

Moods and the Salience of Subjectivity

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Forthcoming in Stefan Lang and Maik Niemeck (eds.), *Self and Affect* (Palgrave Macmillan)

Abstract.

The philosophical debate around the nature of moods has mostly focused on their apparent *undirectedness*: unlike mental states such as perceptual experiences, thoughts, and emotions, moods do not seem to be directed at any specific object, and indeed they do not seem to be directed at anything at all. In this paper, I want to draw attention to a different feature of moods, one that is as important and in need of explanation as their apparent undirectedness, but which has been overlooked by most participants in the debate: the fact that moods involve a particularly marked *salience of the subjective aspect of experience*. I argue that any adequate theory of moods should account for this fact. I call this the “subjective salience desideratum.” In the bulk of the paper, I articulate and motivate the desideratum, show that extant theories of moods do not satisfy it, and offer a preliminary overview of possible (yet unexplored) theories that have the subjective salience desideratum at their core.

1. Introduction

Moods are a fundamental aspect of our inner life. Even though they often lie in the background of consciousness, they imbue and permeate our overall state of mind and their diffuse presence affects the whole of our experience. Moods influence the way we think, the way we act, what we intend and desire, they dispose us to have some emotions rather than others, and they even condition the way we perceive the world around us, what we notice and what we tend to attend to. Their pervasive impact makes them a central feature of our mental life, one that affects our decisions, actions, and social interactions, and makes a crucial difference to our wellbeing.¹

Yet, philosophical treatments of the nature of mood experience do not abound. The bulk of the debate focuses on a specific feature of moods—their apparent *undirectedness*—and on whether and how it can be accommodated in the framework of the currently most widespread philosophical theory of consciousness—representationalism. Representational theories aim to explain consciousness in terms of representation. Roughly, the idea is that a conscious experience has phenomenal character (i.e., the peculiar subjective feeling or “what it is like” to undergo it) in virtue of representing something (in the right sort of way). The problem with moods is that they seem to constitute a counterexample to representationalism. Unlike mental states such as perceptual experiences, thoughts, and emotions, which straightforwardly seem to be directed at some specific object (you see *a red apple*, you think *about your partner*, you are angry *at the cashier*), representation of which seems to (at least partly) account for their phenomenal character, moods are not directed at any specific object, and indeed they do not seem to be directed at anything at all: when you are irritable, although you may be *disposed* to more easily get *angry* at the cashier, you are not *irritable* at the cashier—you are *just* irritable. Similarly, when you feel depressed, elated, anxious, or serene, your mood does not seem to be about anything specific—you just seem to be in a general *moody*

¹ See Kriegel (2022) for a fresh and illuminating contribution on the intimate relationship between mood and wellbeing.

state of mind. While a few representationalists have bitten the bullet about the exceptionality of moods,² many have tried to squeeze moods into the representationalist framework.

Much of the mood literature has thus been the battlefield of representationalists and anti-representationalists. On the representationalist side, it has focused on articulating potential representational accounts of moods; on the anti-representationalist side, it has focused on motivating the implausibility of those accounts.

Here I want to shift the focus of the discussion to a different feature of moods, one that is as important and in need of explanation as their apparent undirectedness, but which has been overlooked by most participants in the debate. While I tend to agree with anti-representationalists that extant representational theories of moods are unsatisfactory, I do not take this to be necessarily due to the representational nature of those theories. I suggest that the inadequacy of extant representational theories is mainly due to failure to meet what I call the “subjective salience desideratum”: they fail to accommodate the fact that moods involve a particularly marked *salience of the subjective aspect of experience*. (I will explain what I mean by this in §2.)

Given that the focus of the debate has been almost exclusively on apparent undirectedness, the subjective salience desideratum has been widely neglected and little if anything has been done to explore new theories that take the desideratum seriously and aim at satisfying it. In this paper I try to take a few first steps toward filling this gap, by mapping out the possible views that promise to meet the subjective salience desideratum, sketching a preliminary evaluation of their pros and cons, and suggesting some *prima facie* reasons for considering some of them more promising than others.

In §2 I explain and motivate the subjective salience desideratum. In §3 I survey the main extant philosophical theories of moods, summarize their main problems, and show that they do not satisfy the subjective salience desideratum. In §4 I do a preliminary exploration of some possible theories that have the desideratum at their core and sketch an initial evaluation of each. §5 concludes.

2. The subjective salience desideratum

Consider the following examples.

- ☞ When I feel elated, my experience is characterized by *explosive, energetic positivity*. This affective quality does not seem to be part of the world around me—the chair and the cup do not appear to me as if they were full of explosive and energetic positivity—nor does it seem to be responsive to features of my environment—it is not the chair or the cup that causes the positive feeling I experience. Rather, it seems to spring from inside of me, saturate my mind and body, spread a peppy and joyful glow all over my feelings, perceptions, and thoughts, and lighten with a rosy gleam the way I experience myself and the world around me.
- ☞ When I feel serene, I feel *peaceful, motionless calmness*. People around me might well look restless and agitated—this would not affect my inner peace. Things may also look still and

² Fred Dretske (1995: xv), for example, writes: “There are, however, still other experiences—a general feeling of depression, for example—about which I do not know what to say. That is the purpose of the ‘plus or minus a bit’ in the statement of the Representational Thesis.”

calm, but this would be entirely unrelated to my inner serenity. What feels peaceful and motionlessly calm is *me*, or my inner state of mind—rather than things other than me.

- ☞ When I feel anxious, a generalized feeling of *paralyzing terror* subdues my inner life. Things and people are not terrifying and in fact routing out the exact cause of the anxiety (which may be external and related to some of those things and people) can turn out a difficult task, partly because the external events, people, or things that cause the anxiety experience do not show up in its phenomenology—the experience does not attach paralyzing terror to any external event, person, or thing. The terror conquers every corner of my state of mind and encrusts the whole of my experience, regardless of the features of my environment.
- ☞ When I feel depressed, my mood experience involves a specific affective quality—a characteristic mixture of *pointlessness*, *hopelessness*, and *dark emptiness*. This affective quality does not seem to inhere in objects in my surroundings: those look, smell, or otherwise appear to me more or less the way they usually do. What is different is the way *I* feel in experiencing them, the way I feel in experiencing *anything*, really: I feel as if that special mixture of pointlessness, hopelessness, and dark emptiness had seeped into the deepness of myself, as if it had filled up the abyss of my own subjectivity and interposed a heavy leaden mantle between myself and my experiential life.
- ☞ When I feel irritable, a *restless*, *repelling*, and *unpleasant agitation* pervades my experience. This is not due to any particular irritating feature of things and people I happen to encounter, but rather to a general state *I* am in, a sensation in which my overall awareness is soaked, and that is poised to burst out and growl at those blameless things and people. Even if *some* of the things and people around me may feel irritating to me, certainly *not all* of them do—indeed most of them *do not*: the chair I am sitting on, the cup on the table, as well as most other objects in my surroundings do not appear irritating at all.

Each mood is characterized by a specific affective quality (dark pointlessness in depression, energetic positivity in elation, etc.), that shows up in mood's phenomenology. As these examples suggest, the relevant affective quality does not seem to be attributed by the mood to any external object, event, or person. Indeed, moods do not seem to be about any particular thing out there in the world, outside one's mind: they do not phenomenally feel *outwardly directed*. Rather, what those affective qualities seem to pertain to is some *inner* aspect of oneself: what is relevant to the mood is *the way one feels* in experiencing what one does, rather than the way things in one's surroundings appear in one's experience. Although this *could* suggest some form of anti-representationalism, it does *not* necessarily imply that moods are non-representational states; it only suggests that, if moods are representational, what they represent is something *internal* to the subject, rather than some external object in the subject's environment. So, if moods are directed at all, they are *inwardly* (rather than outwardly) directed: they concern the subject itself and/or its own experiences.

To be sure, moods may *affect* the way things appear to us. Being in a certain mood can and often does make us *perceive* things as being a certain way rather than another, *notice* some things or features rather than others, *think* certain thoughts rather than others, have some *emotions*, *intentions*, and *desires* rather than others. When I am depressed, my mind tends to sink into dark thoughts about life's pointlessness and I may tend to experience things and events as void of any importance or meaning. When I am elated, my thoughts are often more optimistic, and I tend to focus my attention on the goodness in the world. When I am irritable, I may perceive more things as

annoying than I usually do, and I may be more prone to burst out in anger against someone in my vicinity.

However, perceiving the world as we do and thinking the thoughts we do are *not constituents* of mood—or so I argue. Rather, those are mental states *distinct* from the mood (perceptual experiences, thoughts, etc.) that are *caused* or *facilitated* by being in a mood—they are *consequences* or *effects* of the mood state. Obviously, the *thought* that my life is pointless and my depressive *mood* are distinct mental states, and either can certainly occur in the absence of the other: I can think about life’s pointlessness while being in a serene state of mind. Similarly, I can notice a kind action’s goodness even though my mind is impregnated with hopeless emptiness. Still, while being distinct from them, moods can be (and often are) *causally related* to thoughts and experiences whose content attributes to worldly things an affective or evaluative property that is connected to the one that is characteristic of the mood: being depressed may cause or dispose one’s mind to inhabit dark thoughts; being elated may cause or dispose one to notice the goodness of a kind action; and so on.

If we carefully isolate the mood experience itself from its effects and consequences on the contents of other experiences and thoughts, we see that, while those other experiences and thoughts may be outwardly directed, the mood itself is not. The mood is rather either *inwardly* directed, or undirected in such a way that it pertains to the subject and/or its experiences, rather than the worldly things those experiences are about. The rest of this section tries to provide further motivation for this claim.

2.1. Introspection and opacity

When we try to introspectively attend to typical outwardly directed experiences, we usually end up attending to the worldly things those experiences are about: when you try to focus your attention on your visual experience of the red apple, you will probably end up attending to the apple. For this reason, those experiences are often described as *transparent* (Harman 1990): introspective attention passes through them and falls onto what they are about.

When we try to introspectively attend to our mood experiences, however, our attention does *not* fall onto any external object or feature of our environment. Attention is not directed outward, but *inward*: we attend to the way *we feel*, to our own inner experience. In fact, moods are paradigmatically *opaque* experiences (and are often recruited as the main counterexample to the *transparency of experience* thesis, i.e., the thesis that all experiences are transparent).

While being in a certain mood, one may certainly focus one’s attention on, say, the things one sees and the features they appear to have, or on the specific contents of one’s thoughts. But this does not amount to introspectively attending to the *mood*. Rather, what one does in this case is focus one’s attention on some *other* mental state that *co-occurs* with (and may be *caused* or *facilitated* by) the mood. When one focuses on the *mood*, rather than on some other state that is somehow causally related to the mood, what one attends to are some affective aspects or features of one’s inner life. What one attends to is *the way one feels*, rather than the way things appear to one.

2.2. *Correlation between intensity and prominence*

When I look at a red apple, what is most prominent in my experience is the outer object—the apple. By contrast, when I am in a depressive mood, what is most prominent is *myself*, as the bearer of that peculiar feeling of dark emptiness. Similar considerations apply to all other moods: *I* feel elated, *I* feel anxious, *I* feel serene—it is the inner state of mine that is prominent.

This becomes particularly evident when we consider phenomenal-intensity changes. When the intensity of a visual experience increases—say, when a light appears to become brighter, or a sound appears to become louder—the *external object* of the experience—the light, the sound—acquires more salience in my overall experience. By contrast, when the intensity of my mood experience increases—when I sink deeper into my depressive state, or when I fly higher up in my elatedness—what becomes more salient in my experience is *me* and my own inner state—I feel more intensely *myself* and my inner sinking pain, or my inner exploding joy.

2.3. *Sensitivity to changes in the world*

The phenomenology of outwardly directed experience is (partly) determined by what the experience is *about*: my visual experience as of a red apple is different from my visual experience as of a yellow banana (partly) in virtue of being directed at a red apple as opposed to a banana. Changes in the way the world appears necessarily make a difference to the phenomenology of outwardly directed experiences. By contrast, changes in the way the world appears need not make any difference to mood phenomenology. My depressive phenomenology remains equally dark, regardless of what objects happen to populate the rest of my experience.

To be sure, encountering some particular objects *might* affect mood's phenomenology. Contemplating the beauty of Bach's *Partita in D Minor* might ephemeraly relieve the inner pain of the depressed; witnessing contemptuous behavior might drag down the inner excitement of the elated. But these are *causal effects* that what one hears or sees *may* have on the mood experience. Changes in the way the world appears do not necessarily imply a change in mood phenomenology (in fact they usually do not).

2.4. *Pervasiveness*

Outwardly directed mental states can be picked out and mentally isolated from other concurrent experiences. I can distinguish my visual experience of a red apple on the right from my visual experience of a yellow banana on the left, and from my auditory experience of bell ringing. Each can be mentally isolated from the others and conceived as occurring independently of the others. Outwardly directed experiences are, so to speak, *isolable* and *local*. Arguably, these experiences can be distinguished (partly) by reference to their specific intentional content—what they represent. My seeing a red apple can be distinguished from my hearing doorbell ringing partly in virtue of the former representing a red apple and the latter representing doorbell sound. In this sense, these mental states are *targeted*: we can pick them up by reference to some particular thing in the world.

Moods, by contrast, are not similarly targeted. There is no object in the world that allows one to pick out one's depressive state. Depressive mood is a seemingly targetless state one is *in*, a state that encompasses one's overall inner state of mind and tinges it dark gray.

Nor are moods isolable or local. They are global, diffused, and pervasive; they spread all over our inner experience. They do not seem to be detachable from one's overall experience the way seeing a red apple seems to be detachable from hearing doorbell sound. Moods imbue and impregnate one's whole mental life and seem to attach to every mental state one happens to have. A mood is like a blanket covering all the experiences one undergoes, or like a filter through which one lives the whole of one's inner life.

This consideration resonates with the "colored lenses" metaphor that is sometimes used to describe moods: each mood has a specific hue by which it tinges one's entire stream of consciousness.

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These considerations, I argue, impose a *desideratum* on philosophical theories of mood: any satisfactory theory of mood must accommodate and account for the fact that moods pertain to some inner aspect of the subject, rather than the world outside the subject's mind. If moods are directed at all, they are *inwardly* directed. If they are not directed, an account of moods still has to accommodate and explain the fact that in mood experience what is salient is the *subjective* aspect of phenomenology.

3. Extant theories of moods and the subjective salience desideratum

As noted, most contemporary theories of moods are representational. They attempt to explain away moods' apparent undirectedness by appeal to some peculiarity in the intentional structure. Most of them account for moods in terms of peculiar *content*. Some of them (in fact only one, to my knowledge, i.e. the one developed by Kriegel 2019b) account for moods in terms of peculiar *attitude*. Anti-representationalist theories, on the other hand, typically spell out moods in terms of *intrinsic experiential qualities*. In this section, I briefly review these theories and suggest why they are unsatisfactory.

3.1. Pure representationalism about moods

Pure representationalism about moods aims at accounting for moods purely in terms of a peculiar kind of content: S is in mood M iff S is in a mental state with content *x*. Different pure representational views spell out *x* in different ways.

3.1.1. *Generalized content*. The most popular theory of this type characterizes moods as mental states with *generalized* content. The idea was famously put forward by Robert Solomon (1976: 173):

Euphoria, melancholy, and depression are not about anything in particular [...]; they are about the whole of our world, or indiscriminately about anything that comes our way, casting happy glows or somber shadows on every object and incident of our experience.

Inspired by this idea, two views of moods as mental states with generalized content have been developed. One is the view that moods are “about the whole of our world” and the other is the view that moods are “about anything that comes our way.” Let us consider each in turn.

“*The whole of our world.*” On this view, moods are mental states that represent the whole world as having a certain evaluative property (Lyons 1980; Crane 1998): depression represents the whole world as pointless; elation represents the whole world as wonderful; anxiety represents the whole world as threatening; serenity represents the whole world as calm; and so on:

WHOLE WORLD: S is in mood M iff S is in a conscious state whose content consists in attributing evaluative property E_M to the whole world.

E_M here is the evaluative property that is peculiar to the specific mood M (pointlessness for depression, wonderfulness for elation, and so on).

“*Anything that comes our way.*” On this view, moods represent everything or anything one encounters in experience as having a certain evaluative property (Kenny 1963; Seager 1999; Mitchell 2019): depression represents everything/anything one encounters in experience as pointless; elation represents everything/anything one encounters in experience as wonderful; and so on. This can be unpacked in two ways:

EVERYTHING: S is in mood M iff S is in a conscious state whose content consists in attributing evaluative property E_M to *everything*.

ANYTHING: S is in mood M iff, for any object x experienced by S, S is in a conscious state whose content consists in attributing evaluative property E_M to x .

All three versions of the generalized content view have been the target of compelling objections.

Amy Kind (2014) has argued that representing the whole world, everything, or anything one encounters in experience as having a peculiar evaluative property is neither necessary nor sufficient for mood. On the one hand, change in mood phenomenology does not entail change in the way the world is represented: when a father, elated by the birth of his daughter, rocks her to sleep in his arms, his elation deepens, but the daughter does *not* necessarily appear more wonderful or rosier to him (*ibid.*: 126-27). On the other hand, change in the way the world is represented does not entail change in mood phenomenology: one’s mood may remain unvaried regardless of the changing series of worldly objects one happens to experience. Furthermore, one may well represent the world as pointless without *feeling* depressed.

Somewhat related to the latter point is an objection raised by Uriah Kriegel (2019b)—what he calls the “problem of shared contents”: it is perfectly possible to be in a conscious state whose content attributes an evaluative property to the world (or to everything, or to anything one encounters in experience) without experiencing any mood. One may be in a conscious state with content <the world is pointless> without thereby feeling depressed: one may instead *believe* that the world is pointless, or *wonder* whether the world is pointless, or bear some other attitude to the world and its pointlessness.

Moreover (and more relevantly to our purpose), moods just do not *seem* to attribute any evaluative property to the whole world, or to everything in the world, or to anything we happen to encounter in experience. When I am elated, I do not necessarily represent the world as wonderful (I do when, say, the *thought* occurs to me that the world is wonderful), nor do things around me necessarily appear so—my cup appears to me as unremarkable as it usually does. In

fact, as compellingly pointed out by Davide Bordini (2017) moods seem to be fully independent of the world:

[T]he world does not seem in any way “responsible” for one’s experience, quite the contrary: the mood seems to be there quite independently of it. Either way, mood experience does not really seem to inherently involve the world—or anything coming from the world-side, so to speak: being in a certain mood appears to be *an entirely subjective matter*, a matter of having certain feelings that have nothing to do with the way the world is. (Bordini 2017: 62, italics added).

As I argued in §2, moods simply do not phenomenologically appear to be *outwardly* directed. Rather, being in a certain mood is, as nicely put by Bordini, “an entirely subjective matter”: what is relevant to the mood is the subjective experience, the way one *feels inside*.

Hence, besides being unsatisfactory in the ways illustrated by Kind and Kriegel, generalized content views also fail to satisfy the subjective salience desideratum.

3.1.2. Unbound affective properties. A different form of pure representationalism about moods is put forward by Angela Mendelovici (2014). Mendelovici argues that moods represent affective properties, but do not attribute those properties to anything (either the whole world or some object or event in it): they represent *unbound affective properties*. So, depression represents *pointlessness*, elation represents *wonderfulness*, anxiety represents *scariness*, and so on. This is best understood by comparing it to her account of emotions. Emotions, in Mendelovici’s view, represent affective properties as attaching to some object in the world. Feeling joy about the birth of a friend’s child represents the birth as wonderful—it attributes wonderfulness to the birth event. On the assumption that every emotion corresponds to a phenomenally similar mood (joy/elation, anger/irritability, fear/anxiety, etc.), the idea is that each mood represents the same affective property as its corresponding emotion, but without attributing it to any object or event (either particular or general). So, elation just represents *wonderfulness*—without representing *anything* as *being wonderful*. More precisely:

UNBOUND AFFECTIVE PROPERTIES: S is in mood M iff S is in a conscious state whose content is an unbound affective property A_M .

This account aims to do justice to the felt undirectedness of moods by taking it at face value without giving up representationalism. Moods do not feel directed toward any object because they are *not* directed at *any* object: they are directed at *free-floating properties*. This, supposedly, speaks to the free-floating nature of mood phenomenology.

One challenge for this account, obviously, is to explain what exactly it *means* to represent unbound affective properties (Kind 2014: 128). However, the view faces also a more fundamental problem, thoroughly articulated by Bordini (2017). He argues that Mendelovici’s account is *introspectively unmotivated*. We might perhaps agree with Mendelovici that *emotions* are *transparent*: affective qualities phenomenally appear to be qualities of the object or event toward which the emotion is directed (wonderfulness appears to me to be a property of my friend’s child’s birth). However, Bordini argues,

things are quite different with undirected moods: the affective qualities (a) do not appear to qualify any object, since no object (of any sort) is involved, and (b) do not even appear to be localized anywhere in outside space or one’s own body. So, based on what is introspectively available, the affective qualities involved in undirected moods cannot be attributed to something other than the experience itself. If so,

undirected moods are introspectively *opaque*: the affective qualities they involve appear to qualify the experience. (2017: 66, italics original)

The idea is that moods just do not introspectively appear to represent free-floating properties, in a way that is independent of the experience and its subject. More plausibly, the affective qualities that phenomenally characterize mood seem to pertain to the experience itself and/or its subject.

Mendelovici's account, too, fails to satisfy the subjective salience desideratum.

3.2. *Impure representationalism about moods*

Partly motivated by dissatisfaction with respect to pure representationalism about moods, Uriah Kriegel (2019b) has developed an alternative representational theory. As noted, Kriegel's main objection to generalized content views is the *problem of shared contents*: one can be in a mental state whose content attributes a certain evaluative property to the whole world (or to everything, or to anything one encounters in experience) without experiencing the mood that is characterized by the relevant evaluative property (for one may instead have, say, a *belief* with the relevant generalized content). Kriegel's proposal is that what accounts for the nature of mood experience is not (just) a peculiar kind of *content* but (also, and most fundamentally) a peculiar kind of *attitude* the subject bears to that content. While a mental state's content is *what* the mental state represents, a mental state's attitude is the *way* or *manner* in which the content is represented—it pertains to *how* the subject representationally relates to the relevant content. The *belief* that there is milk in the fridge and the *desire* that there be milk in the fridge have the same content, i.e., the proposition <there is milk in the fridge>. However, they differ in *how* the content is represented: in one case the subject bears the *belief* relation toward that content, in the other case the *desire* relation.

Kriegel spells this out in terms of *representational guises*: while belief represents the relevant content *under the guise of the true*, desire represents it *under the guise of the good*:

[W]hen a mental state represents *p* under the guise of the F, the state does not represent *p* as F, but rather *represents-as-F p*. Thus, a belief that *p* does not represent *p* as true, but *represents-as-true p*. That which it represents is simply *p*. Representing-as-true is a *way*, or *mode*, of representing—the mode characteristic of belief. [...] In the expression 'represents-as-F', the '-as-F' denotes a modification of the representation relation; it does not qualify that which is being represented. It thus denotes a representational guise that remains external to content. (Kriegel 2019b: 10)

The expressions used to refer to representational attitudes are hyphenated to convey the idea that attitudes are *unstructured*: “the expressions ‘represents-as-true’ and ‘represent-as-good’ are not syntactically structured and do not include ‘true’ and ‘good’ as syntactic constituents” (*ibid.*). This mirrors the unstructuredness of attitudes themselves: the property of *being true* is not *part* of the belief attitude the way it is part of the content of, say, *wishing it were true*. Representing-as-true is a sui generis and unstructured *way of representing* that is peculiar to belief. Still, even though truth is not a structural *part* of belief attitude, the use of the expression “representing-as-true” is not arbitrary, for it aptly describes the nature of the relevant attitude. “True,” Kriegel explains, functions as a “wink” conveying something like the following message: “If you want to grasp the nature of the attitude of belief, say, think of truth-ascribing content and then rethink the “truthy” aspect of that content as pertaining rather to the psychological attitude taken toward that content.” (Kriegel 2019b: 11).

This is a form of *impure representationalism*. While *pure* representationalism aims to account for the nature and phenomenology of conscious states purely in terms of its representational *content*, *impure* representationalism appeals to both representational content *and representational attitude* (Crane 2003; Chalmers 2004).

Kriegel's idea, then, is the following. As for mood's *content*, he adopts a similar strategy to generalized content representationalists; instead of construing moods as having universally quantified content (the *whole* world, *every* thing in the world, or *anything* one encounters in experience), though, he (more aptly) construes it as the generic <things> (this is aimed to do justice to mood's generality while avoiding the implausible consequence that, say, when I am in an elated mood, the uncivilized behavior of a subway passenger appears wonderful to me). However, what distinguishes moods from other mental states with the same content is, on Kriegel's view, the specific kind of *attitude* moods instantiate:

[W]hat we should say is not that anxiety represents things as menacing, but rather that anxiety represents-as-menacing things; not that euphoria represents the world as wonderful, but that it represents-as-wonderful the world; not that irritability represents things as annoying, but that it represents-as-annoying things. Here menace, wonderfulness, and annoyingness are not parts of *what* anxiety, euphoria, and irritability represent, but aspects of anxiety, euphoria, and irritability's distinctive *ways* of intentionally relating to what they represent. They modify these moods' representational relations to the content instead of showing up *in* the contents. (*ibid.*: 12)

We may summarize the view thus:

REPRESENTATIONAL GUISES: S is in mood M iff S is in a conscious state that represents-as-F things, where represent-as-F is a moody attitude.

This is the most promising representational theory of moods. By construing the content as the generic "things" and by encoding the affective and evaluative aspect of mood's phenomenology in the attitude rather than in the content, it nicely accounts for mood's apparent undirectedness. At the same time, it avoids the problem of shared contents without appealing to potentially mysterious free-floating properties. Most importantly for our purpose, it also aims at addressing the issue at the core of our subjective salience desideratum. Kriegel explicitly refers to Bordini's (2017: 62) concern with respect to generalized content views:

Bordini's claim, recall, was that moods are experienced as more subjective and internal than pure intentionalism suggests—we can feel depressed without "blaming" the world for it. This is captured nicely by our impure intentionalism, since in it, depression does not ascribe pointlessness to the world; the pointlessness information is encoded rather in the attitude, which is part of the "subjective" or "internal" relatum of the intentional relation. (Kriegel 2019: 16).

Kriegel's is the only extant representational theory of moods that tries to accommodate (something akin to) the subjective salience desideratum. Indeed, *prima facie*, it seems to satisfy the desideratum. The main source of dissatisfaction with other representational theories lay in the fact that they encode the moody evaluative or affective property in the content, and thereby construe it as attaching to something utterly independent of the subject's inner experience. Kriegel, instead, construes the affective feature of mood as an attitudinal feature, which is instantiated by the mood experience itself, rather than by what the mood experience is about. It thus aims to do justice to the fact that what most fundamentally characterizes the nature of mood is a feature of the experience—something that has to do with *inner* or *subjective* aspect of the representational structure.

Despite being promising and having the merit of taking the subjective salience desideratum into account, REPRESENTATIONAL GUISES has, in my view, two main problems.

First, although it accounts for mood’s diffuseness and apparent undirectedness (by postulating “things” as the characteristic content of mood experiences), it does not seem to capture mood’s *globality* and *pervasiveness*. As noted in §2.4, moods have the power to affect the *whole* of one’s inner life. Unlike mental states such as visual experiences and thoughts, moods are not isolable and local: they are *global* and *pervasive*. They cannot be mentally isolated from other experiences: they imbue one’s whole mental life and seem to affect every mental state one happens to have. By construing moods as mental states that “represent-as-F things”, however, Kriegel’s theory implies that moods are isolable and local in a way that is similar to other outwardly directed mental states: they can be picked out by appeal to their content (<things>) and characteristic “moody” attitude, and mentally detached from the rest of one’s experience. But moods just do not seem to be local and detachable in this way. They rather appear to spread all over one’s overall experience.

Secondly, at closer inspection, despite endorsing the subjective salience desideratum, REPRESENTATIONAL GUISES does not seem to satisfy it fully. For although *attitude* is a feature of mood experience, the *content* of moods postulated by the view is something *other* than experience—it is something (that is at least *felt as*) *external* to the subject and its experience. So, moods are still construed as *outwardly directed* mental states: they represent *things* in the world.

In fact, in Kriegel’s theoretical framework, for *any* conscious state—not just moods—attitudinal features are features of experience. *Representing-as-true* is what most fundamentally makes a mental state a *belief*; *representing-as-good* is what makes a mental state a *desire*. Both are features of the relevant *mental state*, rather than of what is represented by the state. And yet, belief and desire do not typically display the kind of subjective salience that is characteristic of moods. So, the fact that attitude is both what makes a mood experience the experience it is and a feature of the mood experience itself is not enough to account for mood’s subjectivity.

3.3. *Anti-representationalism: moods as intrinsic experiential qualities*

In light of the shortcomings of extant representational theories of moods, one option is to give up representationalism and construe moods as *non-representational, intrinsic experiential properties* or *qualia* (Block 1990). On this view, depressive mood is just the instantiation of an intrinsic experiential quality whose nature is exhausted by a certain *sui generis* feeling that may be described as *pointlessness-and-dark-emptiness*—i.e., the feeling that is characteristic of depression; elated mood is exhausted by the instantiation of the *energetic-positivity* affective quality; and so on:

QUALIA: S is in mood M iff S instantiates a moody intrinsic experiential property F_M .

This view certainly accommodates mood’s apparent undirectedness: moods do not *appear* to be directed because they *are not* directed. By the same token, it avoids the counterintuitive results yielded by construing moods as *outwardly directed* mental states and thereby is not exposed to most of the problems that affect representational views. However, it still has at least two problems.

First, similarly to Kriegel’s view (and really to all other representational views considered above), it entails that moods are isolable and local: moods here are construed as mental qualities that are instantiated in our conscious mind *beside* and *on a par with* other (isolable and local) experiences. It thus fails to speak to the fact that moods seem to be special and different from

isolable and local experiences in that they are rather *global* and *pervasive*—they somehow affect the totality of our experience.

Second, it is silent with respect to the subjective salience desideratum. Although, unlike outwardly directed representationalism, this version of the qualia view is not *incompatible* with the desideratum—moods are construed as inner, experiential properties—it does not quite *explain* why subjectivity is so relevant to mood experience. For one may have a qualia theory of *perception* (Block 1990; Papineau 2021), which is a paradigmatic kind of conscious state in which what is relevant is the *outer* rather than the inner.

So, anti-representationalism is not sufficient for accommodating and explaining the subjective salience desideratum—nor is it necessary, as we will see in the next section.

4. Mapping out alternative views

The failure of extant theories of moods to satisfy the subjective salience desideratum motivates searching for alternative accounts. In this section, I offer a preliminary exploration of the logical space occupied by possible theories whose central aim is to satisfy the desideratum, as well as a preliminary evaluation of such views with respect to ability to account for mood’s central features and vulnerability to objections. Due to space constraints, this overview is going to be extremely sketchy. Its purpose is mainly to lay out some available options, to be explored in much greater depth in further work.

There are two broad ways to go: representationalist and anti-representationalist.

If we go representationalist, we need to specify the *content* of mood experience. To do justice to the subjective salience desideratum, the content needs to be something *internal* to the subject. Two options suggest themselves: either mood experience is directed toward the *subject* of experience (the self) or it is directed toward the subject’s *experience*. Both are versions of what we may call *inwardly directed representationalism about moods*. To do justice to mood’s affective phenomenology, affective features need to appear in the representational structure. If we opt for a form of *pure representationalism*, such affective features are encoded in the *content* and are construed as properties of what mood is about (either the self or the experience); if we opt for a form of *impure representationalism*, affective features are encoded in the *attitude*.

If we go anti-representationalist, the most plausible view is that moods are *intrinsic (affective) qualities of the subject’s experience*.

Let us consider each option in turn.

4.1. Moods as pure representations of the self

On this view, being in a certain mood consists in representing *oneself* as having a certain evaluative property. Depression represents oneself as being hopeless or darkly empty, elation represents oneself as being positively energized, anxiety represents oneself as being paralyzingly terrified, and so on. More precisely:

PURE SELF: S is in mood M iff S is in a conscious state whose content consists in attributing evaluative property E_M to S herself.

The main motivation for adopting this kind of view is that it speaks to the fact that when one is in a certain mood, it is primarily *oneself* that appears to be affected—rather than the worldly things in one’s surroundings: it is *me* who feels darkly empty when depressed, positively energized when elated, and so on.

One challenge the proponent of PURE SELF would have to overcome is the *problem of shared contents*: I may *believe* that, or *wonder* whether, I am darkly empty without quite *feeling depressed*; or I may *hope* to be positively energized without *feeling elated*.

4.2. Moods as pure representations of experience

An alternative pure representational view is that being in a certain mood consists in representing one’s *experience* as having a certain evaluative property. On this view—assuming across-the-board representationalism—moods are *meta-representational states*: they are representations of representations. There are various ways to spell out the content of mood meta-representation. Here are those that stand out: when a subject S is in mood M at time *t*, either (i) M is directed toward S’s *overall experience* at *t*; or (ii) M is directed toward a *subset* of S’s experiences at *t*; or (iii) for *any* experience E of S at *t*, S harbors a distinct token mood state M_i of mood type M, directed toward E; or (iv) for *some* experience E of S at *t*, S harbors a distinct token mood state M_i of mood type M, directed toward E. We cannot discuss all the options here, so I will discuss the one that strikes me as antecedently as most plausible, namely (i).³ On this version of the view, depression represents one’s overall experience as hopeless or darkly empty, elation represents one’s overall experience as positively energized, and so on:

PURE EXPERIENCE: S is in mood M at *t* iff S is in a conscious state whose content consists in attributing evaluative property E_M to S’s overall experience at *t*.

The advantage of this view is that it does justice to the subjective salience desideratum (by construing moods as directed at one’s *inner experience*) and accounts for mood’s generality and diffuseness (by postulating that the content of mood is the *whole* of one’s experience).

The main challenges faced by the proponent of PURE EXPERIENCE are the following. First, similarly to PURE SELF, it seems to be threatened by the problem of shared contents (one may *believe* that one’s overall experience is positively energized without *feeling* elated). Secondly, construing mood’s content as attributing evaluative properties to one’s overall experience may not seem phenomenologically plausible. Depression does not seem to attribute dark emptiness to my overall experience. Rather, and more subtly, it seems to somehow *cast* my overall experience under a “darkly empty” light: it is the *way* I am aware of my experience that is determined by my mood, rather than what I am aware *of* by being aware of my experience. To account for this, it might seem more fitting to adopt a view that encodes mood’s affective feature in the *attitude*, rather than in the content.

³ As a preliminary motivation for this choice, consider: *contra* (ii) and (iv), moods seem to affect the *whole* of our conscious life—not just part of it; *contra* (iii), it seems much less psychologically plausible to have a multiplication of mood state tokens of the same type at any one time, than to have just one mood state token encompassing one’s overall experience.

4.3. Moods as impure representations of the self

Like Kriegel's REPRESENTATIONAL GUISES, inwardly-directed impure representationalism encodes mood's affective feature in the attitude, rather than in the content. Unlike Kriegel's view, however, the content is construed here as something *internal* to the subject, rather than the outwardly-directed <things>. As with inwardly-directed pure representationalism, there are two main options: either the content is *oneself*, or it is one's *experience*.

On what we may call the "impure self view," moods *represent-as-F oneself*: they consist in taking a *moody attitude* toward oneself. So, depression represents-as-darkly-empty oneself, elation represents-as-positively-energized oneself, anxiety represents-as-paralyzingly-terrified oneself, and so on. Following Kriegel, we construe moody attitudes as *unstructured*: the property of dark emptiness is not a *part* of depressive attitude. Representing-as-darkly-empty is an unstructured, sui generis *way of representing* that is constitutive of depressive experience; "darkly-empty" in the expression "represent-as-darkly-empty" is a "wink" that helps us grasp the hopeless nature of depressive mood:

IMPURE SELF: S is in mood M iff S is in a conscious state that represents-as-F oneself, where represent-as-F is a moody attitude.

The main reason to adopt this view is that it preserves the merits of both PURE SELF and REPRESENTATIONAL GUISES without incurring their main difficulties. Like PURE SELF (and unlike REPRESENTATIONAL GUISES), it accounts for the fact that it is primarily *oneself* (rather than things in the world) that is relevant to the mood. Like REPRESENTATIONAL GUISES (and unlike PURE SELF), it does not face the problem of shared contents.

One challenge for the IMPURE SELF theorist is to spell out exactly *what* the content of mood is: what is the *self* that shows up in the content of mood? Is it a "thin" kind of self, say, the instantaneous mental bearer of the overall experience that is instantiated at *t*, or a "thicker" kind of self, something that persists through time and perhaps coincides with the whole organism in which the experience is instantiated (*cf.* Strawson 2003)? Is the kind of self that shows up in the content of mood so "minimal" that it collapses onto the overall experience instantiated at *t* (Strawson 2011)? Is the self represented conceptually or non-conceptually? Exploring these issues obviously outstrips the scope of this paper. Here I can just hint at some of the questions the IMPURE SELF theorist will have to deal with.

Another challenge with IMPURE SELF is that, depending on how the self that constitutes mood's content is construed, it may be vulnerable to the detachability objection affecting outwardly directed representationalism and qualia theory (and indeed all the views considered so far). To avoid the phenomenologically implausible consequence that moods as isolated and detachable, and do justice to the fact that, on the contrary, they are so pervasive that they seem to attach to and affect one's overall experience (like a colored filter applied on one's whole inner life) an IMPURE SELF theorist will need to construe mood's content in a way that accounts for the fact that moods appear to spread over the whole of one's experience. In this respect, a thick and a conceptual construal of self, for example, seem inadequate, for both articulate mood as a *targeted* state, whose content is not necessarily specified in connection to the subject's current *overall experience*.

A thinner conception of self might be more phenomenologically adequate. For example, construing mood's content as <the subject of this overall experience> seems more plausible in this respect. On a view of this kind, by pertaining to the subject of experience, the mood pertains

also to the experience itself. So, depression could be articulated as *representing-as-darkly-empty* <oneself as the subject of this overall experience>. By casting a dark-empty light on the thin subject, depressive mood also (derivatively) casts a dark-empty light on each of the subject's experiences. Of course, more would need to be said to defend the plausibility of such an account.

Alternatively, one may adopt a minimal conception of self, whereby the self *just is* the overall experience instantiated at time *t*. An IMPURE SELF view of this kind collapses onto the IMPURE EXPERIENCE view, to which we now turn.

4.4. Moods as impure representations of experience

On this view, moods *represent-as-F one's current overall experience*: they consist in taking a *moody attitude* toward the overall experience one has at *t*. So, depression represents-as-darkly-empty one's current overall experience, elation represents-as-positively-energized one's current overall experience, and so on:

IMPURE EXPERIENCE: S is in mood M at *t* iff S is in a conscious state that represents-as-F S's overall experience at *t*, where represent-as-F is a moody attitude.

There are at least three main reasons to be attracted to this view. First, similarly to IMPURE SELF, it inherits the merits and avoids the problems of PURE SELF and REPRESENTATIONAL GUISES, while satisfying the subjective salience desideratum. Second, unlike IMPURE SELF, it does not face the challenge of defining the "self" that constitutes mood's content. Third, it seems to be best positioned to account for mood's *pervasiveness* and *non-detachability*. Being a meta-representational state, mood cannot be detached from the overall experience that constitutes its content. Mood seems to spread all over one's experience because, in a sense, it *does*: by representing-as-F the overall experience, a mood casts one's overall experience under the same affective light: depression casts one's overall experience under a dark-empty light, elation under a positive-energetic light, and so on.

The main challenge with IMPURE EXPERIENCE is to spell out what exactly a "moody attitude" is. On IMPURE EXPERIENCE, "representing-as-positively-energized" is a representational guise that, although *unstructured*, is nonetheless somehow related to the affective/evaluative property that appears in the content of representational states such as the thought that *my mind is positively energized*. How should we account for this connection? Can a view such as IMPURE EXPERIENCE deliver an informative account of mood? In future work, I intend to address these questions and argue that IMPURE EXPERIENCE is the most promising among inwardly-directed representational theories of mood.

4.5. Moods as meta-level qualia

A final option to consider is what we may dub "inner anti-representationalism." On this view, moods are intrinsic phenomenal qualities. However, unlike QUALIA, this view construes moods as intrinsic, non-representational properties *of experience*. So, if experiences are instantiations of phenomenal properties, moods are *second-order properties*, or *meta-level qualia*: they are intrinsic affective properties that are instantiated by the subject's experience. Different versions may be developed depending on whether *all* or only *some* of one's concurrent experiences possess the relevant meta-level quale. To account for mood's pervasiveness, however, it might be advisable to

adopt a universal thesis here, or a thesis such that it is one's *overall experience* that has the relevant meta-level quale. So, depression consists in one's overall experience instantiating meta-level *pointlessness-and-dark-emptiness*, elation in one's overall experience instantiating meta-level *energetic-positivity*, and so on:

META-LEVEL QUALIA: S is in mood M iff S's overall experience instantiates a moody meta-level intrinsic property F_M .

The advantage of this view is that, besides being (like QUALIA) untouched by the problems affecting representational views, it also overcomes the problems incurred by QUALIA. It does not face the detachability problem: moods cannot be detached or conceived in isolation from the overall experience because they are (second-order) properties of that experience. Relatedly, it accounts for mood's pervasiveness: a mood is a quality that is instantiated by *all* experiences one undergoes at *t*. Moreover, META-LEVEL QUALIA is not silent with respect to the subjective salience desideratum, but explains it. Moods appear to pertain to some inner aspect of the subject because they are (second-order) properties of experience.

A potential disadvantage of META-LEVEL QUALIA is its *explanatory power*: ceteris paribus, a theory that (like representationalism) digs into the metaphysical structure of moods and attempts to offer a reductive explanation (e.g. an explanation of mood phenomenology in terms of representational properties) seems to be preferable with respect to a theory on which moods are primitive affective qualities. Obviously, what remains to be investigated is whether ceteris *sunt* paribus—investigation we cannot carry out here.

5. Conclusion

Moods display a peculiar phenomenal *salience of subjectivity* that—together with their apparent *undirectedness*—needs to be accounted for by a philosophical theory of their nature. Given that none of the extant theories of moods succeeds in this, new theories need to be explored. Here I have only sketched the shape some of those theories may take. Among representational theories, I suggested that the main options are (i) a form of *pure* representationalism on which mood's content attributes an evaluative property to the *subject*; (ii) a form of *pure* representationalism such that mood attributes an evaluative property to the subject's overall *experience*; (iii) a form of *impure* representationalism on which mood consists in bearing a moody attitude toward *oneself*; (iv) a form of *impure* representationalism on which mood consists in bearing a moody attitude toward one's overall *experience*. A possible anti-representationalist alternative construes mood as a second-order intrinsic affective quality of experience—a *meta-level quale*. Much more work is needed for a full exploration and evaluation of the possible options. Here I hope to have provided reasons for taking such exploration worth pursuing.

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