

AFFECT WITHOUT OBJECT: MOODS AND OBJECTLESS EMOTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Should moods be regarded as intentional states, and, if so, what kind of intentional content do they have? I focus on irritability (understood as an angry mood) and apprehension (understood as a fearful mood), which I examine from the perspective of a teleosemantic theory of content. Eric Lormand has argued that moods are non-intentional states, distinct from emotions; Robert Solomon and Peter Goldie argue that moods are generalised emotions and that they have intentional content of a correspondingly general kind. I present a third model, on which moods are regarded, not as generalised emotions, but as states of vigilance; and I argue that, on this model, moods should be regarded as intentional states of a kind quite distinct from emotions. An advantage of this account is that it allows us to distinguish between a mood of apprehension and an episode of objectless fear.

Key words: emotion, mood, intentionality, teleosemantic theory of content, state of vigilance

1. Preliminaries

1.1. Introduction

Moods play a central role in our psychological lives. We seem to be in some mood or other for much of the time. Moreover, the psychological effects that moods produce are profound and broad-ranging. As a result, moods feature prominently in our attempts to explain and evaluate the way in which people feel, think and behave.

It is not obvious that we should welcome the influence of moods. On one familiar conception, a mood offers a view of reality that is at best distorted and at worst wholly subjective. However, this conception of moods is not universal. For example, Stephen Mulhall has drawn on the work of Cavell and Heidegger to argue for a view of moods as epistemically valuable states, embodying knowledge of the subject's relationship to the world (Mulhall 1996). In this paper, I would like to investigate two questions that relate closely to this issue: namely, whether moods are or involve intentional states of

some kind; and, if so, what kind of intentional content they have. I will end by briefly considering the value of moods as guides to emotion and action.

It is not clear whether the term ‘mood’ picks out a single class of psychological state. We might describe someone as being in a gloomy mood, a suspicious mood, a depressed mood, an elated mood, an optimistic mood, a lazy mood. Some of these states (suspicion, optimism) are associated with a certain style of thinking; others (laziness) with the subject’s general level of motivation. Gloom and elation seem to be primarily affective states, closely associated with a specific type of emotion. Depression, too, seems to be primarily an affective state; but it is associated with a number of different emotions, including sadness and anger.¹

Whether these states belong to a single psychological category is not an issue that I shall address here. Instead, I shall focus on two cases: irritability (or what we might ordinarily refer to as ‘an angry mood’) and apprehension (or what we might ordinarily refer to as ‘a fearful mood’). I have chosen moods that are naturally regarded as affective states because I plan to proceed by investigating the relationship between moods and emotions. It seems helpful to pursue this question by comparing particular moods with emotions with which they are associated. Moreover, irritability and apprehension, as they are characterised here, are each associated with a single emotion – irritability with anger, and apprehension with panicky fear. If we can offer a plausible account of these relatively simple moods, we shall be better placed to account for moods of more complex kinds.

1.2. Two theories of moods

I shall start with a story. Annie has arrived home from work in an irritable mood. As she is preparing dinner, the telephone rings: it is her colleague Bill, who wants to ask her about a problem that has arisen at work. Annie is exasperated by what she regards as an invasion of her personal time. She snaps at Bill and slams the telephone down.

This story involves two affective phenomena: Annie’s irritable mood and her angry emotion. But what is the distinction between them? In this section, I shall set out two existing views of this distinction. Both these theories contrast, in certain respects, with the account that I shall develop in this paper.

The first theory has been defended by Eric Lormand (Lormand 1985).² Lormand argues that moods and emotions belong to distinct psychological categories. According to Lormand, moods differ from emotions in at least one crucial respect: emotions are intentional states, but moods are not. Lormand provides two arguments in support of this view. First, he points out that emotions typically have intentional objects. Typically,

¹ For discussion, see Ekman 1994, p. 57; Griffiths 1997, pp. 248-257.

² See also Roberts 2003, pp. 112-115.

when someone is frightened they are frightened *of* something; when they are angry, they are angry *about* something. Moods do not have intentional objects: to be irritable or apprehensive is not to be irritable or apprehensive about a particular item or event.

Secondly, Lormand appeals to the role that moods play in explaining behaviour. He suggests that, although we can appeal to both moods and emotions to explain behaviour, these explanations do not work in the same way. Consider the following two explanations:

(A) Annie snapped at Bill because she was angry with him for calling her at home.

(B) Annie snapped at Bill because she was in an irritable mood.

(A) explains Annie's behaviour by giving her reasons or grounds for behaving as she did. In what follows, I shall refer to this kind of explanation as an 'intentional explanation'. In contrast, (B) is naturally understood as explaining Annie's behaviour as an instance of a familiar causal regularity. I shall refer to this kind of explanation as a 'regularising explanation'.³

Neither of these arguments is decisive. Lormand is surely correct to point out that moods are not typically about a particular item or event. But this does not establish that they have no intentional content of any kind. There can be intentional states whose content does not concern a particular item or event, but rather the occurrence of a situation of a certain type. The judgement that it is raining or the desire that things should turn out well are states of this kind. It is possible, then, that the content of a mood typically concerns the occurrence of a certain type of situation.

Secondly, while Lormand is right to point out that we ordinarily appeal to moods to regularise, rather than give grounds for, people's behaviour, this does not establish that moods are not intentional states. For one thing, there may be strong theoretical or empirical grounds to question our commonsense understanding of the relationship between moods and behaviour. Less controversially, intentional states can feature in regularising explanations. For example, consider the following explanation:

(C) Annie agreed to Bill's request for a pay rise because she had just noticed that a large spider was marching towards her.

We could not understand this explanation without understanding the content of Annie's perceptual judgement. Nevertheless, (C) does not explain Annie's behaviour by citing the grounds for her behaviour; instead, it draws on our knowledge of the way in which people regularly behave when they notice that they are about to encounter something dangerous or disgusting. So, even if moods do ordinarily feature in regularising

³ There are some who regard intentional explanations as a species of regularising explanation. For them, the point would be that, while (A) and (B) are both regularising explanations, (A), but not (B), is also an intentional explanation.

explanations, this does not by itself entail that they are not intentional states. I shall return to this issue at the end of the paper.

Robert Solomon has proposed a rather different account of the relationship between moods and emotions. Solomon holds that moods are intentional states: the content of a mood, he suggests, concerns the world in general. Moreover, he denies that moods and emotions are different categories of psychological state. On his view, moods and emotions can be placed on a single scale: at one end of the scale, we find emotional reactions to specific objects; at the other end we find moody responses to the world in general. Solomon puts the point as follows:

An emotion focuses its attention on more-or-less particular objects and situations, whereas a mood enlarges its grasp to attend to the world as a whole, without focusing on any particular object or situation...Moods, in their indiscriminate universality, are metaphysical generalizations of the emotions. (Solomon 1993, p. 71)

Peter Goldie takes a similar line: he argues that ‘What, in part, distinguishes emotions from moods is that emotions have more specific objects than moods. The distinction is thus a matter of degree’ (Goldie 2000, p. 17).⁴

This account of moods as generalised emotions has some attractive features. In particular, its adherents resist moving from the claim that moods are not about some particular item or some narrowly specified situation to the claim that moods have no intentional content at all. Moreover, they are well-placed to account for any features that moods and emotions have in common.

Nevertheless, it might be objected that the theory underplays the differences between moods and emotions. In particular, it is not obvious how the account will distinguish between a mood and an objectless emotion, such as objectless panic or rage. Objectless emotions could be characterised much as Solomon and Goldie describe moods; yet, arguably, objectless emotions are distinct from moods. Indeed, Lormand’s account faces a similar objection: his first argument, if it succeeded, would imply that both objectless fear and an apprehensive mood are non-intentional states. Why, then, is apprehension a mood and objectless fear an emotion?

There are several ways in which the proponent of these theories might deal with this worry. They might argue that it is wrong to suppose that the content of an objectless emotion is as general as the content of a mood (Goldie 2000, pp. 17-18). Alternatively, it might be suggested that an objectless emotion should be regarded as a particularly intense or short-lived mood. In what follows, I will argue that there is room for a third account of this distinction – one that rests on a conception of moods as intentional states of a kind distinct from emotions.

⁴ See also Goldie 2000, p. 143. Compare Lyons 1980, p. 76; Frijda 1994; Nussbaum 2000, p. 133.

The account that I shall present has a speculative character, in that it turns on the adoption of a certain view of intentionality, together with a specific set of empirical assumptions.⁵ My aim here is not to establish its truth, but rather to call attention to it as a viable alternative to the existing accounts. I shall argue that the account does a good job of explaining the characteristic features of irritability and apprehension; and it suggests a clear distinction between these moods and an objectless emotion – one that I take to be both initially plausible and open to empirical test.

1.3. A teleosemantic approach

The account that I shall present is underpinned by a teleosemantic theory of intentional content.⁶ The version of the teleosemantic theory that I adopt is that developed by Ruth Millikan, subject to a few modifications of my own (Millikan 1984; Price 2001). In this section, I shall summarise the relevant features of this account.

On this version of the teleosemantic theory, a psychological state will count as an intentional state if it meets two criteria:

(1) States of that kind are produced by mechanisms that have a certain function: that is, to ensure that, whenever a certain condition C obtains, a certain type of psychological or behavioural response is produced.

(2) States of that kind normally carry the information that C obtains.⁷

The notions of function and normality on which this account depends are historical notions. In particular, it is important to note that normality is intended to be an explanatory, not a statistical, notion. To say that an item is behaving normally, in this sense, is to say that it is behaving just as earlier items of the same kind behaved, where the fact that they behaved in that way helps to explain the persistence of items of that kind (Millikan 1984, pp. 33-34). What is normal, in this sense, must sometimes have occurred; but it may be atypical, even rare.

Pain will count as an intentional state, on this account. The mechanisms that produce pain function to ensure that, when injured, the subject behaves in a certain way, forms certain beliefs, adopts certain goals, and so on; moreover, pain normally carries the information that the subject has been injured. As this example suggests, the definition is a relatively liberal one. Given these criteria, beliefs, desires, and perceptions will count as

⁵ Any account of moods will need to assume some theory of intentionality and some set of empirical claims. However, I accept that some of the empirical claims that I rely on here – particularly those concerning the function of moods – are particularly hard to establish.

⁶ Much (though perhaps not all) of what I say could also be expressed within a causal-functionalist theory of intentional content.

⁷ The notion of information on which I am relying here is much weaker than the notion characterised by Fred Dretske (Dretske 1981, pp. 115f.). For a state of type S to carry the information that a condition of type C has occurred, it is enough that C has occurred, and that the probability of C given S is greater than the probability of C alone. See Lloyd 1989, p. 64; Price 2001, pp. 91-93.

intentional states; but so will much simpler states, such as the visual signal that triggers the eye blink reflex.⁸

Intentional content comes in two forms. The content of some states – states that have indicative or descriptive content – is identical with the information that they normally carry. Factual judgements and perceptual states have descriptive content. Other states – states that have imperative or directive content – represent an activity to be performed or an outcome to be achieved.⁹ Desires and intentions have directive content.

Many intentional states possess a combination of descriptive and directive content. For example, pain both signals that an injury has occurred and motivates actions designed to cope with the situation. As Millikan points out, it might be argued that evaluative or normative judgements, such as the judgement that something is dangerous or offensive, also possess a combination of descriptive and directive content, since they function both to represent how things are and to generate further desires or actions (Millikan 1995, p. 191). States that possess a combination of descriptive and directive content might be characterised as *appraisals*, in that they represent a certain kind of situation as to be sought or to be avoided.

However, not every intentional state can be ascribed directive content. Some intentional states – for example, the eye blink signal – function simply to trigger a fixed response whenever a certain type of situation occurs. There is no need to suppose that these states do more than indicate that a situation of that type has occurred. In contrast, some intentional states function to initiate an inferential process in which a response is *selected* in order to bring about a certain outcome. In this case, it makes sense to suppose that the state represents that outcome as a goal. So, the claim that pain can be ascribed directive content implies that pain does more than simply trigger a set of reflex responses; it implies that it motivates certain kinds of action – nursing the injury, for example.¹⁰

Are moods intentional states? If the theory that I have sketched in this section is correct, this will depend on the answers to two questions. First, has getting into a mood sometimes helped people to respond more effectively to a situation of a certain kind? Secondly, on at least some of those occasions, have moods carried the information that such a situation has arisen? If these questions could be answered in the affirmative, then we could conclude that moods are intentional states.

⁸ I use the term 'signal' to refer to an intentional state that functions to trigger a stereotypical response. See Price 2001, p. 78.

⁹ States with pure directive content will normally carry a particular kind of information, namely that circumstances are such that the activity or outcome represented is likely to promote the subject's well-being or to satisfy some existing goal. Hence they satisfy the definition of an intentional state offered above. However, this information is not what these states represent (Price 2001, p. 142).

¹⁰ See Price 2001, pp. 138-141. Contrast Millikan 1984, pp. 116-8; 1995.

2. *Contrasting moods and emotions*

2.1. **Emotion, mood and function**

In this section, I shall present a brief account of the moods of irritability and apprehension and the emotions of anger and panicky fear. My aim is to explore the similarities and differences between these moods and their corresponding emotions. I shall end by considering what kind of function, if any, we might ascribe to these states.

Like many recent writers, I take it that emotions are complex states, involving an organised pattern of psychological and physiological changes, initiated by an appraisal or evaluation of some kind.¹¹ Within this view, there is room for a number of controversies. One controversy concerns which changes should be regarded as components of an emotional occurrence, and which as effects or accompaniments. Another concerns how we should characterise the appraisals that initiate these changes – as evaluative judgements, as complexes of thoughts and desires, or as states of some other kind. In this paper, I shall sidestep both these controversies. I shall refer to the changes ‘involved in’ emotional occurrences, without making a distinction between components, effects and accompaniments. And I shall refer to ‘emotional appraisals’ without taking a stance on what type of psychological state we should take these states to be.¹²

Moods, such as irritability and apprehension, also appear to be complex states, involving a range of different psychological and physiological changes.¹³ What kinds of change, then, are involved in emotions and moods?

1. There seem to be some behavioural changes that are common to both moods and emotions: for example, both irritability and anger might prompt Annie to drum her fingers or pace about. In the case of anger, it is generally accepted that these changes in behaviour have an expressive function, allowing other agents to recognise the subject’s frame of mind. It is possible that they play the same function in the case of moods (Goldie 2000, pp. 147-8). Nevertheless, they are not motivated: they are not actions that Annie selects in order to bring about a particular goal.

2. As well as triggering expressive behaviour, anger and fear characteristically motivate certain kinds of action. Once Annie has become angry, we would expect her to be motivated to respond to Bill’s behaviour, and to do so in certain predictable ways – by intimidating or attacking him. Similarly, a fearful subject will be motivated to avoid the threat that has prompted their fear – by fleeing, or cowering, or lashing out. In addition, both anger and fear prompt the subject to treat the situation as a priority, overriding

¹¹ See especially Ekman 1992; Griffiths 1997; Tooby and Cosmides 1990; Lazarus 1991; Johnson-Laird and Oatley 1992; J.E. LeDoux 1998; de Sousa 1987.

¹² For further discussion, see Price 2006.

¹³ See the contributions published in Ekman and Davidson 1994, particularly those by Frijda, Ekman, and Davidson.

other motivations that they may have. In contrast, the moods of irritability and apprehension do not appear to motivate the subject to act.¹⁴

3. Although these moods do not motivate actions, they do influence other psychological states, particularly emotions. When someone is in an irritable mood, they become angry much more easily than usual; when they are apprehensive, they are more likely to become afraid. Moods also seem to influence judgements of certain kinds. For example, there is some evidence that a negative mood biases people's judgements about the probability of negative events.¹⁵

4. Both emotions and moods appear to involve other cognitive changes. When a subject is angry or fearful, memories and thoughts concerning similar situations encountered in the past come more easily to mind, allowing the subject to draw on past experience in deciding exactly how to respond to the situation.¹⁶ Anger and fear also seem to influence attention: when someone is angry or fearful, their attention is strongly focused on the offensive or threatening aspects of their situation. There is some evidence that moody subjects, too, are more inclined both to notice and to recollect information congruent with their mood.¹⁷

5. Both emotions and moods involve physiological changes, apparently designed to prepare the body for action. The physiological changes involved in irritability and apprehension are similar to those involved in anger and fear, though they are typically less intense.

6. Finally, both emotions and moods typically involve feelings. Exactly how we should characterise emotional and moody feelings is a complex issue. But I take it that these emotions and moods typically involve feelings at least in the sense that the subject is typically aware of the physiological and psychological changes that they are undergoing.

As we have seen, the psychological and physiological changes involved in irritability and apprehension overlap to some extent with the changes involved in anger and fear. However, there are some key differences. In particular, while anger and fear motivate specific actions designed to resolve the situation that has prompted the emotional response, irritability and apprehension affect the subject's actions only indirectly, by influencing their emotions and judgements. In addition, while both moods and emotions involve physiological changes which prepare the subject for action, in moods these

¹⁴ Here, I am denying only that moods are themselves motivations. I have not excluded the possibility that moody states might help to generate motivations by becoming involved in processes of practical reasoning. It seems fairly obvious to me that this is not so; but I do not have space to discuss this here.

¹⁵ For discussion of the effect of moods on judgement, see Morris 1989, pp. 71-99.

¹⁶ For discussion of the cognitive changes involved in emotion, see Bower 1994.

¹⁷ The evidence for these effects is difficult to interpret. For a survey and discussion, see Rusting 1998.

changes are less intense. Might these differences tell us anything about the functions, if any, played by these different states?

The idea that emotions have functions is familiar enough. Philosophers and psychologists have long suggested that emotions enable us to deal with situations critical to our survival or well-being. The account given above suggests that angry and fearful appraisals contribute to this outcome in a number of ways: by prompting the subject to treat the situation as a priority, by motivating the subject to produce certain kinds of action, and by triggering psychological and physiological changes that prepare the subject to act.

In contrast, the idea that moods, such as irritability or apprehension, might have functions is rather more controversial. These moods might be regarded as a motley collection of symptoms, which, like the symptoms of disease, have no particular function. Alternatively, they might be regarded as abnormally weak or diffuse emotions, which have been generated in the absence of the proper conditions and are unable to perform their proper functions.

However, there is a third possibility: it is possible to view the psychological and physiological changes involved in these moods as working together to produce a potentially beneficial effect. An irritable or apprehensive subject will be on the lookout for a certain kind of situation; and, should it arise, will respond more quickly and more robustly. For example, an irritable subject is less likely to miss a dig or a jibe, and more likely to react to such an offence with a strong display that will deter further provocations. This could be beneficial in a situation in which a subject is particularly likely to be treated offensively by another agent. Similarly, an apprehensive subject will be on the lookout for danger, and will react more quickly to a threat; this could be beneficial if the subject is in an unusually hazardous environment.

With this in mind, it might be suggested that the moods of irritability and apprehension do have functions – functions that are quite distinct from the functions played by anger and fear. We might express the contrast as follows: while the function of anger or fear is to enable the subject to deal effectively with an offence or threat that has actually occurred, the function of irritability or apprehension is to adapt the subject to an environment in which there is an increased probability that an offence or a threat will occur. Given a historical notion of function of the kind assumed here, this need not imply that these moods typically succeed in performing this function. It need imply only that they have sometimes played this function in the past – often enough to have made some contribution to the subject's well-being (or to the well-being of their ancestors).

Claims about function are, of course, difficult to establish. My claim here is not that moods of irritability and apprehension do have this function, but only that this is a possibility that is worth taking seriously. Certainly, there are some considerations that can be advanced in its favour – the most obvious being that it would explain why these

moods take the form they do. In particular, the account makes sense of the fact that these moods influence the subject's emotions and judgements, but do not generate motivations to act.

In contrast, it is harder to see how the thesis that moods are generalised emotions can explain this feature of moods. Goldie appeals to the idea that moods lack a specific object: moods, he suggests 'are generally not specific enough to explain specific action' (Goldie 2000, p. 147). However, while this might explain why moods do not motivate actions targeted at specific individuals or situations, it does not explain why they do not motivate responses of a more generalised kind. For example, if an apprehensive subject feels that everything is threatening, we might expect them to be motivated to flee from everything, or perhaps just to cower. If moods are less intense than emotions, the motivation might be relatively weak; but it is not obvious why it should not be there at all.¹⁸

Still, this is not a decisive point, since other explanations may be forthcoming. To decide between these accounts, further theoretical and empirical investigation is required. At this point, then, I claim only that the thesis that irritability and apprehension function as states of vigilance is a plausible alternative to other existing accounts, and that it is sufficiently plausible to merit further philosophical and empirical investigation.

In what follows, I shall go on to explore what such an account might imply concerning the intentional content of moods and the contrast between moods and objectless emotions. I shall argue that this account allows us to make a much sharper distinction between a mood and an objectless emotion than is possible on other approaches; and I shall suggest one way in which this distinction might be open to empirical investigation.

2.2. Moods and information

In the last section, I suggested that it might be possible to regard moods of irritability and apprehension as states of vigilance, which function to prepare the subject for the occurrence of an offence or a threat. If this account were correct, these moods would meet the first criterion of intentionality that I set out above. However, before we could conclude that they are intentional states, there is a second criterion to be met: they must sometimes carry the information that an offence or a threat is more likely than usual to occur.

One of the most striking features of moods is the variety of ways in which they can be caused. If Annie is feeling irritable this evening, this may be because she has recently experienced a sequence of frustrating events. Alternatively, her irritable mood might be triggered by her beliefs about the evening ahead: perhaps she believes that her father,

¹⁸ It might be countered that an apprehensive subject is indeed (very weakly) motivated to flee from everything that they encounter. But it seems more accurate to say that an apprehensive subject is *poised* to flee: they are on the lookout for danger and on their toes.

with whom she has a difficult relationship, is about to telephone her. Moods can also be triggered by internal, physiological changes: Annie may be irritable because she is tired or because she has had too many cups of coffee.

If we consider the different ways in which irritable moods can be caused, it is possible to see that, on some occasions, they do carry information about how things are likely to turn out in the near future. This is particularly evident if we consider cases in which an irritable mood is triggered by the belief that a certain type of event is likely to occur – for example, Annie’s belief that her father is about to telephone her. Again, an irritable mood that has been triggered by a series of annoying incidents will also sometimes carry the information that the subject is in an unusually challenging or hostile environment. Similarly, it is plausible that a mood of apprehension will sometimes carry the information that the subject is in an unusually threatening situation. If so, these moods will indeed meet the second criterion mentioned above.

Once again, it is important to bear in mind that a teleosemanticist can make this claim without supposing that moods always or even typically carry this information. All that is required is that moods have sometimes carried information of this kind. In other situations – for example, when triggered by coffee – moods may be illusory states. Indeed, it may turn out that moods are illusory most of the time. I shall return to this point at the end of the paper.

2.3. Emotional appraisals and moody signals

In this section, I shall consider how we might move from these claims about the functions of emotions and moods to an account of their content. In order to avoid any controversy about which psychological and physiological changes are components of emotional episodes and which are effects or accompaniments, I shall not consider angry or fearful episodes as a whole. Rather, I shall investigate what content might be ascribed to the appraisals that initiate episodes of anger and fear. Similarly, I shall assume that irritable or apprehensive moods are triggered by intentional states of some kind, and I shall consider what content might be ascribed to these states.

As we have seen, angry and fearful appraisals motivate the subject to produce certain kinds of action. Hence, an angry or a fearful appraisal will have directive content. They will also have a descriptive content, registering the occurrence of an offence or a threat. This is because they are supposed to motivate angry or fearful behaviour only in response to events of these kinds. So, for example, we might express the content of Annie’s angry appraisal very roughly as follows:

*Bill has acted in a pretty offensive way by telephoning me in the evening; ensure that the offence is not repeated by intimidating him or by attacking him now.*¹⁹

¹⁹ The purpose of this ascription of content is to indicate roughly which states of affairs this appraisal is supposed

This state represents Bill's behaviour as calling for a certain kind of response: it is because of this that it seems right to characterise it as an appraisal, rather than as a signal or a factual belief.

In contrast, there is no reason to suppose that the states that trigger irritable or apprehensive moods will possess directive content. As we have seen, although these moods can modify behaviour, they do not motivate actions, and so there is no reason to suppose that they represent some outcome or activity as a goal. In contrast, the account suggested above does imply that the states that trigger these moods can be ascribed descriptive content concerning the likelihood that an offence or a threat is about to occur. So, for example, we might express the content of the state that triggers Annie's irritable mood roughly as follows:

It is more likely than usual that people will behave offensively towards me in the near future.

Since states of this kind lack directive content, I shall not refer to these states as 'appraisals': they will be signals, or perhaps beliefs.²⁰ In what follows, I shall refer to them simply as 'signals'.

The content of Annie's irritable signal will reflect the content of the emotional appraisals that it functions to prompt. Both the emotional appraisals and the moody signal will present the situation in terms of categories that reflect the subject's most pressing needs or interests. But this is not to say that the content of either state concerns a wholly subjective or internal reality: whether things are as these states present them to be is a perfectly objective matter.

Annie's irritable signal concerns the occurrence of a situation of a certain type. In contrast, her angry appraisal concerns a particular item – her colleague Bill. This is because the appraisal functions to motivate Annie, not merely to intimidate or attack, but to intimidate or attack a particular person – that is, the person who is the source of the offence. As a result, her appraisal will identify Bill both as the source of the offence, and as the target of her retaliation.

However, not all emotional appraisals function to motivate behaviour directed at a particular person or object. In particular, some cases of fear are better understood as responses to the subject's situation, rather than to a particular item. Consider the case of Clark, who experiences an attack of panic on an aeroplane: he spends the flight curled up into a ball, refusing to move. Clark's behaviour is not designed to protect him from

to register and what kinds of action it is supposed to motivate. It should not be taken to imply that the appraisal shares the same complex, propositional structure as the sentence that I have used. The issue will depend on whether the appraisal is to be regarded as a judgement or belief, or as a psychological state of some less sophisticated kind. This point applies to all the ascriptions of content that follow.

²⁰ Whether 'signal' or 'belief' is the correct term depends on whether these states are used in practical reasoning. See note 14.

a particular person or object: it is designed to protect him from injury, no matter what the source. We might express the content of his fearful appraisal as follows:

Things are extremely threatening in that I am trapped inside a flimsy container high above the ground; make sure that I am not injured, by fleeing, or by lashing out, or by cowering now.

In this respect, then, Clark's fearful appraisal is no more specific than Annie's irritable signal.

However, there is one respect in which the content of both emotional appraisals is more specific than the content of Annie's irritable signal. Annie's angry appraisal represents the specific nature of Bill's offence; similarly, Clark's fearful appraisal identifies the specific nature of the threatening situation. This is because, if the claims that I made earlier are correct, one function of these emotional appraisals is to enable the subject to call up memories and beliefs concerning the type of situation they are in, information on which they will be able to draw in order to select a response.

In contrast, the content of Annie's irritable signal does not specify the kind of offence that she is likely to encounter. This is because its function is to prepare the subject to deal with whatever kind of offence they might encounter in the near future. So there is no reason to suppose that the information carried by a moody signal will normally distinguish between different kinds of offence.

Finally, the content of angry and fearful appraisals will include a temporal element. The descriptive content of Annie's appraisal concerns an event that has occurred in the recent past, while Clark's appraisal concerns his current situation. The content of irritable and apprehensive signals, in contrast, does not concern the present or the past, but the near future.^{21 22}

If the account offered here is correct, it implies that these moody signals are not a subclass of emotional appraisal. There is a sense in which it is true, as Solomon and Goldie suggest, that the content of irritable and apprehensive signals is less specific than the content of angry and fearful appraisals. But the differences go deeper than this. The descriptive content of these moody signals does not concern the occurrence of an offence or a threat; rather, it concerns the likelihood that an offence or a threat will occur in the near future. Moreover, while angry and fearful appraisals have directive content, irritable and apprehensive signals do not, because it is not the function of these signals to motivate the subject to act.

²¹ Since the content of these signals concerns only the near future, one way in which an irritable or apprehensive mood can be inappropriate is by lasting too long. In this respect, moods contrast with personality traits. Clearly though, the differences go deeper than this. In particular, I would not classify personality traits as intentional states.

²² It is an interesting question whether the content of all moody signals is concerned with the future, but I shall not consider that here.

2.4. Apprehension and objectless fear

We are now in a position to consider the distinction between a mood and an objectless emotion. Consider the case of Dannie, who wakes in the night, in the grip of panic. When asked to describe her experience the next day, she insists that she was not afraid of anything in particular: she just had an overwhelming and inexplicable feeling that something terrible was about to happen.

As we have seen, Goldie argues that the content of an emotion is more specific than the content of a mood. He writes,

Your fear on waking may have no very specific object – the dark, the shape of the curtains, the strange noise which woke you – but it is still an emotional experience and not a mood. And the next morning, when your fear is gone and you remain anxious, it is natural to say that you are anxious about everything this morning, or about nothing in particular, or that you are anxious about everything *and* nothing. (Goldie 2000, pp. 17-18)

As Goldie describes it, then, the emotion of fear is directed on to some specifiable feature of the subject's situation; in contrast, the mood that follows has no specific focus: it is directed onto everything.

However, the fears that Goldie describes in this passage do not seem to be objectless fears of the kind suffered by Dannie. A sudden fear of the dark or of a strange noise or shape may not be well-founded, but in each case it does seem possible to say why someone might find these things frightening: these fears do not have the unfathomable quality characteristic of objectless fear. It is plausible that many cases of night-time fear are of the kind that Goldie describes. But there do also seem to be cases like that of Dannie, in which the subject is unable to identify anything as the focus of their fear, and can say only that they are – inexplicably – afraid. Moreover, it seems to be primarily this kind of case that we have in mind when we talk of objectless fear.

How might we characterise Dannie's emotional state? Like Clark's fear of flying, it is not directed at any particular object or person. Unlike Clark, however, Dannie is unable to identify the nature of the threat that confronts her. It seems to be this, rather than the absence of a particular threatening object, that accounts for the inexplicable quality of her fear. (Indeed, we might compare Dannie's objectless fear with the equally inexplicable fear of someone who finds that they are terrified of a particular item – a pipe cleaner, say – without being able to say what it is about the object that terrifies them.) If this is right, Dannie's fear will be no more specific than a mood of apprehension.

It follows that, if moods are generalised emotions, Dannie's objectless fear and a mood of apprehension will be similar in significant ways. On this account, any difference between the two states will be a difference of degree – for example, of duration or intensity – not in the pattern of psychological and physiological changes that they in-

volve. Earlier, for example, I mentioned Goldie's suggestion that moods fail to motivate actions because they lack a specific object. Given that Dannie's fear is no more specific, this should imply that Dannie's fear, too, will not motivate her to act. Conversely, if it is claimed that Dannie's objectless fear does motivate action, we might expect an apprehensive mood to do so as well, though perhaps with less intensity.

In contrast, the account that I have offered here suggests that there will be two significant differences between the content of Dannie's fearful appraisal and the content of an apprehensive signal. First, the descriptive content of these states, while equally general, is not the same. Dannie's fearful appraisal, like other fearful appraisals, represents the presence of a threat, whereas the content of the apprehensive signal concerns the likelihood that some threatening situation is about to occur.

Secondly, like any other fearful appraisal, Dannie's appraisal has the function to motivate action. So, on this account, it will have directive content. Admittedly, Dannie has no information to help her to select an appropriate response. But she may still be motivated to act in some way consistent with her fear. We might expect her to hover, unable to decide whether to run away or to hide. Or it may be that, for fearful subjects, flight is the default option: if so, we might expect her to experience an urge to flee. In contrast, we would expect the apprehensive subject to be poised to flee, but not to experience an urge to flee, or to be torn between fleeing and hiding.

On this account, then, we can express the content of Dannie's fearful appraisal roughly as follows:

Things are extremely threatening in that [...]; make sure that I am not injured now, by fleeing now, or by lashing out now, or by cowering now.

The gap in square brackets highlights what is abnormal about Dannie's appraisal: it fails to carry any information about the nature of the threat that confronts her. In contrast, the content of an apprehensive signal can be expressed in something like the following way:

It is more likely than usual that a threatening situation will arise in the near future.

If this is right, Dannie's fearful appraisal and an apprehensive signal are responses to different kinds of situation and affect the subject's behaviour in different ways. There is a significant contrast here with the thesis that moods are generalised emotions. Moreover, it is a contrast that is open to empirical investigation.²³

²³ There is evidence that subjects experiencing states of objectless panicky fear are strongly motivated to flee, though there is some controversy about whether this is a direct result of their emotional state, or a reaction to its aversive character (Barlow 2002, p. 123).

3. Moods: grounds or (merely) causes?

Consider once again the following explanation:

(B) Annie snapped at Bill because she was in an irritable mood.

As I mentioned earlier, Lormand points out that (B) is naturally regarded as a regularising rather than an intentional explanation. Lormand suggests that this implies that moods are not intentional states. However, there are two ways in which we might respond to this objection: we might question the commonsense assumption that moods can feature only in regularising explanations of human behaviour; or we might attempt to reconcile this commonsense assumption with the claim that moods are intentional states. In this section, I shall investigate this issue.

As we have seen, moods generate actions only indirectly, by influencing the subject's emotions and judgements. Hence if Annie's irritable mood provides grounds for her snapping at Bill, it will do so only indirectly, by providing grounds for her anger at his telephone call. So, in order to decide whether we might appeal to Annie's mood in giving an intentional explanation of her behaviour, we need to begin by considering whether Annie's mood provides grounds for her emotion. Consider the following explanation:

(D) Annie became angry with Bill because she was in an irritable mood.

Might (D) be regarded as an intentional explanation? The issue depends on how Annie's irritable mood helps to generate her anger. I shall consider two possible explanations of how this occurs. These explanations are not mutually exclusive. However, to the extent that each is correct, they support rather different views of the relationship between Annie's irritability and her anger.

One possibility is that Annie's mood helps to generate her anger by increasing her sensitivity to certain kinds of cue: for example, perhaps Annie's irritability makes her more likely to take the lateness of Bill's call as strong grounds for construing his action as offensive. On this scenario, it does look as if we could make sense of Annie's angry reaction in the light of the information normally carried by her mood. Her mood normally carries the information that people are more likely than usual to treat her offensively; this information favours an angry interpretation of Bill's behaviour, meaning that Annie requires less in the way of additional evidence to warrant her anger. So, on this scenario, Annie's mood does provide grounds for her angry appraisal.

If this scenario turns out to be correct, the commonsense assumption that moods cannot feature in intentional explanations will turn out to conflict with the account of moods that I have offered here. We would have to decide whether to reject the account in order to preserve this commonsense assumption or whether to reject the commonsense assumption. But we should not presume that the commonsense assumption can-

not be revised. Further investigation might reveal that it rests on mistaken assumptions about the function of moods or about the way in which moods produce emotions.

However, there is a second, less disruptive scenario. It is possible that a mood influences the subject's emotions indirectly, by focusing the subject's attention on certain aspects of the situation. On this scenario, Annie's irritability disposes her to become angry with Bill because it focuses her attention on his lack of consideration, and away from other features of the situation – for example, the urgency of his problem. Annie's irritability makes sense of her shift of attention. But her shift of attention is not itself an intentional state: it causes, rather than grounds, her angry appraisal. On this scenario, Annie's irritability does not ground her angry appraisal; rather, it explains how she comes to have the grounds that she has.²⁴ On this second scenario, then, there is no conflict between the claim that moods are intentional states and the commonsense intuition that they feature only in regularising explanations.

4. Moods as guides

I have argued that moods such as irritability and apprehension might function as states of vigilance, which are supposed to be produced in response to a change in the probability that a certain type of situation will occur. Moreover, I have suggested that, if this is right, moods can be regarded as intentional states, which represent how things are likely to turn out in the immediate future. This might prompt us to ask whether we ought to regard these moods as valuable states: states that embody knowledge about how things are and work to ensure that our emotional appraisals are more likely to fit our situation. I would like to end by briefly suggesting some reasons why this need not be the case.

If irritable and apprehensive signals are intentional states, then, given a teleosemantic theory of content, it follows that signals of this kind have sometimes carried information about how things are likely to turn out. However, as I mentioned earlier, it does not follow that this is typically the case. In discussing emotions such as anger and fear, Paul Griffiths argues that the appraisals that produce these responses function to alert us to situations that we cannot afford to miss; as a result, he suggests, we should expect the mechanisms that produce these appraisals to operate on a hair trigger (Griffiths 1997, p. 95). It may turn out that the mechanisms that produce irritable and apprehensive signals are equally sensitive. So the claim that irritable and apprehensive signals are intentional states is consistent with the possibility that they are often incorrect.

²⁴ It is possible to account for (C) in a similar way. Annie's judgement that there is a spider heading her way is not her grounds for agreeing to Bill's request. Rather, it explains why she failed to attend to the grounds that she had for refusing it.

Moreover, even in a case in which an irritable signal presents things as they are, it cannot be assumed that the effect of such a signal is to ensure that the subject's emotional appraisals are themselves correct. On the account that I have set out here, it might be said that an irritable signal functions to attune the subject's emotions to their situation. But this claim need not be interpreted to mean that its function is to ensure that the subject becomes angry if and only if an offence has occurred. It might mean only that its function is to prevent the subject from overlooking an offence, even at the cost of a false alarm. If the mechanisms that produce angry appraisals are on a hair trigger, the effect of an irritable signal may be to ease the trigger further still. The presence of an irritable mood may make it even less likely that the subject will overlook a jibe, but only at the expense of making it more likely that the subject's anger is disproportionate or misplaced.

Moreover, if an irritable signal influences the subject's response partly by focusing their attention on certain aspects of the situation, then one of its effects will be to prevent them from attending to considerations that might have elicited a different emotional response. It is possible to ask, not only whether a particular emotional reaction is adequately grounded, but also whether the subject's emotional response overall is well-balanced or reasonable.²⁵ Perhaps Annie has adequate grounds for feeling angry with Bill. Nevertheless, had she not been in an irritable mood, she might also have recognised features of the situation that called for other kinds of emotion: compassion for Bill's anxiety, pride in his reliance on her, and so on. So, one consequence of her irritable mood may be that her overall response to Bill's call is unreasonable or unbalanced.

The account that I have offered in this paper, then, does not necessarily imply an optimistic view of the value of moods such as irritability and apprehension. It may turn out that the mechanisms that produce these moods are designed for sensitivity rather than accuracy. Moreover, even if these moods sometimes succeed in ensuring that we approach certain kinds of situation with an appropriate vigilance, they may do so at the risk of prompting emotional responses that are disproportionate, misplaced, or unbalanced overall. If the view that I have presented here is correct, we should reject the view that moods are wholly subjective states; but it does not by itself imply that we should reject the commonsense assumption that moods are unreliable guides to emotion and action.²⁶

²⁵ See de Sousa 1987, p. 187.

²⁶ Earlier versions of this paper were read at an Open University seminar in March 2004 and at a seminar at the Institut Jean Nicod in April 2004. I am grateful to the participants at both events for helpful comments. I am also grateful to Tim Chappell and Keith Frankish for valuable comments on a more recent draft.

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