even try to trace mood in simple, concrete narrations typical of the Gospel. Since the Gospel remains crucial for Christian spirituality, integrating doctrinal and moral character, let us try to look at one text from the perspective of mood. To do so we must choose either a parable or a description of Christ's actions. However, in both cases we are dealing with concrete, clear and meaningful situations which provoke reflection, involvement and transformation. They do this, more or less explicitly, through moods. Let us take the parable of the mustard seed:

> The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches. (Mt 13, 31-32; ESV)

Here the main motive evoking presence is extension from the tiny size of the mustard seed to a large tree. This extension is emphasized and intensified by the process of growth which constitutes the axis of the parable. It gives the impression of solidity and ubiquity. Form here the main emotion of the parable arises: admiration of God's uncompromising dynamism which puts together the most inconspicuous seed and a full-sized tree. The effect is increased by adding information about the birds of the air nesting in the branches. The limited micro-space of the mustard seed is transformed into a suggestive green universe, full of life. All in this image is vivid and suggestive. Simple words increase the powerful effect of the situation described. The listener cannot resist the positive impression brought about both by the seed (which, incidentally, is useful in kitchen) and the impressive full-grown tree that can host birds. Here too many memories from our contacts with nature can be activated. They transmit a message about the dynamic power of life and beauty that results from nature. Such an image must draw us in. The kingdom of heaven appears in it as an attractive, natural reality, close to our physical and psychological aspirations. We can almost breath it in, with the prospect of the life that has gone before. Thus an abstract, doctrinal idea becomes a concrete, attractive and suggestive reality that one would like to enter with the body and all its senses.

Another classical, non-biblical spiritual text to which we shall now refer, has a character very close to that of the Gospel: the situations and the sayings of the Desert Fathers that come down from the most ancient proponents of the Christian spiritual tradition. These texts are close to the Biblical narration, even if they lack the genial mastery of the Gospel. Let us look at two situations described there:

> On another occasion Mark decided to leave Scetis and go to Mount Sinai and live there. His mother sent his abba a message, begging him with tears to send her son out to see her. So the old man made him go. But as he was putting on his sheepskin to go and preparing to take leave of the old man, he suddenly burst into tears and did not go out after all. (*The Sayings*, 146)

This text describes a real and emotionally difficult situation. We find ourselves between two emotional and personal relationships: with the mother and with the spiritual father. It is a tension that is natural, well known in different spiritual traditions and well described in the Gospel. The tension results from the fact that theoretical considerations are not always convincing in the context of natural, human and emotional reactions. From the theological perspective we can talk here about the conflict between choosing God and his supernatural project of life and natural, human relationships that are not wrong, but remain inferior to the absolute value of God. Everything is clear in the light of faith. Faith, however, as grace, is not always obvious and unproblematic. This is a classical theme of spirituality. In the situation described above we witness a conflict that is both for faith and caused by faith. Anyone who tries to follow a spiritual path, will recognize him/herself in the dilemma of the monk Mark. So, we are talking of a real presence both in natural and spiritual life. One cannot be indifferent to this fundamental choice. Both characters are highly emotional: tears are mentioned twice and both the abba and his disciple weep. Both of them seem to understand the complexity and perplexity of the situation. The tears are a visible sign. Even the simple gesture of putting on the sheepskin to leave is given a decisive meaning. The moving character of the situation provokes reflection but also emotional involvement. The message it transmits is clear: the radical choice for God is higher than even the noblest of human relations. One could, of course, ask about the possibility of an integration of these two realities. Today the radicalism of the Desert Fathers is difficult to understand, but it is this radicalism that gives a strong flavor to the mood of the situation and makes it so meaningful and expressive.

Another example of the role of mood in a spiritual text comes from the *Philokalia*, a medieval collection of teachings of oriental spiritual masters. Here we have fewer situations and more teaching. Mood is created by the way of expression, suggestive metaphors and style of rhetoric. It is clear in the following example:

> The radiance of divine beauty is wholly inexpressible: words cannot describe it, nor the ear grasp it. To compare the true light to the rays of the morning star or the brightness of the moon or the light of the sun is to fail totally to do justice to its glory and is as

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inadequate as comparing a pitch-black moonless night to the clearest of noons. (*Philokalia,* V2/356)

This text is an attempt to present the theological idea of "divine beauty" through the metaphor of light. At the same time the inadequacy of such metaphor is emphasized. The tension, but also the "flavor" of this image, aspiring to be a mood, lies in the great disproportion between divine and natural light. This disproportion is increased by the suggestive description of natural light, followed by the statement that such light cannot be compared with the divine light. Thus the sense of delight and inadequacy merge, creating an open space for something more than contemplation: aspiration, desire, nostalgia but also, in consequence activity, involvement. These emotions simultaneously express an intense experience of presence: light gives and favors life. Moreover, light makes visible and transmits images and impressions. The mood enveloped in light attracts, embraces and invites us to enter and participate in it. That is why light has always been very important for spiritual experience – for instance as the second stage of the classical spiritual path, described by Dionysius the Areopagite, namely ~~a~~ purification, illumination and perfection (*On the Heavenly Hierarchy*, III, 2).

The last example is taken from the Western spiritual and mystical tradition. It is a fragment from *A Spiritual Canticle of the Soul* by John of the Cross. As in the previous example, the mood here is generated by the elaboration of a metaphor. This time it is the image of mountains and strands, well known in both the Bible and spiritual texts. Even if John of the Cross is quite concrete in his words, he manages to evoke a suggestive mood. We need to remember that the work under discussion is a commentary on an allegorical poem; the presence of images, therefore, should be of no surprise. Elaborating them serves to widen the eloquence of the poetic verses.

We quote the comment on only one line, taken from the third stanza:

"I will go over mountains and strands." Mountains, which are lofty, signify virtues, partly on account of their height and partly on account of the toil and labor of ascending them; the soul says it will ascend to them in the practice of the contemplative life. Strands, which are low, signify mortifications, penances, and the spiritual exercises, and the soul will add to the active life that of contemplation; for both are necessary in seeking after God and in acquiring virtue. The soul says, in effect, "In searching after my Beloved I will practice great virtue, and abase myself by lowly mortifications and acts of humility, for the way to seek God is to do good works in Him, and to mortify the evil in ourselves, as it is said in the words that follow: "I will gather no flowers." (John of the Cross, *A Spiritual Canticle of the Soul*, III, 5)

As in the previous examples, the author plays here with a tension, that between the image of mountains and the spiritual practice of virtue and the contemplative life. The evocative description of high mountains and low strands makes consideration of the spiritual effort more real. Interestingly, the author does not write about other aspects of mountains. He simply relates their height to the toil and labor of climbing them. In this way the mountains are perceived in a more integral way: besides of the moment of visual admiration, through body and will. Wonder, admiration and perseverance are the components that evoke the mood of mountains. This mood is enhanced by the motifs of ascending and acquiring appear (incomprehensible), referring to the human aspect of climbing mountains. This provides a bridge connecting the experience of mountains with that of spiritual effort and growth, where such values as virtue, mortification and humility appear. The analogy is obvious: progress in the spiritual life is like climbing mountains. In the classical spiritual tradition this is nothing new (it is sufficient to recall John Climacus or John Cassian), but presented in the context of an even vaguely outlined mountain landscape it receives a new, convincing character. The experience of climbing mountains, known to everybody, is a particular and intense existential experience: such an experience necessarily involves being present in an active, committed and highly aware way that generates strong emotions and enlarges our visibility and ability to see. It also serves as an appeal, a message that puts our existence into context. Interacting with the mountains we are also changed by the experience. Spiritual experience goes even further: the climbing it offers is an external event which, however, helps us to transcend our previous style of life.

All these texts express personal spiritual experience. At the same time their intention is to share this experience so that it might resonate in the heart of a reader. Such is the nature of spiritual experience: being strong, personal and transforming, it often seeks to express itself so as to be transmitted to and shared with other people. What serves here as a tool is mood, constructed through images and metaphors but also, in a more general sense, by the rhetoric and style of the text. In this way the texts we have discussed have their own~~,~~ artistic value, independent of their spiritual connotations. However, read and interpreted in their full spiritual context, they clearly go further than an exclusively modal expression and transcend the normal and natural consequences of mood: in this context spiritual experience deepens the sense of the presence, that is more encompassing than natural emotions.

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Despite not being visible, spiritual experience touches and transforms the heart, activating it in the spiritual realm, and precisely this activity drives us to share and transmit what we perceive.

In this paper, we have sought to demonstrate both the affinity and the synergy between art and spirituality. Both arise from human expression, and owing to mood they could be regarded as two different stages of human existential experience. That is why it is important to extend the understanding of mood from an exclusively psychological sense to a philosophical one. Doing this we are able to show the affinity between such an understanding of moods and a modern reception and understanding of spirituality. This affinity allows us to interpret classical spiritual texts in a new way that is closer and more relevant to the mentality and existential experience of the people of today.

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