Under the general heading of what we might loosely call emotional states, a familiar distinction can be drawn between emotions (strictly so-called) and moods. In order to judge under which of these headings a subject’s emotional episode falls, we advance a question of the form: What is the subject’s emotion of or about? In some cases (for example fear, sadness, and anger) the provision of an answer is straightforward: the subject is afraid of the loose tiger, or sad about England’s poor performance in the World Cup, or angry with her errant child. Although the ways we find natural to talk in such situations can alter (afraid of, sad about, angry with, and so on), in each case the emotion has what Ronald de Sousa, following Wittgenstein, calls a target—“an actual particular to which that emotion relates.” (de Sousa, 1987, p.116)

In the case of other emotional states, however, we find an answer to this kind of question is not forthcoming. General feelings of elation, anxiety, or depression, for example, may not be targeted in this sense. What is the subject elated / anxious / depressed about? Well, nothing in particular; the subject is just elated / anxious / depressed. Emotions (strictly so-called—hereafter simply “emotions”) are then that
subset of emotional states that are targeted, and the target-less remainder fall under the general heading of moods.

The distinction between emotions and moods—between targeted and untargeted emotional states—has traditionally been accounted for by an appeal to the intentionality of the respective states: whereas the targeted nature of emotions shows that they are world-directed and intentional, the absence of targets for moods shows that they are non-intentional. An often-cited example of this claim is found in John Searle:

Some, not all, mental states and events have Intentionality. Beliefs, fears, hopes and desires are Intentional; but there are forms of nervousness, elation and undirected anxiety that are not Intentional […]. My beliefs and desires must always be about something. But my nervousness and undirected anxiety need not in that way be about anything. (Searle, 1983, p.1)

But we can find reasons for dissatisfaction with the distinction between intentional emotions and non-intentional moods. One cause for concern is that, pretheoretically, emotions and moods seem to share many similarities, yet this distinction forces us to treat emotions and moods as fundamentally different kinds of mental state. This is especially worrisome as we are not only forced to treat, say, anger and anxiety as dissimilar, but we are also forced to treat two kinds of anxiety—directed and undirected anxiety—as significantly different.
Another concern, raised by Tim Crane, is that if moods are non-intentional, then their characteristic phenomenological feels must be due to “properties which are phenomenologically detectable to the subject, but are non-intentional, involving nothing beyond themselves. These properties must therefore be qualia: non-intentional, subjective properties.” (Crane 1998, p.240) But, argues Crane, once we introduce qualia into the picture, we also let in the familiar spectre of qualia inversion. Briefly, the concern with this consequence is that, whilst we may be able to make sense of qualia inversion where colour perception is concerned, it does not obviously make sense in the case of moods. After all, it is eminently plausible to hold that the reason anxiety has the functional role it does is because of the way it feels—how could a state that felt like elation possibly make us behave as we do when we are anxious?

In the light of these concerns, Crane proposes an intentional account of moods. When it comes to explaining how moods can be intentional when there is no answer to the question of what they are of or about, Crane begins by pointing out that the same can be said of pain. Even though there is no clear answer to what a given pain is of or about, pains can nevertheless be seen to be outwardly directed:

[I]n bodily sensation, something is given to the mind, namely the body, or a body part. Calling this phenomenon ‘intentionality’ classifies it together with the case of outer perception, where the perceived portion of the world is
‘given’ to the mind; and with thought, where some object, property, or state of affairs is ‘given’ to the mind. (Crane, 1998, p.238)

What is distinctive about intentional states, Crane suggests, is not that we can provide answers to questions about what the states are of or about, but that when one is in one, something is “given” to one’s mind.

If we understand intentionality in this way, we can also ask whether something is given to the mind in cases of untargeted moods. The answer to this question appears to be yes: when I am in the different moods, the world is given to me in different ways—if I am anxious, then the world appears disturbing or threatening; if I am irritated then the world is given to me as annoying and provocative; if I am elated then the world just seems to me to be a wonderful place to be. On this conception of intentionality, moods can be seen to be intentional—in each case “there is the experiencing subject, the world experienced (or the thing in the world experienced) and the particular way of apprehending the world.” (Crane, 1998, p.245)

Whilst I think this move represents a significant step forward in our understanding of the role emotions and moods play in our mental lives, there remains work to be done. We must remember that there is still a significant difference between emotions and moods—emotions have targets whilst moods do not—and this needs to be explained. Whilst Crane doesn’t explicitly address this issue, he does seem to indicate where he would locate the difference. In the quote above, he suggests that in all cases of emotional consciousness, “there is the experiencing subject, the world
experienced (or the thing in the world experienced) and the particular way of apprehending the world.” The key part of this passage is where Crane allows for some emotional states to be directed at “the world experienced” and others to be directed at a particular “thing in the world experienced”. This difference would map quite neatly on to the distinction between moods and emotions: moods are intentionally directed at the world in general, whereas emotions are directed at particular things in the world.

If this is an accurate interpretation of Crane, his position appears to closely resemble that of Robert Solomon.

Moods are generalized emotions: An emotion focuses its attention on more-or-less particular objects and situations, whereas a mood enlarges its grasp to attend to the world as a whole, typically without focusing on any particular object or situation. (Solomon, 1976, p.172-173)

On this general account, the difference between moods and emotions is located in the extent of their intentional focus. The suggestion appears to be that, where moods are concerned, the intentional object of the state is the world in general, and the intentionality of moods exhibits a wide focus. In cases of emotions, however, the intentionality of the emotion is narrowly focused on a particular object.

But I suggest that this analysis of the relationship, and in particular the claim that emotions are narrowly focused on particular objects or states of affairs, is incompatible with the phenomenology of emotions. As we have seen, when one enters
a particular mood, it affects the way one perceives the world in general—I call this phenomenon “global affectivity”—and because of this, moods are said to have wide focus. But global affectivity is also present in the case of targeted emotions.

This can be seen with a few examples. If I feel that I have been treated unfairly by my boss and this makes me angry, my anger changes the way I both apprehend and respond to the world in general. For example, because I am angry at my boss, insignificant things may irritate me: I might slam my office door, or shout at my wife, or kick my cat. Although I am angry with my boss, and there is a sense in which my anger is narrowly focused on him, my anger also has the wide focus that is characteristic of moods in as much as it changes the way I apprehend and respond to the world in general.

We can also provide similar examples with respect to other paradigmatic emotions such as fear and joy. If I am afraid that a loose tiger might attack me, then there is a sense in which my fear is narrowly focused on the beast itself. But there is also a sense in which my fear is globally affective—I jump at small noises, I am wary of shadows, and so on. Similarly with joy; I am happy because England have won the Ashes—this is the target or focus of my pleasure—but my happiness affects the way I apprehend and respond to the world in general. When I am happy little things make me smile and the world just seems like a great place to be.

But if targeted emotions are narrowly focussed on a particular object, and are in no way directed upon the world in general, then it becomes difficult to see how we could account for their global affectivity. On the other hand, if emotions, like moods,
are widely focussed upon the world in general, then it becomes equally difficult to see how to explain why emotions, but not moods, are targeted. In the light of this dilemma, I suggest we need to move to a two-component theory of emotion of the sort outlined by Laird Addis (1995). On this general approach, an emotion proper would consist of two components. The first component would be shared with moods and would both explain global affectivity and underpin our intuition that emotions and moods are importantly similar. The second component would be exclusive to the emotions and would account for their being targeted.

Whilst I think this proposal is on the right lines, it stands in need of further development, especially where the natures of the two components are concerned. The brief for the remainder of this paper is to make a start on this task and sketch the structure of what I believe to be a promising approach. Let us begin, then, by addressing the first question: what is the nature of the first component—the component common to both moods and emotions? Addis himself postulates a sensational common core, but this would seem to fall foul of Crane’s transposition concerns. In the light of this, I will develop a proposal more in tune with Crane and Solomon—that the component common to moods and emotions is a widely focussed, mood-like intentional awareness of the world in general—and see where this takes us.

The first thing we should note, if we are to endorse the general line that moods are intentional states, is that this proposal is subject to an important and interesting ambiguity. A key aspect of Crane’s position is that the different moods and emotions are different manners or ways in which subjects experience the world. But
this claim is ambiguous. On the standard interpretation, the different emotions and moods are a range of independent intentional states, each supplying a new kind of intentional engagement with the world. So we could perceive a horse, or think about a horse, or be afraid of a horse, or be angry with a horse, and so on. However, Jean-Paul Sartre, one of the inspirations behind Crane’s theory, points out that not only is a given emotion a “specific manner of apprehending the world” (Sartre, 1939, p.57), it is also “a transformation of the world.” (1939, p.63) According to Sartre, when we enter a particular mood or emotion, the way we experience the world is transformed.

When I enter a particular mood, for example when I become irritated, I begin to see things differently—I begin to see objects in the world as annoying and malign. If we follow this thought through, it suggests that the kind of intentional engagement we have with the world remains the same: just as I was perceiving the world before I became irritated, I am still perceiving the world afterwards. What changes is the way the world is given to me in perception. On this interpretation, moods do not supply a new kind of intentional engagement with the world, instead they modify the way in which our existing (perceptual / conceptual) intentional states make us aware of the world.

Although the standard interpretation appears to favour the first reading and treat emotions and moods as independent kinds of intentional states, I am inclined to favour the second. As Martin Heidegger suggests (see, for example, Heidegger, 1927, p.138), in even our most neutral engagements with the world, we perceive the world in a particular way. When I perceive my cat Edgar, for example, I perceive him as
white, fluffy, and loveable. The way I perceive the cat is naturally captured at the level of perceptual content: I perceive that Edgar is white, fluffy, and loveable. If I then become irritable, I may come to see the same cat to be annoying and bothersome—I come to perceive that Edgar is annoying and bothersome. But what appears to change here is not the kind of engagement with the world I enjoy—I am perceptually related to Edgar in both cases—but the way I perceive Edgar.

In addition to this consideration is the thought that, if moods and emotions were independent modes of intentional engagement with the world, we should be able to conceive of a mental event consisting of just that kind of engagement. For example, we can easily imagine that we might have a mental event that consisted solely of a perception—as when we are thoughtlessly engaged in driving. We can also imagine that a mental event might consist of nothing but thought—thinking in a sensory deprivation tank for example—or perhaps even an isolated pain. But it is not so easy to make sense of the idea that we could be angry, say, in the absence of any perceptions or conceptions—what would constitute my being angry in the absence of any angry thoughts for example?

If this is so, it suggests once more that the anger modifies the thought, instead of supplying an independent intentional mode of engagement with the object of our anger. To enter an emotion or a mood is, I suggest, analogous to putting on a pair of tinted spectacles. If I put on a pair of green-tinted glasses, this has the effect of changing the way I see the world. What is more, the way I see the world changes in a way that is characteristic of wearing green glasses—the objects of perception now
appear to be tinged with green, and so on. Similarly, when I become anxious, the way I see the world changes in a characteristic way—the objects I perceive now appear to be threatening and malign.

So my answer to the question as to the nature of the first component—our mood-like awareness of the world—is that it is not, contrary to received wisdom, a new way of apprehending the world. Instead, I suggest that moods are characteristic modifications of our existing (perceptual / conceptual) modes of intentional engagement. This not only explains why moods and emotions affect our experiences of the world, but also has the parsimonious consequence that we do not need to endorse several additional intentional modes (one new mode per kind of mood) in our taxonomy of intentional states.

But what about the nature of the second component? Do we need to endorse additional intentional modes in order to account for the targeted nature of the emotions? To answer this question, we need to do two things. First, we need to look more closely into what is involved in the claim that emotions, but not moods, have targets. Second, we must investigate whether the evidence that emotions have targets can be accounted for without recourse to additional intentional modes. My tactics here will be to show that we can account for all the relevant evidence without appealing to any additional kinds of intentionality over and above those already accepted.

As we saw earlier, the general idea behind the claim that emotions have targets is that we can isolate actual particulars that emotions such as anger, fear, or happiness are directed towards. Which particulars are these? Well, a common
suggestion is that “for O to be an object of an emotion E is commonly for O to be taken by the subject to be the cause of E.” (de Sousa, 1987, p.110) What is critical, on this account, is that the subject takes, or believes, the target object to be the cause of the emotion. But we should be wary of placing too much weight on the idea that the subject has to take the emotion to be the cause of their state. For example, Anthony Kenny points out that we can be in an emotional state, and have beliefs about its aetiology, without the (believed) cause thereby being the object of the emotion, as when we say, “I was angry because I was hungry.” (Kenny, 1963, p.74-5)

Nevertheless, there does appear to be a close link between what the subject believes about the genesis of their emotion and its target. For example, consider another of Kenny’s examples in which a subject says, “I was angry because he burst in without knocking.” (Kenny, 1963, p.71) The cause of the anger here appears to be an event—the event of his bursting in—but one would expect the target of the anger to be the man, instead of the event. What these situations appear to show is that what is relevant is not what the subject takes to be the immediate cause of the emotion, but instead what the subject takes to be the reason for the existence of the emotion. Similarly, the questions designed to elicit the target of an emotion (What are you angry about? Why are you sad?) are most naturally read as asking for reason-giving, as opposed to merely causal, explanations. In the light of this, I suggest that, in most cases, the target of an emotion will be what I will call the “perceived ground” of the emotion. “Perceived” because what is crucial is what the subject takes, or believes to
be the case, and “ground” to get across the idea that the subject takes the target to be, in some sense, ultimately responsible for the emotion.

When we understand this, we can see how to address J. R. S. Wilson’s concern that I may not be angry with the man who burst in, but “with my secretary who allowed him to burst in without knocking.” (Wilson, 1972, p.59) On my proposal, what is relevant when it comes to specifying the target of the emotion is who or what the subject takes to be responsible for their being in an emotional state—if I had explicitly told my secretary that under no circumstances was I to be disturbed, for example, then I may well take the man’s being allowed to burst in to be my secretary’s fault and I would take my secretary to be responsible for my being angry.

Even in those cases where there is no agent, say when I am sad that a friend died naturally, the object of my emotion is the death of my friend, and I take this event to be responsible for my being in the emotional state.

If this is what is involved in an emotional state having a target, then we need to ask what our evidence is for the claim that emotions, but not moods, can be targeted. As far as I can see, two prime motivations for this claim exist—subject testimony and subject behaviour. Let’s take these in turn. The rationale behind the first source of evidence is that we know emotions have targets because the subjects of emotion tell us that they are targeted. All we need to do is ask the question: What are you happy / sad / angry about? and the subject’s response reveals the target of the emotion.
However, instead of being revelatory of emotions having a special kind of intentionality, I suggest that all an ability to answer this question shows is that, for some emotional states, the subject believes a particular object (or state of affairs) to be the reason they are in an emotional state. Sometimes we enter an emotional state and we think we know why—it was the tiger’s escaping that led to my being afraid, or Brazil’s beating England that led to my being sad. It is our beliefs about the reasons for, or grounds of, our emotional states that supply us with the means necessary to answer questions of the type outlined above, not anything intrinsic to the emotional episode itself. Where moods are concerned, we are in a similar kind of state but, in the absence of appropriate beliefs, we are unable to supply a reason—I may be anxious, but I don’t know why. So I suggest that an ability to answer such a question is only revelatory about a subjects beliefs about their emotional states (it reveals that the subject believes they are aware of a reason for being in that emotional state) and not revelatory about the intentionality of the emotional states themselves.

In the case of emotions, then, I suggest the subject is both in an emotional state (understood as a mood-like awareness of the world as described above), and has beliefs about why they are in that state. The subject’s beliefs about their reasons for being in this state provide the ammunition to enable the subject to answer the questions about what they are emotional about. In the case of moods, the subject has no such beliefs, and is therefore unable to respond to these questions. So in as much as there is a need to turn to intentionality to account for this evidence, we do not need to
appeal to any additional kind of intentionality enjoyed by the emotion itself, but merely to the intentionality of the beliefs about the ground of the emotion.

It may be argued that this is not all the relevant evidence—it is not merely the case that subjects tell us that their emotions are directed, but that their actions bear this out. As Sartre says, the emotional consciousness “grasps the world differently, under a new aspect, and imposes a new behaviour” (Sartre, 1939, p.64-5)—a behaviour particular to the emotion or mood experienced. What is peculiar to emotions is that these behavioural manifestations can also show signs of being targeted. Take a case of anger. If I am angry with Clive, then the targeted nature of this anger is manifested by my behaviour towards Clive—if I meet Clive I might shout at or hit him; even in his absence I can rail against him in conversation—the existence of this kind of targeted behaviour is a feature of emotions, but not of moods, and therefore needs explaining.

I will investigate the characteristic targeted behaviour that accompanies emotion in more detail, but as a first point we should remember that Clive is not the only person I might behave aggressively towards. As we have seen, emotions, like moods, are globally affective; even if I am angry with Clive, I might still snap at my wife or kick my cat. But this does not, as it stands, go any way to explaining why my apparently being angry with Clive makes me more likely to engage in especially Clive-directed angry behaviour. Imagine, for example, that I am faced with a group of people, one of whom is Clive. Because I am angry with Clive, my angry behaviour will, in all probability, be directed towards him over and above any of the other people present. So even when we acknowledge the globally affective nature of emotions, we
are not thereby enabled to say all we need to about the targeted behaviour that can be present when a subject is emotional.

To show how we can explain the existence of such directed behaviour without invoking a further kind of intentionality, I will begin by evaluating the claim to the contrary: that I have Clive-directed angry behaviour because Clive is the intentional object of an additional anger-mode. I take this claim to imply the following: if Clive were not the object of my anger-mode, then I would not be disposed towards engaging in Clive-directed behaviour. To evaluate this claim we need to engage in a little imaginative reconstruction. Imagine I am angry with Clive because Clive has harmed Edgar. The first question to ask is why this has made me angry—what is it about the harming of Edgar that leads me to become angry?

In his 1988 paper on emotions, Robert Roberts points out that emotions are “concern-based”:

[T]o be angry is not just to see a person as having culpably offended; it requires a concern about some dimension of the offence […] To be afraid of heights is not just to see them as a danger to something-or-other; it requires that something I hold dear seem threatened. (Roberts, 1988, p.191)

What is vital, then, is that Edgar’s well-being concern me—in some way it must matter to me, or be important to me. Because I have this relationship of concern to Edgar’s well-being, I find the state of his being-harmed to be undesirable and
abominable. In turn, the existence of this state of affairs leads me to become angry. What is more, as I see Clive as the agent responsible for this undesirable state of affairs and as the reason for my anger, I am angry with Clive, and my becoming angry with Clive leads me to acquire particular behavioural dispositions that include highly Clive-specific dispositions such as, let us imagine, abusing or physically attacking Clive in public. On the proposal we are considering, this is explained by our entering an anger-mode that has Clive as its intentional object, and our being in this state explains why I acquire the particular Clive-directed behavioural dispositions.

As I suggested, this explanation appears to imply that were it not for my being angry with Clive, I would not have acquired any Clive-directed behavioural dispositions. Is this the case? We can find out by imagining that my anger with Clive is somehow removed, whilst everything else about my mental make-up is held constant, and asking whether this would thereby remove any explicitly Clive-directed behavioural dispositions. I suggest not. What is significant about this imagined anger-free situation is that everything but the anger has been held constant. This means that it will not only remain the case that Edgar’s well being is an issue that concerns me, but also that all of my beliefs about Clive, his actions, and the undesirable results of these actions (Edgar’s being harmed) remain.

Given that all this is still in play, we can ask what my behavioural dispositions might be in the absence of anger. First take the general case. As removing the anger involves removing the mood-like awareness component, nothing is globally affecting my behaviour and we should expect my behavioural dispositions towards the
majority of objects in the world to be as normal—I will chat normally to my wife, stroke my cat, and so on. What about the Clive-specific cases—what if I were to come across Clive at a social event? Whilst it may be true that, in the absence of anger, I may no longer feel inclined to abuse or physically attack him, his failures still matter to me. Because of this, I may well take the opportunity to civilly express to him my displeasure at what he has done, my disagreement with the actions he has taken, and so on. But these expressions of displeasure would still be directed at Clive, and not to anyone else present. So whilst removing the anger from the situation might well change the nature of my Clive-directed behaviour, it wouldn’t remove it altogether. I still believe Clive to be the agent of an undesirable state of affairs, and these beliefs ensure that I still have explicitly Clive-directed behavioural dispositions.

What is especially telling though is that if we add back in the mood-like awareness of the world, we find that all the angry targeted behaviour we are trying to account for comes with it. What happens is that the globally affective nature of the mood-like awareness ensures that my actions in general take on a more irritated, aggressive quality. In the general case, this explains why I no longer chat to my wife, but shout at her; why I no longer stroke my cat, but kick it, and so on. And as this mood-like awareness is globally affective, it will not only transform my general behavioural dispositions, but also my underlying Clive-specific behavioural dispositions. Whereas in the absence of the mood-like awareness I might merely be inclined to take the opportunity to verbally express my displeasure to Clive, when this
component is present these dispositions will take on a more aggressive and confrontational character.

So I suggest that the onset of anger does not create Clive-directed behavioural dispositions *ex nihilo*—on the contrary, my beliefs about Clive and his actions would have ensured that some Clive-directed dispositions obtained even if those beliefs had not made me become angry. Once we recognise this, we can see that an explanation of the Clive-directed angry behaviour does not oblige us to endorse an additional intentional mode of anger, but can be fully explained by the transformational nature of the relevant mood-like awareness acting on the underlying behavioural dispositions. And moods don’t yield such directed behavioural dispositions because the absence of a perceived ground ensures that, in the underlying behavioural dispositions, there exist no directed dispositions to transform.

This suggests that in order to explain the evidence that leads us to claim that emotions are targeted, we do not need to appeal to an independent kind of intentionality enjoyed by emotions but not moods. When it comes to explaining subject testimony we find that we need only appeal to the agent’s beliefs about their reasons for being in an emotional state; in the case of targeted behaviour, we need to appeal both to the agent’s beliefs about the genesis of their emotion, and to the particular directed behavioural dispositions that these beliefs result in. Then, to explain the angry behavioural dispositions that obtain, we need to appeal to the way the globally affective transformational nature of the relevant mood-like awareness acts upon these targeted behavioural dispositions.
So in conclusion I suggest that the first step towards getting an adequate picture of the intentionality of moods and emotions is to follow Crane in treating intentionality as the way in which the mind apprehends the world. This enables us to thereby bring both emotions and moods under the umbrella of intentionality. But I suggest that we treat them, not as additional intentional modes of awareness, but as characteristic modifications of our other (perceptual / conceptual) modes of awareness. Once we have made this move, I suggest that in order to explain the fact that both emotions and moods are globally affective, we should see that both types of emotional state are of the same kind—they both serve to change the way in which their subject apprehends the world.

The difference between emotions and moods lies, then, not in intrinsic differences between the two states, but in differences in accompanying mental states. Where emotions are concerned, the subject will invariably have beliefs about why he or she is in that emotional state. These beliefs will then enable the subject to testify as to the targets of their emotions, and will provide the subject with target-directed behavioural dispositions. When transformed by the subject’s emotional state, these underlying targeted dispositions can then lead to explicitly targeted emotional behaviour. In the case of moods, the subject will have no accompanying beliefs, and the state will not, therefore, be targeted. The absence of these beliefs explains the subject’s inability to answer questions about what they are in a mood about, and explains why they have no underlying targeted behaviour for the anger to transform.
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