1 Introduction

Moods are a significant part of our affective lives. Different environments can put us in an anxious or elated mood, and moods can affect our emotions, desires, and beliefs. Most theories of moods view them as intentional mental states – moods have intentional objects, like events or situations, that they are directed at. One important question we can ask is: can moods be rational? Some intentional accounts have argued that moods can be appropriate responses to one's global environment, while others have argued that moods are rational when they represent their object's properties accurately.

In this essay, I will argue that non-intentional moods can be rational. I start, in Section 2, by distinguishing moods from emotions and sketching some ways to think about how they can be rational. In Section 3, I outline two intentional theories of moods and how they can be rational, and then present some issues with these views. Using these problems to motivate a turn to thinking of moods as non-intentional, I propose a functionalist approach to moods in Section 4, and, in Section 5, outline some approaches as to how such non-intentional moods can be rational. I conclude that non-intentional moods can be rational in virtue of how they respond to beliefs, cohere with other mental states and give rise to actions.

2 Preliminaries

Moods have been taken to be distinct from emotions in the philosophical literature. Some have emphasized their differences in duration – depression stays for longer than sadness about an event – and in intensity – 'cool moods' seem to have less impact than a sudden burst of anger (Lormand 1985, Kostochka 2021). Others have drawn the distinction in virtue of what they are about. Moods have more general objects like one's whole situation (Goldie 2002, Solomon 1993), or moods have unconscious objects – that we are not aware of while in the mood – as opposed to the conscious objects of emotions (Bonard 2022). Others have taken the pervasiveness of moods to be their distinguishing feature. Moods have wide-ranging effects that tend to spread to all parts of our experience, whereas emotions have been thought of as more localised. Boredom, for instance, prevents us from finding anything interesting to do. Mitchell (2019) stresses the 'global' aspect of moods and

Sizer (2000) takes the widespread changes in mental states as something a theory of moods must explain. So, it is important for a theory of moods to be able to distinguish between moods and emotions.

Moods have also been considered as mental states that can be rational or appropriate (Mitchell 2019, Price 2006). Being in a gloomy mood after hearing tragic news about a friend seems more appropriate than being put in a cheerful mood. Someone's morose mood coheres less with their belief that they had an exceptionally good day than does their serene mood. Moods can also help us in reaching advantageous outcomes, like when in virtue of being in a positive mood we start forming useful habits. Moods can be irrational as well: a long-lasting depressive mood, after making an agent withdraw from the world, is likely to be diagnosed as major depressive disorder (Fabry 2020).

3 Rationality through Intentionality

Now, I present two intentional theories of moods and how they explain their rationality. I then raise some problems with these views and argue that neither gives a satisfactory account of moods.

3.1 Moods as Generalised Emotions

The first theory of moods I consider claims that 'moods are generalized emotions' (Solomon 1993: 71). Moods, like emotions, have intentional objects. The object of a mood is more general than the object of an emotion, but 'there will always be *some* degree of specificity in the object of moods' (Goldie 2002: 143). So, even if someone in a depressed mood claims there is 'nothing worth doing', their mood still has a somewhat specific object, like their current situation. Solomon (1993) also claims that moods are about the 'world as a whole, typically without focusing on any particular object' (Solomon 1993: 71). A subject in an elated mood while taking a walk in a park, then, is not joyous only about the ducks swimming in the pond, but also about the shining sun, the music she is listening to, and the poem she read earlier: her whole situation. Her elated mood is not about anything particular, but her whole present situation.

How would such moods be rational? One way is to think about rationality as fittingness or warrant. A mood is rational if its intentional object is instantiated (Scarantino 2021): X being in a despairing mood about X's helpless place in the world (for example, having recently lost a job) is rational if X is, in fact, in such a difficult position. If, however, X is in reality going through a temporary rough patch and does not know how to solve their problems, X's despair is still warranted: her situation displays the relevant evidential cues (Scarantino 2021). To assess whether a mood is rational, we must turn to what it is about: whether they 'represent the world as it is' (Scarantino 2021).

A problem with this view is that it 'underplays the difference between moods and emotions' (Price 2006: 52). Consider someone being outraged with the world. Their emotion, anger, is about the world as a whole. On Goldie's and Solomon's view, this state is a mood since it has a general intentional object (the world). However, there is a 'phenomenal difference' between mere anger (hostility) and anger directed at the world (outrage with the world) (Mendelovici 2013: 130). Hostility seems to remain even after we have stopped being outraged with the world, and, in intentionalist terms, we can be hostile towards a specific person, while we can feel angry about a general situation. Thinking of moods as 'generalised emotions', then, fails to distinguish moods from emotions about the world.

3.2 Moods as Felt Responses to the Total Environment

The next account I consider does solve this problem. This is Jonathan Mitchell's (2019) view that moods are felt responses to the evaluative light in which a subject's total environment is presented.

Let us unpack this. The intentional object of a mood is a subject's whole world, which is understood as 'the broadest set of relations between self and world' (Mitchell 2019: 124). This includes a subject's present values and priorities, as well as future and modal relations like their goals and ambitions, and is, hence, 'necessarily open-ended' (Mitchell 2019: 124).

Agents develop feelings of favour/ disfavour (usually pre-reflectively) towards their total environment. These feelings present an agent's environment to them in an evaluative light. An agent feeling happy towards their environment presents the world to themselves as 'imbued with positive value' (Mitchell 2019: 123). So,

whereas the total environment is *what* moods represent, the evaluative light captures *how* a subject's environment is presented to them.

To their total environment being presented this way, the agent reacts with *felt responses*: as felt because they experience feelings of favour/ disfavour, and as responses because they register the evaluative light they are responding to. They are responses *to* the environment in an evaluative light and have this as their intentional objects. Emotions about the world, though, have as their objects complex states of affairs (like their present situation) that do not exhaust *all* of an individual's relations to their world.

Next, Mitchell claims that moods can be *epistemically appropriate* responses to some evaluative light. A feeling of favour/ disfavour is a 'felt presentation of the way things evaluatively are' (Mitchell 2019: 129). A feeling of sadness presents our world to us as sad. When, in some mood, we are responding to our environment based on these evaluative feelings of favour/ disfavour, our mood is experienced as appropriate to the environment's evaluative light. So, it is epistemically appropriate to be in a mood when the felt responses that characterise moods are based on these evaluative feelings of favour/disfavour.

To illustrate, consider a subject who has just suffered a breakup. His total environment now lacks a central priority (his relationship) and shared long-term goals and projects. He feels misery towards his new environment, which is now presented to him as empty and insignificant. In turn, he responds with despair to his now bleak world. And this negative response is epistemically appropriate to the evaluative light he sees his environment in: it is based on his misery, that presents his world to him as miserable.

However, the object of an agent's mood being their total environment, as broadly understood by Mitchell, 'makes excessive demands on [their] representational capacities' (Hatzimoysis 2019: 285). It strains a subject's cognitive capacities far past their first-person and limited experience of the world, from where they cannot access all worldly relations at once. Moreover, assessing whether one is appropriately responding to such a complex representation sets the bar unrealistically high for a mood to count as rational. If I am in a sad mood because I have caught a cold, this sad mood seems to be an appropriate response to my cold, despite it not aligning with the positive evaluative light of and feeling of favour

towards my broader environment that includes my healthy family members and my unaffected future goals.

Next, moods can be appropriate to a situation without being based on affective states. Bodily changes, like being hungry, can put us in an irritable mood by not satisfying physiological needs, but it does not involve presenting the world to ourselves in a bothersome way. And being in an irritable mood because of hunger still seems an appropriate response to an environment without food.

Moreover, feelings of favour/ disfavour are not enough to determine whether moods are appropriate. For instance, when we are about to take an exam, we can feel stress that presents our environment to us in a threatening way. An anxious response, based on our stressed feeling, would seem appropriate. However, we may simultaneously believe that the exam will be easy and that we will perform well. Someone might say to us: 'Stop being stressed! Calm down, I know you will do well.' Here, we are affectively responding to our environment based on feelings of disfavour, but the associated evaluative light mischaracterizes our environment, giving rise to an inappropriate response.

So, Mitchell's view distorts our moods as mental states and gives a faulty account of how our responses, based on feelings of favour/ disfavour, can be appropriate.

4 A Non-intentionalist Theory of Moods

These problems motivate a turn to non-intentionalist theories of moods. In this section, I expose a functional theory of moods and then, in Section 5, explain how such moods can be rational.

On a functional theory, moods, instead of being intentional states, are 'changes at a deeper level of cognitive organization' (Sizer 2000: 764-5). Moods are explained in terms of biases in operations like storing and recalling information, allocating attention and energy, and directing processing rules. On a particular functionalist view (Wong 2015, 2016), a mood is 'a mechanism that monitors [a subject's] energy level' and gives rise to biases accordingly (Wong 2016: 3070). A mood functions to survey the balance between demands raised by a subject's environment and the psychological and physiological resources they can use to meet those demands. Then, they 'engage [one] in the right task using the right amount of energy' (Wong 2016: 3070). Moods observe our energy levels and set us up to perform the right

actions with the right amount of energy. Also, moods, which ‘are not themselves representational states’ (Sizer 2000: 764) are neatly distinguished from emotions that are intentional states directed at objects.

To illustrate, consider Marcel, who is starting to feel increased pressure nearing an important chess match. He needs to study strategies, memorise openings, play practice matches, and rest regularly. He feels like he does not have enough physical energy, concentration, or self-discipline to do everything. The demands of his environment exceed his personal resources that he can expend in meeting them. He starts to feel overwhelmed and as inadequate to meet these demands. This results in him having a lower energy level and a negative mood. His negative mood will produce biases like ‘more narrow focus and greater concentration on detail’ (Sizer 2000, p.764) that lead him to prioritise and complete important tasks, and a slower and more cautious reasoning process that helps in risk evaluation and time management (Wong 2016, p.3071). Marcel’s mood regularly checks his energy level and gives rise to cognitive biases correspondingly.

Hatzimoysis objects to this view by considering a situation where the world around us ‘involves nothing worth pursuing’ (Hatzimoysis 2019: 290): where there are no demands raised by our environment. In this environment, no matter how low our energy level is, we will have sufficient personal resources to meet its demands. This leads to the counter-intuitive result that we would be in a very good mood. But, ‘experiencing the world as devoid of any significance’, which is characteristic of a depressive mood, is ‘anything but ‘being in a positive mood’’ (Hatzimoysis 2019: 290-1).

Nonetheless, even though no particular objects impose any demands, this unfamiliar and taxing environment would still raise a large demand on us: to meet such a situation where there is nothing inviting or motivating. It would require great concentration and determination to not let this situation abase one’s outlook and physical willpower to not let one’s health deteriorate. A lot of resources would be needed to prevent this experience from ruining one’s mental health and social relations (even for a recurring episode). So, in Hatzimoysis’ situation, great external demands are still put on the subject that can be met only by expending a lot of physical and physiological resources, which is associated with a negative (depressive) mood. Our global situation can still impose demands on us, despite there not being any specific objects in our environment that do so.

5 Rationality of Non-intentional Moods

In this section, I argue that non-intentional moods, like the ones characterised by a functionalist account, can be assessed rational. I do this by considering how beliefs affect moods (5.1) and how moods lead to actions (5.2).

5.1 Rationality as Appropriateness

As we have seen in Section 3, one way in which moods can be rational is in terms of *appropriateness*. In a situation where we have just gotten a job offer we worked hard for, being in a joyful mood seems more appropriate than being melancholic. Even if we have been in a morose mood throughout the day, we expect this good news to put us in a better mood.

Kostochka (2021) suggests that moods can be appropriate when they are 'caused by rationally formed beliefs' (Kostochka 2021: 11413). She argues that belief-responsive moods – where a change in belief gives rise to a change in mood – are appropriate when they are based on rational beliefs. For instance, consider the following case:

Martin wakes up in an anxious and drained mood on the morning of his Physics exam. After finishing his exam, he is dejected because he believes that he performed badly, since he was unsure about his answers and had no time to check them. Sylvia, a top student in Martin's class, starts discussing answers with him. Sylvia had the same answers as Martin, her explanations of her answers Martin understands and agrees with, and she says that other students told her that they had the same answers. Martin now starts to believe that he did do well on his exam, and he is put in a more contented mood.

Here, Martin changes his belief from thinking that he did badly in his exam to thinking that he did well, and his mood changes from dejected to contented. So, his mood is responding to his belief. This belief is based on the evidence that a top student and many others had the same answers as him and that Sylvia's explanations justify his answers. This is considerable evidence that Martin's answers

were correct. Therefore, Martin's belief that his exam went well is rationally formed. So, Martin's contented mood, caused by his rationally formed belief, is an appropriate mood. It changed from a dejected mood to a contented one in response to a new, rationally formed belief.

Moreover, we can ask what mood we expect Martin to be in after he has formed his new belief. What mood is coherent with his new belief? If Martin remains in a dejected mood, we would question why. We expect, upon forming the belief that he did well on his exam, that Martin would be put in a better mood. He might also believe that a good result will be beneficial for his studies and for going into subsequent exams, and might feel relieved about his exam and hopeful about the grade he is going to get. A dejected mood seems to cohere less with these beliefs and emotions than does a contented mood. Given Martin's mental states, a contented mood would be more appropriate than a dejected one.

One may point out that Martin's contented mood is *about* his exam going well and him believing so, and hence his mood is an intentional state. However, on a functionalist approach, beliefs influence how we 'allocate our voluntary attention and how we passively attend to our situation' (Kostochka 2021: 11408). In Sizer's terms, Martin's new belief shifts his attention (away from parts he was unsure about) and brings about new associations (with Sylvia's answers and explanations). These changes in cognitive processing are characteristic of positive moods (Sizer 2000: 764) and are in virtue of what Martin is in a content mood. Although his new belief causes his content mood, this mood is not directed at this belief or its content.

5.2 Strategic Rationality

We can also look at what role moods play in motivating action. If moods lead agents to 'select means conducive to the agent's ends' or 'to pursue ends that align with the agent's interests' (Scarantino 2021), then moods are said to be *strategically rational*. This framework has been used for emotions, but I aim to show that it works for non-intentional moods as well. Since moods are clearly distinguished from emotions on a functionalist view, giving similar accounts of their rationality does not collapse the distinction between the two different states.

Moods affect intentional states – like beliefs, desires, and emotions – in virtue of how they influence cognitive processes: moods can introduce biases that affect how

we process information and categorise sensory experiences (Sizer 2000: 763-4). So, if the cognitive biases brought about by moods bring an agent closer to their ends or interests, then such moods can be seen as strategically rational.

Imagine that Arthur, a university student, wakes up on a cold and rainy morning. He has a Mathematics lecture on a complex theorem, so he wants to attend it to understand it and ask questions. But, he is considering staying at home because of the bad weather and not having properly prepared for it. If Arthur wakes up in a bad mood, his mood will bring about cognitive biases like ‘mood congruent recall’ – causing Arthur to remember affectively toned material matching his current mood that influences his categorising and reasoning – and a narrower ‘focus on small details’ (Sizer 2000: 764). He will recall getting soaked by the rain and ineffective lectures, and concentrate on avoiding the rain and social interaction. If Arthur wakes up in a good mood, though, his mood will give rise to recalling positively toned memories and to shifts in information processing – causing Arthur to ‘take in a wider range of information and…perceive ‘the bigger picture’ ’(Sizer 2000: 764). He will recall useful and productive lectures and consider the importance of attending this lecture in the wider context of his semester. In turn, he will be more open to attending and more excited to learn, the bad weather and his lacking preparation having less weight in his deliberation. So, Arthur’s good mood lowers the threshold for how motivating his desire to attend is. In virtue of the cognitive biases produced (and hence his available resources), his desire will have more weight in his deliberation, and he will experience it as more easily achievable.

Finally, activating his desire, via the cognitive biases associated with his positive mood, leads him to an action, attending the lecture, that brings him closer to his goals. Arthur’s positive mood is strategically rational, then, because it results in him selecting means conducive towards his ends as a student.

One may reply that moods ‘merely cause’ actions, and do not motivate them (Lormand 1985, Price 2006). If someone asked Arthur why he attended the lecture, he would cite his desire, not his good mood, as his reason. His mood seems to have played no practical or motivational role in his action. So, the objection goes, moods do not rationalise actions.

Even on a view where they are seen as ‘merely causal’, though, moods can be *indirectly* motivating. They can play a crucial role in causing an intentional state that does directly motivate action (Price 2006 gives a similar, but converse, account).

Arthur's desire motivates him only when it has been 'activated' by the cognitive biases associated with his mood. Without Arthur's positive mood, his desire would not have led to his action. So, moods, even if they have only causal effects, still motivate actions conducive to an agent's ends, thereby being strategically rational.

5.3 A Final Objection

A final objection is the following: even if moods can influence actions in the right ways as outlined above, this does not mean that they *aim* at rationality. They could be introducing cognitive biases on arational bases – like random bodily changes – that are irrelevant to what is strategically rational and yield beneficial outcomes only by chance. Moods are not linked to rationality.

Even if an instance of a mood is rational only 'by chance', a mood that regularly produces strategically valuable outcomes for longer periods of time and over a wide range of contexts seems to be linked to rationality by more than just chance. Such moods are more appropriate to an agent's environment than moods lacking these effects. Imagine that Arthur did attend his lecture and nailed down the complex theorem. If his positive mood persists, then he will continue to regularly attend lectures, ask his professor questions and maybe even study with his peers, leading to higher grades and satisfaction with his studies. This positive mood could also affect non-academic contexts, leading him to do more exercise and improve his social life. So, for Arthur, a negative mood, where he would be held back by focusing on irrelevant details and negative memories, is less beneficial. His positive mood, in virtue of consistently leading him to perform actions conducive to his ends, does align with what is strategically rational for him.

6 Conclusion

In this essay, I have argued that non-intentional moods can be rational. After showing that moods and emotions are distinct mental states, I considered two theories of moods as intentional states: Goldie's and Solomon's view that moods are generalised emotions and Mitchell's view that moods are felt responses to one's total environment. Goldie's and Solomon's view fails, I argued, because it cannot distinguish moods from emotions. Mitchell's view, which solves this problem,

nonetheless fails because it gives an inaccurate picture of moods and their rationality. I took these points to motivate a turn to a non-intentionalist view of moods: the functionalist theory that takes moods to be changes in one's cognitive organization that function to monitor and regulate the balance between an agent's resources and the demands being raised on them. Then, I outlined two ways in which such moods can be rational. They can be appropriate in virtue of responding to rational beliefs and cohering with other mental states of the subject, and strategically rational by helping to give rise to actions conducive to an agent's ends and interest. I conclude that moods, on a non-intentionalist view, can be rational mental states.

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