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Moods: from diffusiveness to dispositionality

Alex Grzankowski ^a and Mark Textor ^b

^aDepartment of Philosophy, Birkbeck College, London, UK; ^bDepartment of Philosophy, King's College London, London, UK

ABSTRACT

The view that moods are dispositions has recently fallen into disrepute. In this paper, we want to revitalise it by providing a new argument for it and by disarming an important objection against it. A shared assumption of our competitors (intentionalists about moods) is that moods are 'diffuse'. First, we will provide reasons for thinking that existing intentionalist views do not in fact capture this distinctive feature of moods that distinguishes them from emotions. Second, we offer a dispositionalist alternative that we think does better. Finally, we disarm the objection that is responsible for dispositionalism's bad press.


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1. Introduction: emotions and moods

Folk psychology distinguishes between moods – depression, elation, ennui, and so on – and emotions such as present anger or joy about an event. We are attuned to the distinction: If your colleague is in an angry mood, your interactions will go tolerably well if you treat them carefully; don't tease them, for example. If your colleague is angry with you, such behaviour is pointless. You better take cover. Moods and emotions are further distinguished by their phenomenology and causal profile. When you are overcome with fear, your heart will race, you can't concentrate, and you may be 'paralyzed with fear'. When you are in a fearful mood, you are 'on edge', you behave very cautiously and so on.

In the literature the distinction between mood and emotion is standardly introduced by mentioning two properties:

CONTACT Alex Grzankowski  mark.textor@kcl.ac.uk  Department of Philosophy, Birkbeck College, 30 Russell Square, London WC1B 5DT, UK

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Duration: emotions are short-lived, moods can endure for a longer span of time. (One can be low for weeks, but can one feel anger for weeks?).¹

Diffusiveness: moods are 'diffusive', emotions are specific.

Duration is frequently mentioned in psychological work on emotions. Some psychologists take 'mood' be a general term true of affective experiences that 'are extended temporally into minutes, hours, days or weeks' (Naragon-Gainey 2018, 45). Lormand (1985, 387) calls the view that a mood is nothing but a 'prolonged' emotion the 'Duration view'. The Duration view suffers from conceptual problems. Can one extend an affective experience over weeks? Does one still have the affective experience when one is asleep during this time? This seems rather implausible. Rather, the affective experience gives rise to a mood and this brings us back to the question what moods are.²

Diffusiveness is more promising. To our knowledge, Alexander F. Shand (1858–1936) was the first author to highlight the 'diffusiveness' of moods. Describing the diffusiveness of joyousness, he writes that in this mood

There is sunshine over everything, and the shadows fall unnoticed. Common things are transformed. And here again the mood has to discover or to make its object; and if no single one is adequate, and a sufficient justification for what it feels, it spreads itself over a great many, or takes them up in succession. (Shand 1914, 152)

Shand gave a fitting, though metaphorical description of the diffusiveness of mood: the joyous mood is like sunshine; it illuminates and colours everything it reaches. If I am in a joyous mood, my old car looks better than usual, the coffee tastes sweeter, annoying people are less bothersome, and so on.

The intuitive notion of diffusiveness (or diffuseness) has been picked up by a number of recent writers on mood as a feature that distinguishes moods from emotions. For example, in his handbook article on mood, Frijda (2008, 258) quickly homes in on diffusiveness ('diffuseness').³ Moods can be caused by particular objects, but it is distinctive of them that they are not about their cause nor any other object.

We agree with these philosophers and psychologists that the diffusiveness of mood is part of our pre-theoretic understanding of the distinction between mood and emotion. If we want to clarify the mood/emotion

¹See also Kind (2013, 120–121) for critical remarks directed against the Duration view.

²See Frijda (2008, 258).

³See also Kind (2013, 121), Tappolet (2018, 172ff), Kriegel (2019, 2), Rossi (2019, sect. 3), Siemer (2009, 256).

distinction, diffusiveness will anchor our discussion. We aim to defend the view that diffusiveness distinguishes moods from emotions. Part of our defence will be to liberate this idea from an additional assumption: Philosophers who consider diffusiveness to be the mark of moods make the further non-trivial assumption that diffusiveness is a particular kind of mode intentionality.⁴ As a representative example, consider Tappolet's remark:

It is natural to relate the alleged diffusiveness of moods to an important feature that concerns their intentionality. (Tappolet 2018, 172)

The idea is to offer an account of diffusiveness in terms of what is represented: 'an indiscriminating representation could account for the distinctively diffuse character of moods' (Kriegel 2019, 3).

However, this construal of diffusiveness is not part of the intuitive notion of diffusiveness. Our intuitive talk of diffusiveness leaves open whether moods are intentional at all. For example, in Shand's picture, moods have initially no object; they are rather 'looking' for objects that fit them. The sunshine can illuminate things without being about them. Nevertheless, the following is a popular assumption in recent literature:

(DIM) Diffusiveness is accounted for in terms of the Intentionality of Moods.

DIM takes different forms, but the central idea remains the same:⁵

(DIM1) Emotions are about particular objects, moods, are about 'everything and nothing in particular'.⁶ In depression 'everything seems black' (Kenny 1963, 61).⁷

(DIM2) Emotions are about particular objects, moods are emotionally toned cognitions 'of things in general or of one's present total environment' (Broad 1954, 205).⁸ Someone in an anxious mood regards 'the world [...] as a potentially disturbing place for oneself' (Crane 1998, 242).

⁴It is coherent to hold that moods are distinguished from emotions by their particular psychological force as well as their intentionality. But such a view incurs the commitment to say what this psychological force is and why emotions cannot have it. We will argue that moods are neither distinguished by psychological force nor intentionality.

⁵There is an additional view we won't spend time with in the main text. According to Mendelovici (2013a, 2013b), moods represent free floating, unbound properties. On this view, moods are non-propositional representational states that, rather than representing objects non-propositionally, represent unbound properties such as being scary. We are inclined to think that representing, say, redness or scariness is in fact another *objectual* intentional state (where the object is a property). One can fear *fido* or one can, very oddly, fear the property of being scary. If this is right, then our criticisms in the main text can be easily applied.

⁶See Solomon (1993, 112) and Goldie (2000, 143).

⁷For critical discussion see Lamb (1987, 110).

⁸Mitchell (2019, 124–125) also takes moods to be of one's total environment, but he uses 'total environment' differently from Broad. According to Mitchell (*ibid*, 124), the total environment encompasses 'the broadest set of relations (and potential relations) between self and world'. This explanation sounds as if

(DIM3) Emotions have non-generic content, moods have the 'generic objectual content: e.g.

<things>'.⁹

(DIM4) Moods are perceptual experiences of *likely possibilities*. For example, 'anxiety consists in the perceptual experience of the likely possibility of fear-someness being instantiated by something or other'. (Tappolet (2018, 181–182); see also Price (2006, 65).)

(DIM5) Moods are perceptual experiences of undetermined objects, emotions of determinate objects. An 'undetermined object' is one that the individual is unable to identify or individuate. (Rossi forthcoming)

Despite the popularity of the idea, in this paper we will argue that DIM is false. There is no 'undiscriminating representation' that accounts for the diffusiveness of moods.¹⁰

Negatively, we will argue that one cannot account for the diffusiveness of moods in terms of 'undiscriminating' intentional objects. Positively, we will offer a new account of the diffusiveness of moods in terms of dispositions:

(DDM) Diffusiveness is accounted for in terms of the Dispositionality of Moods.

We will argue that by treating moods as dispositions, one can explain the phenomenon of diffusiveness. We will also tackle the main objection against such a view in the final section of the paper.

2. Diffusiveness as generality

According to (DIM1) to (DIM3), the difference between emotions and moods consists in the fact that the latter are more general or are about

'the total environment' contains relations. We think that this, however, is not the intended reading. Mitchell's reference (footnote 35) to Husserl's notion of *Lebenswelt* is helpful. When we think or perceive spatio-temporal particulars, says Husserl, we are primitively certain that we perceive and think about parts of 'universal field' (see Husserl 1936, 145 original pagination). This universal field or horizon is open-ended and seems to be what Mitchell has in mind. Now, if we can have attitudes to the universal field at all – Husserl seems to be unsure about this point – why should such an attitude as my anger at the universal field be a mood?

⁹What is meant by *generic* content? Take a sentence like 'Dogs bark'. The sentence does not say that all dogs bark. For we continue to evaluate it as true even after encountering non-barking dogs (the African Basenji, for example, yodels). While the logical form and semantics of generic sentences is hotly debated, the opposing parties agree that the truth of 'Dogs bark' allows for exceptions and its logical form is not that of a universally quantified statement. Kriegel (2019, 4) adopts this uncontroversial feature of generic sentences for his purposes. If a mood is not an attitude to everything, but to things, one can be in a good mood (Things, Hooray!), yet be concerned by some objects.

¹⁰Lormand (1985, 393) and Ratcliffe (2008, 50) deny that moods are fundamentally distinguished from emotions by their intentional object(s). We agree, but our reasons for this conclusion are different from the ones they give.

more inclusive objects. These views are fuelled by the intuition that a mood is about everything or about nothing in particular. But this strategy suffers from a systematic problem. Consider an example to see the difficulty:

I am angry with Christopher but not Christopher alone. I am also angry with everyone at the meeting. In fact, I'm angry with *everyone*; I'm angry with *people*. These emotions, are, respectively, towards an individual, towards a group, and towards the whole of humanity generically. But crucially, these are *emotions*. When I am angry with people, all marks of an occurrent feeling can be and usually are present: my 'blood is boiling', I lose control, I cannot focus, I feel hot. I shout things like 'People I hate them, one has to hate them' ... I am feeling angry with people; I am not (merely) in an angry mood.

Similarly, in a panic attack everything (my whole environment) may feel scary. In the literature on panic attacks this is often described as the feeling of impending doom: things are about to end or turn bad. But a panic attack is an onset of a strong emotion. It has all the marks of an emotion: I try to escape the situation, I show bodily signs of distress such as a pounding heart and feeling hot and sick.

But according to (DIM1) to (DIM3), the foregoing are not possibilities, at least not possible *as emotions*. Given these views, one's anger towards people or towards everyone is a mood.¹¹ These views have it that what we normally think of unequivocally as emotions – anger, love, hate, fear – are sometimes emotions but, provided they have the right kind of intentional object, are sometimes moods. This has some unattractive consequences. For example, it has the consequence of ruling out the possibility of emotions that are very general in their focus. Although uncommon or perhaps strange, there should be no bar on holding that just as Mary fears Fido, John might fear everyone; just as Sally is angry with Christopher, Elliot is angry with people. Just as one can have beliefs about both the specific and the general, our emotions can vary in their generality and specificity. Why should we accept a view that says there are no such *emotions*?

A 'cheap' answer to our question is that 'mood' is a general term that is true of general or diffuse emotions. But that is certainly not right for the meaning of 'mood' in English. We don't defend ascriptions of mood by

¹¹Kriegel (2019, 15) denies that an emotional experience can ever employ exactly the same 'representational guise' as a mood. Thanks to Kriegel (personal correspondence for drawing our attention to this). But we have two replies. First, the posited difference seems to us ad hoc and unsupported by independent reasons. Second, as Kriegel himself noted to us, the proposal still leaves one without an explanation of the diffuseness of moods.

saying things like ‘John was in an angry mood yesterday because there was not just one object he was angry about’ (and things are no better if one suggests John is angry at *everything* or *people* or so on). Now, (DIM1) to (DIM3) may encourage us to revise our ordinary use of ‘mood’, but, for those not in the grip of a theory, no reason has been provided to make such a revision plausible. Hence, we take these attempts to distinguish between mood and emotion to come at an unjustified cost.¹²

If there is a different, less costly way to draw the emotion/mood distinction that is independently plausible, we should prefer it. In section 5 we will show that there is such a way, but let us stay with the present point a moment longer.

A corollary of the foregoing worry can be brought out by considering the following inference:

1. I hate Fido and I hate Ruff and I hate myself.
2. The only existing things are Fido, Ruff, and me.
3. So, I hate everything.

According to (DIM1), I would have moved from truths about my emotions to a conclusion about a mood. But it seems implausible that the truth of 1 and 2 secure that one is in a bad or hateful mood. Again, the view seems to make it too easy to be in a mood when what one wishes to say is that one is in an emotion widely directed.

If the above is correct, for very general reasons, (DIM1) to (DIM3) do not provide adequate ways of capturing the diffusiveness which is distinctive of moods. They hope to draw that line in terms of representing something nonspecific or general, but rather than delivering a mood with all its diffusiveness, what’s provided is an emotion widely directed.

3. Diffusiveness as modality

Moving onto (DIM4), we now consider a more recent account of diffusiveness in terms of modality. More specifically, the view turns on modal

¹²Goldie (2000, 150) says that an emotion can ‘diffuse’ into a mood and suggests that moods are ‘residues’ of emotions. He combines this with the suggestion that typical emotions and moods are varieties of the same emotion (ibid, 143). Maybe moods are residues of emotions, but this does not require moods to be variations of emotions. For example, some beliefs are residues of judgements. My judging that it will rain initiates my belief that it will rain: the judgement is a mental event that does not last, the belief a dispositional state that survives the judgement and is its residue. Judgement and belief may be both varieties of taking a stance to the probability of future rain. But the difference between judgement and belief is one in category (event versus dispositional state) and not of degree: a belief is not a long-lasting judgement.

notions such as ‘easily possible’ or ‘likely to happen’ featuring in the contents of the affective states. Such a view is not open to the objections discussed so far. Price (2006) suggests a view of moods in terms of likely future possibilities:

[M]oods can be regarded as intentional states, which represent how things are likely to turn out in the immediate future. (Price 2006, 65)¹³

Price gives a plausible description of forward-looking moods like anxiety. But there are also past-oriented moods that make immediate trouble for the proposal. One is in a nostalgic *mood* when one is prone to reminiscences about past events and takes pleasure in them. The onset of nostalgia is famously described by Proust.¹⁴ When I am in a nostalgic mood, I don’t represent ‘how things are likely to turn out in the immediate future’, I am immersed in the *past*. For example, I am disposed to episodically remember the *past* beauty of some things and revel in them. Nostalgia is not about likely possibilities in the future; if about anything at all (and we doubt that it is), it is about remembered past actualities. At a minimum, the view needs to be tweaked, but as we will see in a moment there is a more general problem.

Tappolet (2018) is another proponent of the modal variant of DIM. According to Tappolet, emotions are perceptual experiences as of something having an evaluative property – the dog seems fearsome or dangerous, one’s body seems shameful – while moods are perceptual experiences of the *likely possibility* of something having such a property:

[T]he mood of anxiety consists in the perceptual experience of the likely possibility of fearsomeness being instantiated by something or other. When you are in such a mood, you feel the likely possibility of instantiations of fearsomeness by something or other. (Tappolet 2018, 181–182)

So the intentionality of anxiety is, as with the views above, non-specific – it is felt that something or other might instantiate fearsomeness – but the inclusion of possibility sets Tappolet’s view apart from (DIM1-3).

Although novel and keying into something correct, the worries we have for this approach are similar to those offered before.

First, as with Price, it is hard to see how this proposal will account for nostalgia. There were two concerns facing Price: nostalgia concerns not

¹³Above we quoted Crane as suggesting that moods represent that ‘the world [...] as a potentially disturbing place for oneself’. Crane focuses on ‘the world’ rather than ‘potentially’ in accounting for the phenomenology of mood.

¹⁴See Howards (2012, 644f).

the future but the past and concerns the actual rather than the possible. This second concern is one Tappolet also faces. Nostalgia is not about likely *possibilities*; if about anything at all, it is about *facts* and *events* in the past and their valences.

Second, the view seems to be open to counterexamples even when focusing on fear and anxiety. The feeling that it is a likely possibility that, say, fearsomeness is or will be instantiated simply doesn't look to be a mood when one considers a simple example. Suppose one is walking in an unfamiliar part of an unfamiliar city and suddenly is struck by the fact that this isn't a very good place to be as an outsider. One feels that things might turn threatening at any moment and one looks for the quickest way back to a more familiar landmark. It seems to one that it is a likely possibility that something fearsome will show itself at any moment. But is this an example of being in a mood? We think it's hard to see this as a mood rather than being stricken with recurrent panic and coming to believe that this isn't a very good place to be. And these mental episodes – an emotion and a belief – (even taken together) do not plausibly amount to a mood. So, the view fails to deliver sufficient conditions for being in a mood. That is, there are cases where one evaluatively represents the likely possibility of something and yet wouldn't be described pre-theoretically as in a mood.

Consider another example that shows that meeting Tappolet's condition isn't necessary for being in a mood either. You wake up after a restless night and immediately recognise that you are in a foul mood. When in moods like this, it sometimes helps to remind yourself, 'nothing is bad in the world, I'm just very tired'. You are too tired to give the day any thought and no one else is around. No one seems to be annoying you now nor potentially annoying as the day goes on. You may as well be alone in the arctic. There are no meetings to attend and not a great deal that needs to be accomplished. You could simply go back to sleep if you wanted. In a case like this one, it is strained to hold that the world strikes you as potentially formidable or annoying or as though annoying things might easily be instantiated. And yet, you can still be in a bad mood. So as with the views above, Tappolet fails to adequately distinguish moods from other mental states.

Finally, in addition to counterexamples, it's not at all clear that either Tappolet's or Price's views deliver the target: *diffusiveness*. When one feels 'the likely possibility of instantiations of fearsomeness by something or other', one's feeling is directed upon something like one's local surroundings – *this situation* seems to be one with certain modal properties.

For example, the experienced chess player senses that her queen is in danger, there is an acute possibility that it is taken. Here, either the queen or the whole situation is felt to be a certain way. The feeling is about something in particular and easily identified as such by a reflective subject.

4. Diffusiveness as undeterminateness

Rossi (2019, sect. 4) proposed another take, (DIM5), on the diffusiveness of moods:

I propose [...] to say that one of the defining features of moods is that they are directed at undetermined objects, that is, objects that the individual is unable to identify or individuate.

We are not sure that there are ‘undetermined objects’ as Rossi (ibid.) claims. But the phenomenon he draws our attention to seems clear enough. In fact, Rossi has rediscovered a thesis that can be found in Edmund Husserl’s discussion the intentionality of emotions in his *Logical Investigations*:

[There are intentional experiences] which are characterised as undetermined intentions, where the ‘undeterminedness’ [Unbestimmtheit] of their direction is not a privation, but means a descriptive characteristic, namely a characteristic of the presentation. We present something when ‘something’ stirs, ‘it’ rustles, ‘someone’ rings the bell ... ‘undeterminedness’ belongs here to the nature of the intention whose determination it is to present an undeterminate ‘something’. (Husserl 1901, 396; author translation)

It can be the case that I hear something without knowing what it is that I hear. I can give you no informative answer to your question ‘What do you hear now?’. I don’t know an answer to this question, yet I am certain that I hear something.

It is an interesting observation that there is undetermined intentionality. But is this kind of undetermined intentionality distinctive of moods as Rossi claims? We think not. We take our cue from Kenny:

[T]here are cases where we are afraid, but afraid of nothing, or of something, but we know not what. Perhaps we awake in the morning with a sinking feeling, and a loose and general sense of dread; only later do we remember a dangerous task to be performed. (Kenny 1963, 61)

Your fear is a genuine emotion; you may even be paralysed by fear and show further bodily reactions connected to feeling fear. Yet, you are

not able to answer the question ‘What or who do I fear?’.¹⁵ Psychologists study ‘fear of the unknown’ where the character of the fear is determined by absence of information about the object of fear. (See Carleton 2016). Fear of the unknown is fear of something about which you lack information. But fear of the unknown simply is not a mood!

There is also a more basic worry about Rossi’s proposal: it does not tally with the pre-theoretic notion of diffusiveness. When you are in an angry mood, your anger, from one vantage, isn’t about anything but then it ‘spreads’ over the objects you encounter. The latte? Annoyingly, not frothy enough. The bagel? Annoyingly, too dry. And so on. At the same time, there was no particular object your anger was initially directed upon. So the idea that mood has an object but one knows not what doesn’t fit the phenomenology. Moreover, all the objects your angry mood ‘spreads to’ may be known to you: What annoys you now? This latte here right in front of you that is annoyingly not frothy enough, and so on. Diffusiveness is one thing, undetermined directedness another.

5. Diffusiveness and dispositionality

Given the conclusions of sections 3 and 4, we believe it is worth looking beyond (DIM). If (DIM) cannot capture diffusiveness and what it tells us about moods, what does? Let’s work through an example to develop and motivate an alternative account of the diffusiveness of moods and indeed what we think differentiates them from emotions.

John has drunk a lot of champagne and this put him in a ‘champagne mood’.¹⁶ *Everything* seems funny to him. Now we have seen that this cannot mean that the mood is directed upon everything. Otherwise, we lose the distinction between moods and emotion. Rather, John is disposed, for anything that comes his way, to find it amusing or funny. John’s mood is a bit like superglue. We might say that superglue can glue everything. We certainly don’t think that the superglue represents the things it glues or is about them. Some dispositions such as the power of superglue are triggered by everything, but the manifestation of the power is not keyed to a particular trigger. When we say that it glues everything, we state that the range of things that triggers its power is universal.

Now, the same goes for dispositions like moods. When John is in a champagne mood, he is disposed to find anything that comes his way

¹⁵See also Goldie (2000, 143) on undetermined fear.

¹⁶See Höfler (1897, 412) and Siemer (2005, 819).

funny. And of course, on the dispositional view, many of the manifestations of the disposition are themselves intentional states, but the disposition itself is not. Someone in a mood is inclined to form particular beliefs, desires and feelings, to filter existing mental states in such a way as to make some more salient than others, and to enter into various feelings. When John is in a champagne mood, for example, anything that comes his way will trigger a manifestation of the mood: John will feel that the object is funny or amusing. At the same time, nothing in particular need be funny or amusing. If John is sitting still in a dark room, there may be nothing at all which triggers his Champagne mood.¹⁷

Here is another, related way to put the point. When we say that John finds everything but nothing in particular funny, there are at least two candidate truth makers. *First*, he might be in some representational state that represents everything but nothing in particular. *Second*, he might have a disposition that is triggered by anything, but the disposition is not grounded in a representational state that represents everything but nothing in particular. In sections 2–4 we saw that there are reasons for departing from the intentional views of moods and so we are disinclined to adopt the first truth maker. The second truth maker remains available to us and is a very natural thing to say about someone like John, just as natural as it is to say that superglue glues everything. So rather than offer some intentional state that has a general content, generic content, or whatever, the dispositionalist explains the diffusiveness of moods in terms of the broadness of a disposition rather than in terms of a content of the mood itself. When we say that the person in a bad mood hates everything but nothing in particular, we report about the range of things that trigger his disposition to form negative emotions: everything he encounters or thinks about triggers the disposition and it is likely to manifest itself in a feeling of anger directed at any object encountered.

Now this first stab at formulating the way in which the mood is ‘about’ *everything* is almost certainly too strong. Suppose someone says that when he is in a really silly mood, *everything* seems funny. Presumably, the horrors of war don’t seem funny. Rather, this joke, that clumsy movement, this trivial failing, that odd looking toy, and so on, are, when one

¹⁷Philosophers of emotion say that an affective mood may ‘crystallise’ into emotion: ‘Once started [an emotional mood] is very liable to crystallise into the corresponding emotion, viz., in this case anger, towards the first suitable object which happens to be available’ (Broad 1954, 207). We argue that ‘crystallisation’ is nothing but the manifestation of a disposition and the intuition that moods are about everything concerns the range of objects that trigger its manifestation.

attends to them, all evaluated in an amusing light. One needn't really evaluate *everything* as funny or amusing when in a silly mood. Kriegel (2019, 4) gets this point right when suggesting that moods should be thought of in generic terms (see also section 1). We often speak as though we are disposed to find everything grey and gloomy when feeling low and are disposed to finding everything amusing when feeling high, but we don't literally take this to be the case. Our view easily accommodates this – a disposition's manifestations are restricted by a number of factors. One who is in a silly mood is disposed to very easily find *things* funny or amusing that come to their attention, but they needn't evaluate *absolutely everything* in this way when so disposed. Working out the precise triggering conditions is certainly beyond the scope of the present essay. Suffice it to say that we aren't and need not be committed to the overly strong position.

We have now made sense of the core part of the diffusiveness of moods without turning the distinction between mood and emotion into one of degree. Moods are dispositional states that can be initiated by emotions (and other things such as perceptions) and that, in turn, can be manifested in emotions (more detail on this below).

What are emotions? This is obviously a difficult question we cannot undertake to answer here. Fortunately no answer is required for the purposes of this paper. There are emotions that are dispositional states like your love of football; other emotions, say a fit of rage, seem to be conscious processes. Now, even if all emotions turned out to be dispositions this would not affect our view that moods are dispositions. Under this assumption, moods would turn out to be dispositions to have other dispositions. My angry mood disposes me, among other things, to cantankerousness; that is, I am disposed to be cantankerous. The most plausible assumption here seems to be that moods are dispositions to other mental dispositions as well as to conscious processes.

The dispositional account delivers a further aspect of diffusiveness. Here we take our lead from Shand:

This diffusiveness of the angry mood is accounted for by the fact that the anger to which it disposes us is not aroused in the ordinary way by some external event, but is inwardly excited. [...] Thus in an ill tempered mood a man complains of his dinner, of the lack of attention he receives, of violations of his orders, of disagreeable people he has met, passing from one of these objects, when its insufficiency is exposed, to some other. For while the mood persists, if it can find no single object to justify it, a succession of objects must replace that one. (Shand 1917, 152)

The man in an ill-tempered mood is not only disposed to be angry at any object that he encounters (in a broad sense of ‘encounter’), but he is also disposed to search for objects to be angry about. If you show him that the dinner is actually very nice, he is disposed to find another object to be angry about. Compare this to skill and ability: if I have the ability to repair watches, having the ability is at least a factor in being disposed to look for occasions to exercise it. In contrast, the ‘search aspect’ of diffusiveness is a mystery if we accept (DIM). Why should you look for things to be angry about if you are angry at the world. Your anger encompasses already everything.

Finally, the dispositional account explains why the view of moods as states with general or undetermined objects has such a hold on philosophers. My angry mood is a disposition to feel anger at any object that I encounter or imagine. One can have this disposition without representing the objects that will activate it. Yet, if it is activated and one pays attention to one’s mental life over time, it will seem that everything annoys one. Just remember how things are for you when you wake up in a bad mood. First, the sound of the alarm clock is annoying, then the coffee is annoyingly bitter, the shower, annoyingly cold, and so on.¹⁸ In this situation, you will be under the impression that is best described by saying that everything is annoying. However, this belief or seeming is not the mood, it is an upshot of the repeated activation of the mood over time. It is tempting to hold that the mood represents everything as annoying, but this move mistakes the fact that a disposition is triggered by everything with the generality of an intentional content. This is the mistake proponents of DIM make and, for reasons provided in sections 3 and 4, we think it misconstrues diffusiveness and erodes the distinction between moods and emotions. But it is an advantage of our view that it helps us see why this error is easily made.

6. Moods as non-intentional dispositions

Let us expand on the positive proposal. (DDM) makes the diffusiveness of moods intelligible and turns it into a feature that distinguishes moods from emotions. It implies that moods are dispositions. This view of the metaphysics of moods sits well with common sense. Consider what the OED says about moods:

Mood: A prevailing but temporary state of mind or feeling; a person’s humour, temper, or disposition at a particular time.

¹⁸See Tye (2008, 45-46) and Kind (2013, 120).

'Irritable' and other mood words are 'short-term tendency words' (Ryle 1949, 96). If I am anxious/in an anxious mood, I have, for a while, an inclination, tendency or disposition to feel fear. A disposition to feel fear is distinct and different in kind from its manifestation: the feeling of fear.

Our view is that moods are non-intentional dispositions. How does this help us to distinguish moods from emotions? In some sense, emotions are dispositions too, after all.

Some mental dispositions (beliefs, for example) are intentional, others (character traits like being sentimental or irascible) are not intentional. One's sentimentality can be a relatively permanent property of one, but it has, in no plausible sense, an object. Moods are amongst the non-intentional dispositions, according to us. Consider again our initial example: you wake up in the morning in a bad mood. Nothing has triggered the manifestations of the mood yet. So there is no object-directed emotion manifested. Yet, you feel in a bad mood, you feel, for example, wound-up. A disposition can be manifested in intentional feelings and attitudes, but the disposition itself is non-intentional. So, we do not deny that emotions dispose one in various ways, but what differentiates moods from emotions is that moods are, fundamentally, *non-intentional* dispositions.

Given the importance of dispositions for the proposed view let us consider a paradigmatic disposition to get clear about what we are advocating: fragility. The glass is fragile just in case it has a property that makes it the case that it is easily possible that it breaks. For Meinong (1919, 35) a disposition is nothing but the property of having a property that grounds a possibility.¹⁹

Given our aims and the scope of the present paper, we will not try to lay out the complete dispositional profile of any given mood. We want to defend the view that moods are dispositions at a level of abstraction that shows the merits of pursuing the details. The contemporary literature is rife with Intentionalist approaches and we think dispositionalism deserves a closer look. That said, it will be helpful, briefly and in outline, to see how the dispositionalist view could be developed further. Consider being in an angry mood. We need to fill the dots in:

(Angry) *S* is in an angry mood at time *t* if, and only if, there is a property *P* such that *S*'s having *P* at *t* grounds that it is easily possible at *t* for *S* to ...

It is a matter of controversy among dispositionalists about mood how the dots are to be filled in. Some take moods to be dispositions to attend to

¹⁹Vetter (2015, 71ff) proposes independently of Meinong a similar view this view of dispositions.

negative/positive features of the world, others hold that moods are dispositions to activate negative (positive) beliefs and desires, a third party identifies moods with dispositions to feel.²⁰ However, we find attractive the completion of (Angry) that has it that moods are dispositions to have emotions. Consider as an example how the emotive dispositionalist would fill out the schema for being in an angry mood:

S is in an angry mood at *t* if, and only if, there is a property *P* such that *S*'s having *P* at *t* grounds that it is easily possible at *t* for *S* to feel anger/resentment at *Xs* that *S* encounters.

In outline, we prefer the emotive disposition view over its competitors for the reason that dispositions to feel are explanatorily more fundamental than dispositions to attend, judge, and so on. It is because of the emotional responses to which we are inclined when in a mood that we are prone to make negative judgements or attend to the negative features of things. Your emotional dispositions determine, in part, your belief-forming and attention-steering dispositions. But not the other way around.

Now there is a sufficiency problem here. To see it consider an example. Tony may have a spiteful character and his character makes him easily respond with anger at anything that comes his way. Harriet has an illness that makes it easily possible for her to be angry at everything and nothing in particular. Neither Harriet nor Tony are in a bad mood, but both are disposed to be angered at everything. What, then, distinguishes moods from other dispositions to have emotions? We will have to leave the discussion of this question for another occasion. Here we are only interested in exploring the account of diffuseness that the disposition view offers. Our hypothesis is that the sufficiency problem can be solved by appealing to the etiology of moods: one snaps in and out of a mood, but one cannot snap in or out of having a spiteful character.

However, we neither can nor need to defend the emotive dispositions view here. Our focus is to argue against the trend to develop the details of the Intentionalist programme to the exclusion of the dispositionalist programme. Here we only want to make the case that dispositionalism about moods is an attractive research programme.

If moods are dispositions, we can tease out relations to other affective dispositions. Let's start with character traits. John may be in an angry

²⁰Shand (1914, 152f.) argues for the selective attention view, Lormand (1985, 399f.) for the negative/positive belief and desire view, see also Sizer (2000). According to Höfler (1897, 412), moods (*Stimmungen*) are dispositions to feelings (*Gefühlsdispositionen*). See also Siemer (2005) and Frijda (1993, 384ff).

mood, but also an irascible person. Irascibility is a character trait and not a mood. What distinguishes moods from character traits? Moods are temporary dispositions:

Our emotional moods are like tempers being only less fixed and permanent.
(Shand 1914, 151)

For example, a hot chocolate will get you out of a grumpy mood. In contrast, a character trait is (much) harder to lose. If you want to change the character of a cruel and cold man like Ebenezer Scrooge you must produce an experience that makes him see the world in a different way, a hot coco won't do the trick. Character traits are stable dispositions.

Another class of affective dispositions that is important in our practical lives are sentiments. At some point in British history Anti-French sentiments were widespread; moral sentiments need educating and developing. We think that Broad's (1954, 212) view of sentiments is on the right track: You have an x sentiment if, and only if, your dispositions to think about x are paired with dispositions to have feelings about x . Take the Anti-French sentiment. Whenever, you consider, see or imagine something French, you tend to dislike the object you consider. In this way sentiments are distinguished from moods: moods are not triggered by particular objects or kinds of objects; they are general dispositions. We think it is a nice feature of our view of moods that it makes room for differentiating them from sentiments while seeing the ways in which they bear similarity.

7. The objection from lack of phenomenology

The view that moods are non-intentional dispositions yields a clear distinction between moods and emotions and sheds light on the intuitions we have about the diffusiveness of moods. Yet, the dispositional view does not have many friends. Why is this?

As far as we can see, philosophers of emotion endorse the claim that moods have phenomenal properties – there is something it is like to be in a mood – but then add that dispositions of the sort we are arguing for can't have phenomenal properties.²¹ Let us look more closely at this argument. Tappolet helpfully formulates it in more detail:

What dispositional accounts, whether simple or complex, have to deny is that moods are states characterized by phenomenal properties. As far as I can see,

²¹See, for example, Deonna & Teroni (2012, 4), Mitchell (2019, 120), Prinz (2004, 184).

a disposition to undergo emotions is simply not something that in itself feels a certain way; and neither is a complex disposition, of course. What you experience can only be the phenomena, such as, foremost, the emotions, to which you are disposed. (Tappolet 2018, 176)

We offer the following as rendering of this line of argument:

1. Moods are characterised by phenomenal properties.
2. Dispositions are not characterised by phenomenal properties because having a disposition does not feel any way.
3. Therefore, moods are not dispositions.

The argument is certainly valid, but are the premises plausible?

We agree with Tappolet and others on the first premise: if one is in a nostalgic mood, the state one is in is characterised by a distinctive phenomenology. We disagree with the second premise, though.

Premise 2 is indeed a tempting claim, but when looked at more carefully, it should be rejected. It is correct that a disposition to have feelings does not itself *need* to feel a certain way: being disposed to be in some phenomenal state needn't itself have phenomenal properties. For example, by having a sensory system and a human brain, one is disposed to undergo various experiences, but one might not now be experiencing anything at all. If this is what Tappolet has in mind, we simply agree. But for the argument to be persuasive against a view like ours, a stronger claim is needed: that being disposed in the way we are envisioning *couldn't* have a phenomenology. And this, we think, is very hard to substantiate.

Tappolet might be presupposing that dispositions are not actualised, and so, might then reasonably ask, how could the *merely possible* feel any way to someone here and now? But dispositions aren't merely counterfactual in this sense. It might be that they are best expressed in terms of (or even analysed as) counterfactual conditionals and it is true that something can have a disposition without that disposition *actually being triggered*, but from this, it does not follow that dispositional properties fail to be actual properties that are instantiated here and now. On our view, the dispositions that are moods are properties possession of which grounds that it is easily possible at a time for the subject to have certain feelings and emotions. There is nothing non-actual about having such a property and so if the worry is that the phenomenal must be actual and not merely possible, there is no worry here.

Tappolet might have in mind that dispositions could, at most, have a phenomenological character in some derivative sense and this is indeed suggested when she writes, 'As far as I can see, a disposition to undergo emotions is simply not something that in itself feels a certain way ... What you experience can only be the phenomena, such as, foremost, the emotions, to which you are disposed'. Tappolet might be worried that dispositionalists run the risk of trying to capture the phenomenology of the mood *in terms of* the phenomenology of the feelings one is disposed to have. To be clear, this is not our view. Suppose we correctly identify the phenomenology of some emotion, say an episode of anger. One is angry at John and this feels some way. Suppose further that one's anger is the result of being in an angry mood. The phenomenology of the angry mood is, we agree, distinct from the phenomenology of the anger directed specifically at John. But we hold that moods have *their own* phenomenology and not a mere derivative phenomenology. We suspect that Tappolet and others will insist that this isn't possible, but we simply cannot see why one would so insist. We seem to be faced with the bald assertion that dispositional properties cannot ground or be identical to phenomenal properties. But why endorse this claim? To see that one shouldn't, consider the following example: One is attending, in good light, to a bright red object. There is something it is like to look at such an object. But that experience is also a disposition, it disposes one to believe that there is a bright red object before one. There is no tension in something being at once an occurrent phenomenal episode and being a disposition. That is, there is no incoherence in an entity instantiating both of those properties at once. Moreover, there is no incoherence in holding that those properties are related by identity or by grounded-and-grounds. It might be a controversial thesis, but it is not a non-starter.

1wConsider another example. One is trying very hard to unscrew the lid from a jar of jam. One is twisting with all one's might, gripping the lid tightly, and so on. One's hand is disposed to turn clockwise – if the lid were to pop or one were to lose their grip, the hand would turn. While trying to open the lid, the tension in one's hand feels a certain way. There is no incoherence in this combination of saying that one's hand is disposed to turn clockwise and that being disposed in this way feels a certain way to one. The characterisation of disposition in section 6 makes clear why there is no incompatibility. S has the disposition to φ at t if, and only if, S has a property that grounds that it is easily possible that S φ -s at t . In the example under consideration this property is a state

of one's arm and hand. This state feels a certain way to one. Tappolet is right to say that *dispositions* don't feel a certain way – that would be a category mistake. But the dispositionalist does not make this mistake. One has a disposition if, and only if, one has a property the possession of which makes certain events easily possible (see previous section). The possession of the property is an actual fact and it is no category mistake to say that it feels a certain way.

The above suggests that the phenomenal and the disposition needn't be in tension, but there is also evidence in favour of saying that moods are both phenomenal and dispositional. Our ordinary descriptions of moods suggest as much. If you woke up in a bad mood, you may describe how you felt in the following ways:

- I felt wound-up (disposed to unwind)
- I felt pent-up anger (disposed to feel angry)
- I felt like I could explode (the disposition is ready to manifest)
- I felt utterly depleted (the disposition has been exercised and exhausted)

You can *feel* like you could explode without exploding with anger. There is a particular way being so disposed feels, yet it is very different from the way anger directed at particular things feels once you finally do explode. We cannot see why theorists have been so timid about holding that moods, conceived of as dispositions, can also have a phenomenology of their own. We leave it to them to sharpen their concern.

Perhaps there is another way to pressure our view. Uriah Kriegel (personal correspondence) has offered the following refinement on the worry about dispositions:

For any subject *S*, disposition *D*, and mood *M*,

(K1) Possibly, *S* has *D* and *S* instantiates no phenomenal properties;

(K2) It's not the case that possibly, *S* has *M* and *S* instantiates no phenomenal properties

(K3) So, $D \neq M$.

A salient way to support K1 is to point to the possibility of a Zombie who has the disposition but lacks any phenomenology.

We think this is indeed a pressing concern but it isn't one that threatens our view specifically. Consider the following argument against intentionalism:

For any subject *S*, intentional state *I*, and mood *M*,

(I1) Possibly, *S* has *I* and *S* instantiates no phenomenal properties;

(I2) It's not the case that possibly, *S* has *M* and *S* instantiates no phenomenal properties

(I3) So, $D \neq I$.

This is just as compelling an argument against intentionalism as Kriegel's argument is against dispositionalism. Both arguments, it seems to us, trade on the explanatory gap one famously finds between the phenomenal and any reduction of the phenomenal in other terms. One reply is simply to deny K1: it isn't possible to have the dispositions without the phenomenology. And to then add: it *seems* possible (it is conceivable) because ... (and now fill in your favourite story about why Zombies aren't, in fact, possible). We aren't here advocating any particular reply but we do think it is dialectically adequate to point out that the thrust of the argument in K1-K3 doesn't turn on the dispositionalist thesis – any view that aims to capture the phenomenal in non-phenomenal terms will be afflicted and so the real thrust is coming from elsewhere.

8. Conclusion

How are moods distinguished from emotions? Moods are diffuse, emotions are directed. But moods are not emotions with distinctive intentional objects or contents – approaches that try to capitalise on this idea all fail. Rather, the diffusiveness of moods concerns their dispositional nature. Hence, common sense is right: moods are dispositions and, plausibly, they are dispositions to enter into emotional states.²²

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ORCID

Alex Grzankowski  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0751-1706>

Mark Textor  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8419-6949>

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