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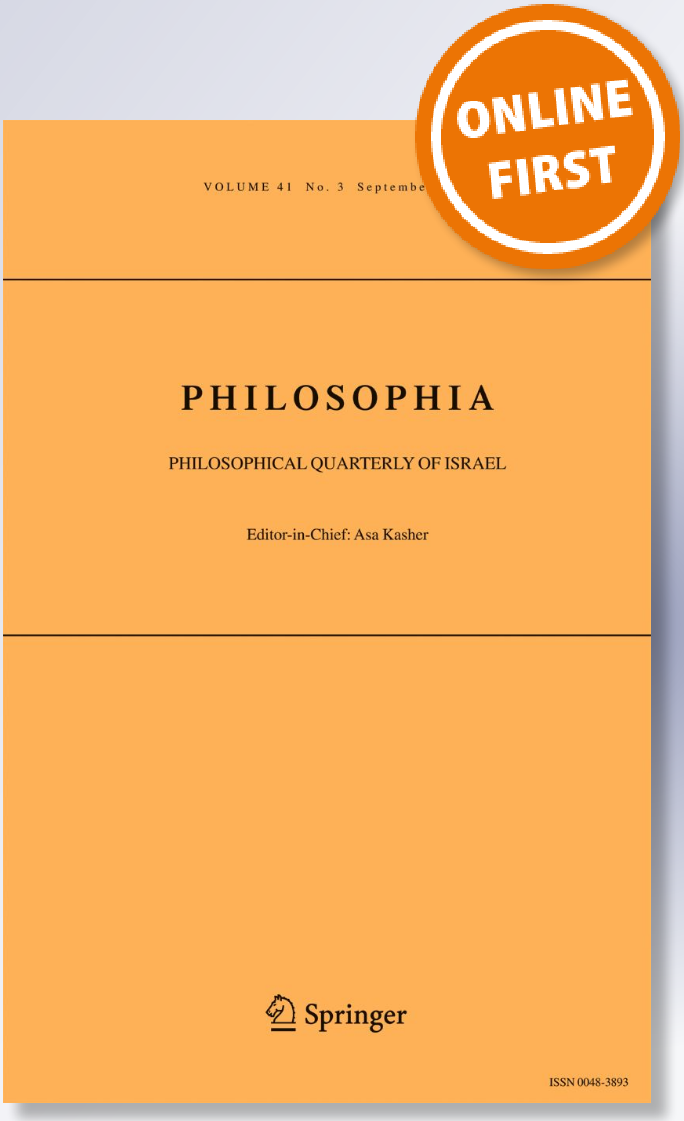

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Moods Are Not Colored Lenses: Perceptualism and the Phenomenology of Moods

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Abstract Being in a mood—such as an anxious, irritable, depressed, tranquil, or cheerful mood—tends to alter the way we react emotionally to the particular objects we encounter. But how, exactly, do moods alter the way we experience particular objects? Perceptualism, a popular approach to understanding affective experiences, holds that moods function like "colored lenses," altering the way we perceive the evaluative properties of the objects we encounter. In this essay, I offer a phenomenological analysis of the experience of being in a mood that illustrates the limitations of the colored lens metaphor and demonstrates the basic inadequacy of the perceptualist account of moods. I argue that when we are in a mood, it is common to experience a kind of "emotional disconnection" in which we perceive evaluative properties that would normally elicit strong emotional reactions from us, but nonetheless we find that, in our present mood, we remain emotionally numb to these perceptions. Such experiences of "seeing but not feeling" are difficult to understand from within the perceptualist paradigm. Building on the work of Martin Heidegger, I sketch an alternative, phenomenological analysis of moods that can better account for experiences of emotional disconnection. On this alternative account, being in a mood does not merely alter the *content* of our perceptions but, rather, alters the way we interpret the *overall significance* of what we perceive, relative to a certain situational context.

Keywords Moods · Phenomenology · Perceptualism · Evaluative perception · Dissociation · Heidegger

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> Life is a train of moods like a string of beads; and as we pass through them they prove to be many colored lenses, which paint the world their own hue, and each shows us only what lies in its own focus.
>
> ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Experience”
>
> I see, I hear! But the objects do not reach me, it is as if there were a wall between me and the outer world!
>
> ~ William James, *The Principles of Psychology*

When we enter into a mood—such as an anxious, irritable, depressed, tranquil, or cheerful mood—our experience is altered in profound ways. One prominent effect of being in a mood is that we tend to respond emotionally to the things that we encounter in ways that are out of character. We might overreact to things that we would otherwise disregard, for example, or remain indifferent to things that would otherwise elicit strong emotional reactions from us. This essay addresses the questions: How, exactly, do moods alter the way we experience the particular objects we encounter? And more generally, how can we best describe and analyze the logic that governs the ways that moods manifest themselves in our experience?

A standard answer to these questions, repeated time and again in the philosophical literature, is to say that moods function like “colored lenses,” altering the way we *perceive* the objects we encounter. The comparison between moods and colored lenses is intuitively appealing, but the metaphor carries heavy philosophical baggage. Taken seriously, this metaphor expresses a popular way of thinking about emotions and moods known as “perceptualism,” which holds that emotional responses are triggered when we perceive evaluative properties that are relevant to our values and concerns.[1] On this view, when we are in a mood, we become disposed to perceive the objects we encounter as having certain evaluative properties—for example, to see things as being *threatening* when in an anxious mood, or as being *pleasant* when in a cheerful mood—and, likewise, we become disposed *not* to perceive objects as having any evaluative properties that do not fit our mood. In this essay, I argue that the colored lens metaphor and the perceptualist analysis of moods are misleading in important ways.

I begin in Section One by defining “mood,” distinguishing moods from emotions and other kinds of affective experiences, and examining the central concepts and claims of the perceptualist account of moods. In Section Two, I offer a phenomenological critique of perceptualism, focusing on experiences in which being in a mood causes us to remain indifferent to things that would otherwise elicit strong emotional reactions from us. I argue that in many such cases, contrary to what perceptualists claim, our lack of emotional reaction cannot be adequately explained as a failure to *perceive* or *attend* to the relevant evaluative properties of the objects we encounter. Rather, when we are in a mood, we often can and do perceive and attend to evaluative properties that do not fit our mood—but when we do so, we find that these mood-incongruent evaluative properties, while still perceptible, suddenly seem emotionally inaccessible or distant from us in an uncanny way. As James puts it in the epigraph above, it is as though there were an invisible wall separating us from the world: We can see that the items and events around us have evaluative properties that we would normally respond to emotionally, but in our present mood, these perceptions do not "reach" us; our evaluative perception is emotionally disengaged. In a depressed mood, for example, we might see quite clearly that the things around us are good and worthwhile, but remain emotionally numb to them nonetheless. In a cheerful mood, on the other hand, we may perceive threats and offenses without feeling the fear and anger that would normally accompany those perceptions. But although evidence from empirical psychology and everyday language suggests that it is quite common to experience this sort of *emotional disconnection* when we are in a mood, the experience of "seeing but not feeling" is difficult to understand from within the perceptualist paradigm.

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[1] By all accounts, perceptualism “has dominated recent debates about the emotions and… is still the predominant emotion theory in philosophy” (Döring & Lutz, 2012). See Roberts (2003) and Goldie (2000) for perceptualist accounts of moods. For discussions of the perceptualist account of emotions, see Brady (2008), D'Arms and Jacobson (2000), Deonna and Teroni (2012), De Sousa (2002), Döring (2007), Elgin (2008), Jones (2004), and Tappolet (2012). Many perceptualists cite McDowell’s work as a key source for the view. According to McDowell (1996), just as sensory perception is a form of “openness” to the sensible world, emotional responsiveness is best understood as a kind of perceptual “openness to values.”

In Section Three, I argue that the tradition of phenomenology offers a wealth of conceptual resources that can shed light on the experience of emotional disconnection. Building on the work of Martin Heidegger, I briefly sketch an alternative account of the way moods alter our experience of particular objects, according to which moods do not necessarily alter *what* we perceive but, rather, alter the way we interpret the *overall significance* of what we perceive, relative to a certain context. Thus, without necessarily altering the content of our evaluative perceptions of particular objects, moods alter the way these perceptions are integrated and synthesized together into a holistic interpretation of the present situation. Experiences of emotional disconnection occur, on this view, when we encounter an object whose evaluative properties we perceive as being important to us, generally speaking, but which, in our present frame of mind, we interpret as being irrelevant to what is at stake in the present situation, all things considered.

In what follows, then, I offer a phenomenological analysis of the experience of being in a mood that illustrates the limitations of the colored lens metaphor and demonstrates the basic inadequacy of perceptualist paradigm. By identifying where perceptualism goes wrong, my hope is that we can better understand what would be required of any adequate account of moods, and better appreciate the important insights afforded by the tradition of phenomenology.

1 Perceptualism and the Meaning of "Moods"

Theorists in different traditions use the term "mood" in different ways, so it is helpful to begin any discussion of mood by clarifying the kind of mood at issue. According to Russell (2009), for example, theorists working in empirical psychology typically use the term "mood" to refer to "core affect"—that is, "primitive non-reflective feelings," such as the feeling of pleasure and displeasure, tension and relaxation, energy and tiredness. In contrast to this quite narrow use of the term, phenomenologists tend to use the term "mood" quite broadly. This broad usage can be traced back to Heidegger, whose seminal phenomenology of *Befindlichkeit* and *Stimmung* did not make fine-grained distinctions between moods, emotions, traits of temperament, cultural attitudes, and other ways that our experience can be affectively structured and organized.[2] Following Heidegger, phenomenologists often use the term “mood” to refer indiscriminately to the many various ways that human beings can be affectively “attuned.”[3]

In this essay, however, I am interested in the specific kind of experience that we often refer to as “being *in* a mood.” This is the conception of mood that is typically at issue in debates about moods within the mainstream Anglo-American philosophical literature. “Moods,” in this sense of the term, can be distinguished from core affect, emotions, and other kinds of affective phenomena. They exhibit three key features:

1. *Global pervasiveness*—Like emotions, moods typically involve a cluster of bodily feelings, motivational states, evaluative thoughts, and evaluative perceptions. In this way, moods manifest themselves throughout the entire domain of emotional experience.
2. *Thematic focus*—Like emotions, each kind of mood is focused on a particular concern or theme. For example, the mood of irritability (like the emotion of anger) is characterized by concerns about things being unjust or offensive, while the mood of anxiety (like the emotion of fear) is characterized by concerns about things being threatening or overwhelming.
3. *Non-specific intentionality*—While emotions are directed toward specific intentional objects, a mood is wider and more general in its intentional scope. For example, the emotion of fear involves an emotional response to a *particular* event being threatening, but the mood of anxiety is a kind of fearfulness directed toward things in general and nothing in particular.[4]

Putting these features together, we can say that a mood, in this sense, is *a global and non-specifically directed emotional response to a particular thematic concern*. With this definition in mind, the present question is this: How might we best describe and analyze the ways that a change in our mood tends to alter how we experience the objects we encounter?

The theoretical paradigm known as “perceptualism” holds that emotional responses are generated by evaluative perceptions or “construals.”[5] A construal is a kind of aspect-perception that is essentially interpretive in nature. Construing is sometimes described as “seeing-as,” in the sense that it involves seeing *X* as *Y*. In many cases, construals are “sub-doxastic” states that do not rise to the level of a full-fledged propositional judgment—not genuine *beliefs*, but *suspicions, imaginings,* or *wonderings*.[6] Brady (2009, p. 415) offers the following examples:

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[2] Heidegger’s term “*Befindlichkeit*” refers to our essential capacity to “find” ourselves always already situated within an affectively structured context. A *Stimmung* is any particular way that we are affectively “attuned” to what matters in a given context. For discussion, see Heidegger (1962) and (Heidegger 2001).

[3] One prominent exception to this rule is Ratcliffe’s (2013) idiosyncratic use of the term “mood” to refer narrowly to “feelings of being” or “existential feelings,” particular kinds of non-conceptual feelings of the body that are involved in maintaining our basic sense of reality.

[4] For a review of how social psychologists define moods in contrast to other categories of affective experience, see Ekman & Davidson (1994) and Fox (2008).

[5] Perceptualism is thus a kind of “appraisal theory” of emotions and moods, though the term “appraisal” is unhelpfully ambiguous, used to refer to both cognitive appraisals and perceptual appraisals. Lazarus (1984), for example, uses the term “appraisal” in his cognitivist account of emotions and moods, according to which our emotional responses are essentially *judgments* we form about how our wellbeing is implicated in a state of affairs. Perceptualism, which holds that emotional reactions are triggered by perceptions rather than judgments, developed as an alternative to cognitivism, which has been criticized for struggling to explain the possibility of “recalcitrant” emotions and moods that persist despite repudiating judgments. The cognitivist view seems to imply that recalcitrant emotions and moods (like feeling afraid or anxious on a plane despite knowing it is safe) involve simultaneously judging that *P* and ~*P*, a position that leads cognitivists into a variety of thorny philosophical issues. Perceptualism, in contrast, explains recalcitrant emotions as similar to optical illusions. For example, because perception and cognition are semi-independent faculties, we may continue to perceive a reed in water as being bent despite knowing that it is straight. Likewise, perceptualists argue, we may feel anxious on an airplane despite knowing that the danger is only apparent. For discussion, see Brady (2007, 2009), Roberts (2009), Railton (2011), Döring (2015), and Helm (2015).

> I might construe a duck-rabbit figure as a duck at one time and as a rabbit at another; I might see a face in terms of another, as when I see my father’s face reflected in my own; I can think of a chimpanzee in human terms; I can have the impression that the person behind me in the queue is standing too close...

On the perceptualist view, the driving forces behind our emotional responses are construals that are *evaluative* in nature. In particular, emotional responses occur, on this view, when a person construes an object as having an evaluative property that is important to her. For example, if a person construes the man in line behind her as standing too close in a threatening sort of way, we would say that she construes this object (the man, or the man’s posture) as having the evaluative property of being dangerous or threatening. Because this evaluative property bears upon her concern for safety, the construal will trigger the bodily feelings, thoughts, and motivations that are characteristic of fear.[7]

Applying this analysis to moods, perceptualists argue that moods dispose us to construe the objects we encounter as having certain evaluative properties. On this view, moods arise when something happens to make us perceptually sensitive to certain evaluative properties, so that we are disposed to construe the objects that we encounter as having these evaluative properties. In this perceptually sensitized state, we will be disposed to experience a certain emotional response to object after object, for as long as the mood lasts. Fish (2005, p. 29) puts the idea this way:

> To enter an emotion or a mood is, I suggest, analogous to putting on a pair of tinted spectacles. Putting on a pair of green-tinted glasses has the effect of changing the way I see the world. What is more, the way I see the world changes in a way similar to wearing green glasses—the objects of perception now appear tinged with green, and so on. Similarly, when I become anxious, the way I see the world changes in a characteristic way—the objects I perceive now appear to be threatening and malign.

Some perceptualists argue that it is biochemical changes that typically give rise to this sort of perceptual sensitivity—a view that suggests that the best way to manage moods is through medication, exercise, diet, sleep, and other means of altering one's biochemistry.[8] But regardless of what the underlying causal mechanism may be, perceptualists agree that moods dispose us to perceive an indefinite series of particular objects as having evaluative properties of a certain kind.

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[6] Such construals are consciously accessible mental states. In this regard, the kind of perceptualism at issue in this essay is quite different from the “perceptualism” defended by Prinz (2004), who argues that emotions and moods are triggered by unconscious information-processing mechanisms or “embodied representations” of states of affairs. Addressing this account is beyond the scope of this essay.

[7] Perceptualists disagree about a number of important philosophical issues that are not directly at stake in the present discussion. For example, do evaluative perceptions merely cause emotions and moods or also partly constitute them? Can such perceptions be unconscious? What are the mechanisms by which construals trigger emotional responses? What is the metaphysical status of an evaluative property? Are such properties objectively given or merely subjective projections? And can we be properly said to perceive “thick” evaluative properties (such as perceiving *the right thing to do*) or only “thin” evaluative properties (such as perceiving the *threatening* nature of an event). For discussion, see McDowell (1996), Goldie (2000), Audi (2013), and Matthen’s (2015) edited volume on the philosophy of perception.

There are several ways of articulating the detailed analysis supporting the perceptualist view of moods. The simplest analysis holds that moods directly alter the kinds of evaluative properties that a person is disposed to perceive: Instead of seeing *X* as *Y*, a person who is in an irritable or cheerful mood would be disposed to see *X* as *Z*. This is the sort of description that lends itself most easily to the comparison between moods and colored lenses, insofar as colored lenses directly alter the content of what we perceive by imposing one color on the scene, thereby making other colors invisible. For example, imagine that Joe wakes up one morning to find that he is already running late for work; as he hurriedly gets ready, his dog gets into the trash and makes a mess in the kitchen, and then on the way to the office, Joe gets stuck in a traffic jam. Now, if Joe happened to be in an especially cheerful mood that morning, he might be disposed to construe the same events quite differently than he otherwise would. Seeing that he is late to work, he might feel relieved that he will miss the regular morning meeting at his office, which is always terribly dreary. Catching his dog in the trash, he might find the guilty look on her face to be adorable and post a picture of the humorous scene on social media. Stuck in traffic, he might feel grateful to have more time to listen to his favorite podcast.[9] On this version of perceptualism, moods directly alter what evaluative properties Joe is disposed to perceive. Thus, when he is in a cheerful mood, Joe will be disposed *not* to perceive the bad-making features of the events he encounters. Indeed, the unjust and offensive aspects of these events may not even register perceptually.

There is evidence that moods can directly alter our perception in some cases.[10] But Joe's case is fairly extreme. A more sophisticated version of perceptualism—one that can offer a plausible description of less extreme cases—focuses on the concept of *attention* rather than perception as such. On this view, moods *indirectly* alter the way we perceive the world by disposing us to perceive certain kinds of evaluative properties as being especially *salient*, that is, as standing out in our perceptual awareness. Because attention is a "finite resource," as Brady (2007) puts it, when our attention is "captured and consumed" by one aspect of our situation, we will tend not to notice other aspects that would otherwise be salient. Likewise, when we *do* notice mood-incongruent evaluative properties, we will be more easily distracted by the aspects of the situation that fit our mood. Thus, by selectively focusing our attention in this way, being in a mood will dispose us to construe the objects we encounter in a certain way, and to react accordingly.

Roberts (2003) defends this latter version of perceptualism. On his view, moods do not directly alter the content of a person's evaluative perceptions*;* instead, moods cause certain evaluative properties to become more salient than they otherwise would be.

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[8] The appeal to biochemistry is defended in Roberts (2003), Prinz (2004), and Eldar et al. (2016). For a computational account of the underlying causal mechanisms of moods, see Sizer (2000). Goldie (2000) offers an insightful discussion of the way moods can develop out of previous emotions.

[9] This example is adapted from Armon-Jones's (1991, p. 88) defense of a colored-lens model of moods.

[10] For reviews of the empirical literature on the significant but limited influence of "mood" (i.e., core affect) on perception, see Fox (2008), Barrett and Bar (2009), and Eldar et al. (2016).

When we are in a mood, we will still see *X* as *Y* as we always do, but now, in our present mood, *X* and its *Y-ness* will stand out in the foreground of our perceptual awareness. For example, when Joe is in a cheerful mood, he may still perceive and react to the bad-making features of events to some extent, but he will be disposed to focus his attention elsewhere—namely, on the evaluative properties that fit his mood. Thus, if Joe were asked why he was so cheerful, he would be able to offer many reasons, such as the opportunity to avoid having to attend a dreary meeting, the cuteness of his dog, and so on. But "despite these reasons," Roberts (2003, p. 115) says,

> we know that the mood was operating by knowing that on another day, in the absence of the mood, [he] would not have responded with these emotions, or at any rate not with the same intensity, despite having the same reasons for having the emotion (roughly, the same beliefs and concerns) as [he has] today. (On that other day, the reasons would not have been pushed into operation.)

On Roberts' view, then, a mood causes a person to be perceptually sensitive to certain kinds of evaluative properties, so that if there are any reasons to construe an object as having such properties, the mood "helps the reasons to obtrude" (115).

Thus, perceptualism holds that moods alter our experience of particular objects by changing the *content* of our evaluative perceptions when we encounter those objects—either by determining which evaluative properties will be perceptible to us, or by determining which evaluative properties will be salient in our perceptual awareness. In this way, moods are said to be like colored lenses, altering the way we perceive the things we encounter.[11] On my view, although being in a mood can alter our perceptual dispositions in these ways—and to this extent, perceptualism offers important insights into the ways moods manifest themselves in our experience—I argue that on closer examination we find that perceptualism faces significant limitations, because it fails to account for the ways that entering into a mood can alter the *emotional accessibility* of the objects we encounter.

2 Moods and Emotional Disconnection from Evaluative Perceptions

Perceptualism is correct that when we are in a mood, our ongoing experience is organized—and, in that sense, "filtered"—in a distinctive way. But a closer examination of the way we actually experience moods in everyday life reveals that moods do not necessarily function like colored lenses by altering which evaluative properties will be perceptible to us or salient in our perceptual awareness. Moods may sometimes alter the way we are disposed to perceive the objects we encounter. But in many cases, when we are in a mood, we remain disposed to perceive and attend to a wide variety of evaluative properties, even those that do not fit our mood—but we find that perceiving such mood-incongruent properties simply does not generate an emotional response. Investigating this experience of "seeing but not feeling" can help us to clarify the precise way in which moods "filter" our experience, thereby demonstrating the limitations of the perceptualist paradigm and pointing us toward an alternative, phenomenological account of moods. To support this line of argument, I begin by presenting some descriptions of my own mood-related experiences of emotional disconnection, and then I discuss evidence from empirical psychology and everyday language practices that suggests that such experiences are not anomalous, but that, in fact, it is common to have experiences of emotional disconnection when we are in a mood.

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[11] Deonna & Teroni's (2015) account of emotions and moods is also sometimes (mistakenly) referred to as a kind of "perceptualism." On this view, emotions and moods are not triggered by the *content* of our perception but, rather, the *attitude* we take toward this content. For example, when we are in a cheerful mood, we may continue to perceive offenses, but we will tend to perceive them with a cheerful attitude or "in a cheerful way," and so we will tend to become less angry than we otherwise would. This account is quite different from the kind of perceptualism at issue in this essay, and addressing it properly would require more space than I have here. While this approach is insightful in many respects, it has been criticized as having similar drawbacks as the so-called "adverbial" account of emotions and moods which, in a bit of circular reasoning, analyzes the attitude that supposedly grounds an emotional response in explicitly emotional terms. For discussion, see Sizer (2000, p. 752–754), Dokic and Lemaire (2015), and Berninger (2016).

Early last spring, I had a profound experience of emotional disconnection while I was finishing setting up my new plot in the community garden. Although the weather was lovely and the birds were chirping, I was in an anxious mood. Earlier in the day I had felt a sharp twinge in my back when I lifted a heavy bag of dirt, and I worried that I might have injured myself. I worried about my physical wellbeing and the potential financial cost of getting medical treatment for a back injury, and I was angry with myself for lifting the bag so casually. But later, as I was getting ready to leave for the day, these particular concerns had faded from my awareness, leaving me with a more vaguely directed mood of anxiety.

Despite my anxious mood, I made a conscious effort to savor my accomplishments by deliberately focusing on how beautiful the garden looked. Pausing for a few minutes to look over the fruits of my labor, I saw that the garden was well built. I had wanted a garden for a long time, and my plants and flowers looked beautiful, nestled together in the rich soil. I imagined how pleasant it would be to cook the vegetables I have grown and to bring food to my friends. Taking in the scene, I saw that the community garden was picturesque and that my fellow gardeners appeared to be warm and friendly. But although my attention was absorbed in the beauty and value of the garden, I found that, in my anxious mood, all of the good things in my awareness did not seem to define the overall emotional tone of the situation. This was confusing to me, since every item that I was currently perceiving appeared to be beautiful and good. With my attention focused on my many blessings, I wondered why I was not experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and motivations associated with happiness and satisfaction. To my dismay, I found that all of the lovely things I saw all around me seemed to be distant, inaccessible, or unreal, in some sense that was difficult for me to describe. I saw the beauty before me and heard the joyful sounds of birds in the distance, but these things seemed to be irrelevant, somehow, in defining how I was doing at the present moment.

The perceptualist account of moods is inadequate to describe or explain my experience in this case. My anxious mood did not function like a colored lens, because I did not see the things around me as being threatening in any way. On the contrary, I saw nothing but good and beautiful things—I simply felt numb to them. Since then, I have noticed that this sort of experience of "seeing but not feeling" often occurs when I am in a mood. For example, I was recently in an especially cheerful mood as I was walking down the street with some friends when a homeless woman asked me for spare change. I value being a compassionate person, and I clearly perceived the woman's suffering and the cruelty of her situation. But despite perceiving evaluative properties that were relevant to my values and concerns, in my cheerful mood, I did not experience the bodily feelings, thoughts, or motivational states associated with the emotion of compassion. In this case, my cheerful mood did not function like a colored lens, making the situation appear to be good in some way. On the contrary, I was able to perceive the sadness of the situation clearly and attend to it, but it felt like I was able to grasp the fact that this person was suffering and needed help in a "merely intellectual" way. I did not feel fully "present" in the situation, and when I gave her a few dollars, it was as though I was acting mechanically and without feeling, merely "going through the motions."

This experience and others like it show that emotional disconnection is a common feature of the experience of being in a mood. In an irritable mood, I have felt numb to actions that I can see are kind and that would otherwise be quite touching; in a tranquil mood, I have found myself temporarily emotionally unresponsive to the burden of responsibilities that I can see are pressing. If I am right that such experiences are common when we are in a mood, then we have reason to seek out alternative accounts of moods that can better accommodate the phenomena. Perceptualism holds that it is our evaluative perceptions that generate the feelings, thoughts, and motivational states that constitute emotions and moods. But such cases of emotional disconnection illustrate that the direction of influence goes the other way—that our mood functions as an *enabling condition*, determining whether a given evaluative perceptions will be able to generate an emotional response.

The force of the sort of phenomenological testimony I have provided here, however, relies on the reader's ability to recognize the accuracy of such descriptions in his or her own experience. The perceptualist may insist that such experiences are rare and so do not pose a serious challenge to the perceptualist account of moods. To lend further support to my claim that moods often involve experiences of emotional disconnection, then, I turn to empirical psychology. Unfortunately, I know of no studies that have directly addressed the question of how frequently people experience emotional disconnection while in a mood. However, indirect evidence for my claim can be marshaled from a variety of sources. Studies have shown that emotional disconnection is a common feature of certain psychiatric conditions related to mood, such as major depression, anxiety disorders, and posttraumatic stress disorder.[12] Ratcliffe's (2015) groundbreaking phenomenological-empirical analysis of major depression shows that people suffering from major depression very commonly report that they can perceive the good things around them and know that they "should" feel happy, hopeful, and grateful in response, but simply cannot do so.[13] These reports are echoed by descriptions of depression commonly found in so-called "depression memoirs," where authors often compare the experience of depression to being imprisoned behind a *transparent barrier*, as in Sally Bramptom's (2008, p. 171) descriptions of feeling as though she were confined behind a "glass wall that separates us from life, from ourselves" and Sylvia Plath's (1966, p. 178) famous description of being trapped inside of a "bell jar."

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[12] For discussion of anxiety and emotional disconnection, see Simpson et al. (2010, pp. 33–35). For discussion of posttraumatic stress and emotional disconnection, see Feeny et al. (2000) and Sherman (2015, Ch. 1).

[13] In 2011, Ratcliffe and his colleagues surveyed 145 people who suffered from major depression, asking them to describe various aspects of their experience. Ratcliffe (2015, p. 33) reports that emotional disconnection was a particularly "salient and consistent theme" in the questionnaire responses. For example, respondents said things like, "When I'm depressed it is like I have become separated from the rest of the world"; "It feels as though you're watching life from a long distance"; "I feel disconnected from the rest of the world, like a spectator"; "It feels as if I am a ghost"; "I feel like I am watching the world around me and have no way of participating."

Unlike the metaphor of a colored lens, the metaphor of a transparent barrier captures the experience of "seeing but not feeling."

It is prudent to be cautious when comparing psychiatric conditions like mood disorders to ordinary, non-pathological moods. However, consensus continues to build in the psychological literature in favor of the "continuity hypothesis," the idea that everyday moods differ from mood-related psychiatric disorders only in degree rather than in kind.[14] Furthermore, empirical evidence suggests that the experience of emotional disconnection is not restricted to psychiatric conditions. The psychiatric construct of "dissociation," a state in which there is a lack of normal integration among a person's mental states—as when evaluative perceptions are divorced from the feelings, thoughts, and motivational states they are typically associated with—is conceptualized as forming a spectrum that ranges from major forms of psychopathology to benign, everyday experiences (Fischer and Elnitsky 1990).[15] In some surveys, 80 to 90% of respondents report having experiences of dissociation at least some of the time (Gershuny and Thayer 1999). According to Simeon (2004, p. 344), "Short-lived experiences of depersonalization [a type of dissociation] are very common in the general population," and include experiences in which one has "a sense of just going through the motions…feeling detached from body parts or the whole body...feeling disconnected from one's own thoughts; and feeling detached from one's emotions (numbed or blunted)."[16] While these studies do not specifically address moods, they lend substantial, if indirect, support for my argument by showing that experiences of emotional disconnection are not confined to psychiatric conditions but are relatively common in everyday life.

Further evidence in favor of my claim that moods often involve experiences of emotional disconnection can be found in our ordinary language practices. We commonly describe the experience of being in a mood with specific phrases that are naturally interpreted as ways of communicating the experience of emotional disconnection: "I am in a funk," or "I feel out of it," or "I do not feel like myself"—expressions that we might use to explain why we are emotionally unresponsive to things that would otherwise elicit strong emotional reactions. We also sometimes employ the language of *presence* and *distance* to indicate that we are emotionally disconnected from what we are perceiving, as when we speak of feeling like we are not "fully present" in the situation, or feeling like we are "distant" or "disconnected" from what is happening.

A potentially misleading aspect of our everyday language practices concerns the use of the term "perceive." It is common to use "perceive" as a *success term*, such that a person counts as genuinely perceiving a certain evaluative property only if this perception makes an appropriate emotional impact, relative to some norm. For example, a person describing her experience in retrospect might say (falsely), "I was so caught up in my irritable mood that I could not even see how kind that person was being." Again, sometimes moods do alter our perception in just this way, but in many other cases, we perceive the mood-incongruent evaluative property but simply feel numb to it. The practice of using "perceive" as a success term—and so saying that we did not *really* "see" the kindness because the perception did not make an appropriate emotional impact—may lead us to underestimate how common it is to experience emotional disconnection when we are in a mood.[17]

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[14] For discussion of the continuity hypothesis, see Morris (1989, Ch. 5), as well as Angst & Dobler-Mikola (1984), Flett et al. (1997), and Enns et al. (2001).

[15] For an excellent overview of research on dissociation, see Kihlstrom (2005).

[16] For further discussion of non-pathological instances of dissociation in everyday life, see Ray (1996), Dalenberg and Paulson (2009), and Steele et al. (2009).

If experiences of emotional disconnection are characteristic of being in a mood, as these considerations suggest, then any adequate philosophical analysis of moods should be able to account for this sort of experience. While perceptualism struggles in this regard, Heidegger's phenomenological analysis of affective "attunement" provides an illuminating vantage point from which to approach the investigation of moods.

3 A Phenomenological Approach to Being in a Mood

In contrast to perceptualism, which analyzes moods in terms of *perceptual dispositions*, the phenomenological approach that I will sketch here views moods as a kind of *interpretive frame*, a kind of framework for making sense of the meaning of our ongoing experience. On this view, entering into an anxious or cheerful mood does not necessarily alter *what* we are disposed to perceive but, rather, it alters how we will be disposed to interpret and respond to the *overall significance* of what we perceive relative to a certain "context of significance." In order to develop this line of thought, I will very briefly discuss Heidegger's analysis of affectivity, and then I will point to some promising ways we might build on Heidegger's work in order to better understand the nature of moods and mood-related experiences of emotional disconnection.

Heidegger understood affective "attunements"—moods, emotions, concerns, traits of temperament, and so on—as conditions for the possibility of making sense of things as *mattering* in certain ways.[18] As Heidegger (1962, p. 177/137–8) puts it, being affectively attuned "*implies a disclosive submission to the world, out of which we can*

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[17] Little (1995) defends the usage of "perceive" as a success term. However, the claim that we only perceive an evaluative property when we emotionally respond to it in an appropriate way simply begs the question that is at issue in the present debate—namely, whether evaluative perceptions necessarily generate emotional responses.

[18] Heidegger (1962, p. 375/327, 293/249, 277/234) says repeatedly that, on his view, understanding (*Verstehen*) and discourse (*Rede*) are "equiprimordial" with attunement (*Befindlichkeit*)—each being an inseparable aspect of care (*Sorge*). (A fourth aspect of care is fallenness (*Verfallensein*).) Thus, for Heidegger, while our affective attunements enable us to make sense of the world as mattering in certain ways, the reverse is also true: making sense of the world as mattering in certain ways enables and explains our affective experiences. Nonetheless, Heidegger emphasizes the important role of affective attunement in disclosing the world—even suggesting at one point that attunement is responsible for the "primary discovery of the world" (177/136–7). This emphasis is meant to correct the traditional view of affectivity, according to which affective experiences are merely subsequent bodily reactions to essentially affectless thoughts or perceptions. For example, Heidegger (1992, p. 286–7) argues that fear "is not at first an awareness of an impending evil to which a dose of dread would then be added. Rather, fearing is precisely the mode of being in which something threatening is uniquely disclosed and can be encountered in concern in being approached by the world." For expositions of Heidegger's account of affective attunement, see Blattner (2006, Ch. 8), Elpidorou and Freeman (2015a, 2015b), Freeman (2014, 2015), Guignon (2000, 2009), Mulhall (1996, 2013, Ch. 4), Ratcliffe (2013), Slaby (2015), Wrathall (2005, Ch. 3) and Withy (2013, 2014, 2015).

encounter something that matters to us." On his view, for example, if we were not already affectively attuned to the concern for our security, we could never "disclose" or make sense of something as being threatening to us. Even if we were in a locked room with a hungry tiger, from a phenomenological perspective, a *threat* could never be present *as such* in our experience. Others might see us as being threatened, but threats would not exist in our experiential "world," since being threatened would not even be intelligible to us—and for that reason, we could be neither afraid nor brave.

> The fact that this sort of thing can matter to it is grounded in one's [attunement]; and as [an attunement] it has already disclosed the world—as something by which it can be threatened, for instance. Only something which is in the [attunement] of fearing (or fearlessness) can discover that what is environmentally ready-to-hand is threatening (176/137).[19]

On Heidegger's view, then, affective attunements allow certain meaningful objects to be present in our experience. Thus, we never encounter an object or event in isolation, but always within a *world* in which certain things *matter* and so certain experiences are *possible*: every perception of an *X*-as-*Y* is actually a perception of an *X*-as-*Y*-within-*W*.[20]

Heidegger's analysis is deeply insightful, but by itself, it is not able to help us to understand moods in their specificity, as a kind of affective experience that is distinct from emotions, concerns, traits of temperament, cultural attitudes, and so on. Heidegger's focus was on the ontological insights afforded by the analysis of affective attunement in general, and so he simply did not say much about the differences between the various ways in which we are affectively attuned.[21] But while moods certainly alter our experiential world in important ways, we have seen that the experience of being in a mood is often marked by a certain *dissonance* with other ways that we are attuned. When we find ourselves in an irritable mood, for example, we may find our mood affecting us in ways that are at odds with the fact that we deeply *value* being a kind person and strongly *desire* to have a pleasant evening. In contrast to major depression, which can truly be a world unto itself—a totalizing alteration of a person's context of significance and space of possibilities—everyday moods are not totalizing experiences in this way. Thus, a fully developed phenomenological account of everyday moods will require us to identify structures of sense-making that function at an *intermediate depth*—not so deep as to alter our most basic sense of reality, but deep enough to alter our experience of particular objects in the ways I have described.[22]

Building upon Heidegger's analysis, then, I suggest that moods do not alter our sense of *what matters*, *generally speaking,* but, rather, they alter our sense of *what is* "*at stake*" *in the present situation*. Drawing on one of Heidegger's early lectures on

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[19] I use "attunement" in place of Macquarrie and Robinson's problematic term "state-of-mind" to translate Heidegger's term *Befindlichkeit.* For a thorough review of various ways that *Befindlichkeit* has been translated, see Freeman (2014, fn. 7).

[20] This formulation is adapted from Welton's (2012) insightful phenomenological analysis of the intentional structure of actively involved human experience.

[21] As Heidegger (1962, p. 178/138) acknowledges, "The different modes of [*Befindlichkeit*] and the ways in which they are interconnected in their foundations cannot be interpreted within the problematic of the present investigation."

[22] For discussion of the concept of "emotional depth," see Ratcliffe (2010) and Dreyfus (2009).

Aristotle, Guignon (2000, p. 84–5) defines a "situation" as "a cohesive, self-contained unity within the ongoing flow of life" whose parameters are typically determined by the activity we are currently involved in—for example, getting ready for work, having lunch with an old friend, teaching a class, and so on.[23] A situation is thus a *local context of significance*, in which certain concerns come to the fore and structure the meaning that objects and events have for us within that situation, and a *local space of possibility*, in which we understand certain, near-term developments to be possible, with varying degrees of probability, while others events would be totally surprising or even unintelligible ways for the situation to develop. While the present situation is just one small fragment of a person's world, it is has a certain privileged status: it is always in the present situation that we are called upon to respond, here and now, to those things we encounter. Thus, modifying the formulation above, we might say that every perception of an *X*-as-*Y* is actually a perception of an *X*-as-*Y*-within-*S*-within-*W*.

With this in mind, one promising approach to the analysis of moods, in my view, is to think of them as "embodied enactments" of our interpretation of the meaning of the present situation.[24] Through our mood, in other words, our bodily feelings, motivational states, evaluative thoughts, and evaluative perceptions become organized and mobilized in such a way as to prepare us to respond to the possibilities that we interpret as mattering within the local context of significance, and to monitor how we are faring as we attempt to navigate the developments that occur.[25] Moods thus enable us to respond emotionally to those things that are relevant to what is at stake in the present situation.[26] For example, if we are having lunch with an old friend, through our mood we will enact an interpretation of what is at stake in this situation—sharing conversation, enjoying food together, and so on—and enact an interpretation of how things are going, overall, as we navigate the situation. If an acquaintance were to stop by our table and ask us, "How's it going?", we may answer (if we were speaking honestly), "Well, I'm saddened by the bad news my friend has just shared with me, and I'm annoyed by how terrible the food turned out…but overall, I'm doing pretty good, because I'm really enjoying catching up with my old friend." In this way, through our mood, our various particular experiences are integrated together, synthesized, and structured with regard to their overall significance within the context of the present situation.

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[23] As Guignon explains, Heidegger argues that unlike a mere "process" (*Vorgang*), a situation is constituted by a collection of events that are unified through their shared significance, rather than merely through causal connections. Heidegger offers the example of climbing a mountain to see a sunrise. At the moment of reaching the summit, he says, the climber is absorbed in the "situation" of the climb. By this he means that the specific experiences that are present to the climber in that moment are imbued with qualities that arise as a result of the relationship between this moment and its context, a context that prominently includes other moments in time that help to define the temporal structure of the situation. Thus, the particular quality of the experience of reaching the summit is a result of the fact that this moment is experienced as the *culmination* of the morning's work, and as such, "The [perception of the] sun, clouds, and rock ledge fill the moment and have a distinctive quality that is sharpened and brought into focus by the long climb" (from *Zur Bestimmung der Philosophie* (1919), p. 205, quoted in Guignon 2000, p. 86).

[24] "Enactment" is a central concept in the so-called *enactivist* approach to issues in philosophy of mind, which is broadly Heideggerian in nature. (See Columbetti 2013 and Hutto 2012 for enactivist accounts of emotion.) On the interpretation of Heidegger's work advocated by Hubert Dreyfus and his students, our emotional responses are a kind of *practical knowledge* in which we skillfully cope with the solicitations of the environment to which we have been attuned. (See Downing 2000 and Wrathall 2005, Ch. 3.) This way of understanding Heidegger's thought helps us to make sense of the important role of the body in affectivity, a topic that Heidegger himself said relatively little about. (See Aho 2005 and Aho 2010 and Guignon 2009.)

[25] Heidegger (1962, p. 173/134) says that moods make "manifest 'how one is and how one is faring.'" As Blattner (2006, p. 80) notes, theorists in empirical psychology also see moods have a "self-monitoring function." For a recent contribution to the investigation of how moods contribute to self-regulatory processes within the domain of empirical psychology, see Eldar et al. 2016.

[26] The analysis of moods as a kind of interpretive frame finds deep resonances with the view of emotions found in Maiese (2011, 2014), whose work is also broadly Heideggerian in orientation. Maiese argues that emotions—or "conscious embodied desires"—establish a "pre-deliberative evaluative backdrop" that "frames" our decisions and moral judgments. (I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to this connection, and for many other helpful comments and suggestions.) For a discussion of "framing theory" and the framing effects generated by emotions, see Druckman & McDermott 2008.

Thinking about moods as situational interpretive frames in this way helps us to understand why experiences of emotional disconnection are so common when we are in a mood. By framing our interpretation of the significance of our ongoing experience in light of what is at stake in the present situation, moods enable us to make sense of a small fraction of the things around us as calling upon us to respond in an appropriate way, while setting aside countless other things as *not* requiring an immediate response. This "setting aside," however, does not imply that the things that do not require an immediate response do not *matter* for us, or that they are not *present* as meaningful objects in our experiential world. To the contrary, while we are having lunch with an old friend, we may become temporarily emotionally unresponsive to many things that we genuinely care about—climate change, being a good parent, and so on—simply because those things are not relevant to what is at stake in the present situation. But because these concerns are still a meaningful part of our experiential world, we will continue to be able to make sense of the significance of any object or event that we encounter that bears upon those concerns. Thus, as we are talking with our friend, we may glance over at a newspaper and see a headline reporting a new global temperature record. In this moment, we may perceive this bit of news as having a number of evaluative properties—we may see it as *sad* or *unjust*, for example—without this evaluative perception mobilizing any bodily reactions, motivational states, or thoughts in response to it, simply because our capacities for emotional responsiveness are currently mobilized and organized around what is at stake in the present situation, namely, catching up with an old friend.

In most cases, our moods correspond to our present activity and reflect the concerns and projects that define our identity. But sometimes, when we enter into anxious, irritable, depressed, cheerful, or tranquil moods, we can experience a *breakdown* in this normal order. In such cases, we make sense of the present context of significance and space of possibilities in ways that may be totally out of synch with our present activity. For example, when we are in an anxious mood, we find ourselves interpreting the present context of significance and space of possibilities in terms of an overriding concern for security and the seemingly immanent possibility of being threatened. In this case, we may find ourselves feeling anxious despite seeing that the things around us are perfectly safe. In such cases where our mood becomes out of synch with our present activity, emotional disconnection is likely to be a prominent feature of our experience, as we find ourselves constantly encountering things that matter to us, generally speaking, but which do not seem relevant to what seems to be presently at stake.

In sum, then, while perceptualism holds that moods function by altering our perception of *each object* we encounter, on the phenomenological approach I have sketched, moods also alter our interpretation of objects in a more *holistic* way, altering our background understanding of the context of significance and space of possibility within which those objects are located. Thus, being in a mood alters the way we experience the particular objects we encounter not simply by altering the *content* of our perception of the object's evaluative properties, but also by altering our sense of the object's relative significance in the context of the present situation. While I have provided only a brief sketch of how such a view might be developed, I hope to have demonstrated that the phenomenological tradition offers a number of valuable resources for constructing an alternative to perceptualism's inadequate analysis of the way moods manifest themselves in our experience.

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