THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF MOODS:
TIME, PLACE, AND NORMATIVE GRIP

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Abstract

Moods are powerful forces in our lives. When we enter into a mood—such as an anxious, irritable, depressed, bored, tranquil, or cheerful mood—we often find ourselves thinking, feeling, and acting in ways that are out of character. Indeed, a change in mood can alter our space of possibilities, so that, for good or ill, what once seemed inevitable suddenly becomes impossible, while the unimaginable suddenly becomes a reality.

What are moods, then, and how does a change in our mood alter the content and structure of our experience? Despite great interest in the topic of emotions within Anglo-American philosophy, the topic of moods has been relatively neglected. And although the phenomenological tradition offers many insights into affective experience in general, no theorist has attempted to apply these insights to the investigation of moods in their particularity, as a kind of affective phenomenon that is distinct from emotions, temperaments, cultural attitudes, and so on. Thus, the most distinctive and puzzling features of moods have yet to be explained.

This dissertation fills these gaps in the literature. Building on Martin Heidegger’s phenomenology of affective attunement, Matthew Ratcliffe’s phenomenology of major depression, Jorge Portilla’s phenomenology of group practices, and philosophical theories of narrative, I develop a novel account of the way moods affect our experience, both as individuals and as groups. I argue that while emotions are responses to particular objects, moods enact our interpretation of the present situation as a whole. Moods systematically alter our experience of time, place, and normative grip,
establishing our sense of what is at stake, here and now. By enacting the situational context of our ongoing experience, moods shape our interpretation of the overall significance of the objects we encounter and influence our emotional responses to them. And in some cases, moods impose a narrative structure onto our experience, leading us to interpret objects and situations in ways that we may later find surprising or problematic.

Thus, by using the tools of phenomenology to analyze the distinctive features of moods, this dissertation offers new insights into an important and relatively neglected topic.
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Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to my son and greatest joy, José Alderaan Gallegos: May you be happy, healthy, and wise, and may you learn to live well with moods.
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Introduction:
The Context and Scope of this Investigation

This dissertation addresses the question: *How do moods affect the content and structure of our experience?* I begin by offering a few words here at the outset to clarify what this question is (and is not) asking about, and to illustrate what I think is at stake in answering this question well. After briefly describing the context and scope of this investigation, I give an overview of my central arguments and a roadmap of how each chapter proceeds.

Moods are one of the most powerful and mysterious forces in human life. Now, to be sure, emotions can also be powerful and mysterious. But emotions are always directed toward a particular “intentional object.” That is, an emotion is always *about* something specific—directed toward a particular person, item, state of affairs, event, or possibility (it is customary to use the general term “object” to refer to all of these things). For example, we might experience the emotion of *fear* when we are hiking in the mountains and suddenly encounter a bear, or we might experience the emotion of *anger* when a colleague makes an insulting comment to us. Here we can say that we are afraid *of* the bear and angry *with* our colleague. A mood, in contrast, is not directed toward a particular object in this way; it is more like an *atmosphere* that touches everything and nothing in particular. As such, when we are transported into a mood, our experience as whole can be affected in profound and confusing ways. When we are in an *anxious, irritable, depressed, bored, tranquil,* or *cheerful* mood, for example, we might find ourselves responding and acting in ways that are out of character—overreacting to things that we would otherwise find trivial, or remaining unmoved by things that we
would otherwise find compelling—and yet we may not be able to say what, exactly, our mood is *about*.

The experience of being swept up into a mood can be exhilarating or painful, but in either case, the experience shows how quickly moods can change the “space of possibilities” in which we act. When the right mood arises—or conversely, when something happens to “kill the mood”—what once seemed inevitable may suddenly become impossible, while what once was unimaginable suddenly becomes a reality. This is just as true for individuals as for groups. Indeed, there is perhaps no collective endeavor whose success does not depend on the creation and maintenance of moods that will enable the members of the group to act together in a coordinated and appropriate way. In some cases, a mood is fragile, fleeting, and easily disturbed; other times, a mood remains stubbornly resilient against great odds. In either case, however, we often find moods difficult to understand and even more difficult to control. Despite the enormous effort we put into monitoring, cultivating, navigating, and policing our own moods and the moods of the people around us, we often have no choice but simply to wait for a mood to arise or dissipate on its own time.

In light of the extraordinary effects that moods can have in our lives, we might ask: What are moods, exactly? And how should we relate to our moods, and to the moods of others? Unfortunately, these questions have been rather neglected in contemporary philosophy. Despite a remarkable resurgence of interest in the topic of *emotions* within Anglo-American philosophy in recent decades, there has not been a single, book-length philosophical treatment of *moods* since Claire Armon-Jones’ *Varieties of Affect* in 1991. In most of the philosophy articles in which moods are even mentioned, they are treated as an afterthought, used merely to contextualize the author’s discussion.
of emotions. This situation is unfortunate, not least because, in my view, we will never truly understand the nature of emotions without understanding the way that moods establish the affective contexts in which emotions arise. In short, the philosophical inquiry into moods is in need of rehabilitation. It is my hope that this dissertation will be a step in this direction.

The neglect of moods in contemporary philosophy is all the more striking when we consider that moods have been a prominent concern of philosophers for millennia. A review of the history of Western thought about moods reveals three “models of mood,” which I call the Stoic, medical, and Romantic models of mood. These models of mood continue to shape our thinking, and so they are an important part of the context of this dissertation. The *Stoic model* holds that moods are grounded in our *evaluative* judgments. As Epictetus famously puts it in his *Manual* (§5), “It is not things themselves that disturb men, but their judgments about things…. So whenever we are impeded or disturbed or distressed, let us blame no one but ourselves, that is, our own judgments.”

On this model, the best way to control our moods is through rational deliberation about the validity of the judgments that are driving them. In philosophy, the Stoic model motivates the “cognitivist” account of moods, which we will examine in Chapter Two, and in clinical psychology, it underlies the so-called “cognitive therapies,” such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (Robertson 2010). The *medical model*, in contrast, views moods as a-rational symptoms of changes in our *biochemistry*. Early proponents of the medical model included Hippocratic doctors in ancient Greece, who attributed a melancholic mood, for example, to an excess of black bile ("melan chole") in the body (Radden 2009, p. 5). On this model, it is futile to try to reason with moods; instead, the best way to control a mood is through physiological interventions, such as through diet,
exercise, sleep, and, of course, drugs. In contemporary philosophy, the medical model motivates the “non-cognitivist” account of moods, which we will also examine in Chapter Two, and it underlies a great deal of the research on moods that is done in empirical psychology and psychiatry.

While the Stoic and medical models disagree about the ontological grounds of moods and the causal forces that drive them, proponents of these models typically agree that we have an ethical duty to manage our moods carefully. This “moralization of mood management” also has deep historical roots. As Greek humoral lore was translated into medieval Latin, mood states such as accidia (boredom) and tristitia (depression) came to be seen as reflections of moral failings that were, in turn, morally dangerous—a “devil’s bath” inviting demonic possession, to which women’s supposed moral and intellectual weaknesses left them especially vulnerable (Radden 2009, p. 6). Today, we are assailed with messages from popular psychology that echo these medieval Christian attitudes, messages suggesting that carefully managing our moods is not merely prudent, but something that a person owes to herself and to those around her. We can see elements of both the Stoic and medical models of moods in popular psychology’s fascination with the “power of positive thinking” and the importance of keeping an “attitude of gratitude” and avoiding “toxic relationships,” as well as in the enormous amount of money, effort, and time that is spent on managing stress through bodily self-discipline and drugs. A dramatic example of this convergence of the Stoic and medical models around the moralization of moods is found in the book Bright-sided, where Barbara Ehrenreich (2009) reports that after being diagnosed with breast cancer, she was thrust into “pink-ribbon culture” that bombarded her with exhortations to remain cheerful and positive, and even to see cancer as a “gift”—or else her “bad attitude” could damage her own
health and the health of other patients.

In contrast, the Romantic model of moods rejects this preoccupation with maintaining a moderate and positive mood. Poets and thinkers in the Romantic tradition did not associate moods with effeminate weakness and physiological malfunction but, rather, with creativity and genius (Brown 2000, p. 2-3). On this view, the experience of powerful moods was part and parcel of the heroic and masculine attempt of great artists and philosophers to do battle with the limits of human knowledge and acquire insight into the nature of the cosmos and the human condition. Romantics thus encourage us to lean into our moods—even our “negative” moods—because these moods may be vehicles for transcending our limitations. As Rilke puts it in his *Letters to a Young Poet* (letter 8),

Why do you want to shut out of your life any uneasiness, any misery, any depression, since after all you don't know what work these conditions are doing inside you? Why do you want to persecute yourself with the question of where all this is coming from and where it is going?... If there is anything unhealthy in your reactions, just bear in mind that sickness is the means by which an organism frees itself from what is alien; so one must simply help it to be sick, to have its whole sickness and to break out with it, since that is the way it gets better.

The idea that unpleasant moods can lead to insight and healing, and so should not be avoided but pursued, may strike the contemporary reader as strange. To better appreciate the intuition behind the Romantic model of moods, then, consider the following anecdote from Naomi Scheman (1980) about “Alice,” a young housewife in the 1950s who, like many other women at the time, had no familiarity with concepts like sexism or patriarchy. At first, Scheman says, Alice was generally satisfied with her new life as a wife and mother, but gradually she became more aware of how frequently “she felt depressed, or pressured and harried, as though her time were not her own” (24). These moods and thoughts were confusing to her, however, because she did not believe
that her time *ought* to be her own, and so she did not feel that she had any reason or right to be depressed. But her depression and anxiety persisted, and eventually they led her to seek out answers. When she finally found a women’s consciousness-raising group, she was finally able to identify the true source of her dissatisfaction—namely, the oppression of women in her society—and by doing so, she was able to regain some agency in her life. This example illustrates the Romantic idea that moods, even and perhaps especially “negative” moods, can be an invaluable epistemic resource and a powerful engine for personal growth.

Despite their differences, all three models agree that, for good or ill, moods can be quite powerful. As such, anything that philosophers can do to clarify our understanding of moods will be of great significance. This, then, is the historical and contemporary context that motivates my work in this dissertation. The scope of my investigation, however, is much narrower. In this work, I do not examine metaphysical questions about the ontological grounds of moods, such as the question of whether a certain mental state (e.g., a certain belief or a bodily feeling) is a “proper part” of a certain kind of mood, or is merely an effect that is caused by being in that mood. Nor do I seek out necessary and sufficient conditions for something to count as a mood. Nor do I make any claims about the causal mechanisms underlying moods, or even any claims about the ethics of mood management (though I will return to the latter topic in the conclusion). Although all of these issues are important, progress on any one question becomes difficult when they are all jumbled together and addressed simultaneously. If we are to rehabilitate the philosophical inquiry into moods, it will be important to distinguish more carefully between various kinds of investigations into the topic.

As I explain in Chapter One, my dissertation is essentially a *descriptive* and
hermeneutical project. The central purpose is (a) to identify the most important ways that a change in our mood affects the content and structure of our experience, and (b) to provide a novel conceptual paradigm that can illuminate how the various features of our experience of moods fit together as part of a single phenomenon. How, exactly, do moods affect the way we think? How, exactly, do moods affect the way we perceive objects? How do they affect our bodily feelings and motivational states? And can we articulate a conceptual paradigm that will help us to understand the underlying logic behind these various ways that moods manifest themselves in our experience? In short, then, I am seeking a satisfying account of the phenomenon that we call “moods”—that is, an account of how this distinctive kind of affective state manifests itself in our experience.\(^1\) While a successful description and analysis of the experience of moods will not directly address many of the important questions we may have about moods, making progress on this front will contribute in important ways to any inquiry into this topic. For example, developing a better understanding of how moods affect our experience will aid scientific research into moods, insofar as it will help to identify and clarify the explanandum of scientific theories about the causal mechanics that underlie the experience of moods. Likewise, an account of how moods alter our experience will help to inform ethical arguments regarding how we should relate to our moods and the moods of others.

\(^1\) In other words, I am restricting my focus to understanding moods as a phenomenon, as something that manifests in our experience. Unfortunately, the terms “phenomenon” and “phenomenology” are used in several different ways in philosophy, so this statement may need some clarification. The term “phenomenology” plays a prominent role in a debate in the domain of philosophy of mind that sometimes touches on the topic of moods. In those debates, the term “phenomenology” is used to refer to the qualitative character of a mental state, that is, to “what it is like” for the subject of that mental state. The central disagreement concerns whether the ontological/ causal ground of this qualitative character is best understood as a kind of mental representation or as a non-representational “ quale” (Harman 1990, Crane 2003, Mendelovici 2014). This dissertation does not address this controversy, nor any metaphysical or causal questions, but, rather, focuses on providing an illuminating description and analysis of how moods affect the content and structure of our experience.
In Chapter Two, I assess four major theories of moods in mainstream Anglo-American philosophy, the non-cognitivist, perceptualist, cognitivist, and attitudinalist theories of moods. The first three of these theories argue that moods are essentially a representational state of one kind or another. In other words, these theories hold that moods are ways of representing particular objects or things as a whole as being relatively good or bad, or as having other kinds evaluative properties, such as being dangerous or as being beautiful. For example, according to the perceptualist theory of moods, moods function like “colored lenses,” altering the way we are disposed to perceive the things we encounter—for example, by disposing us to perceive things as being threatening when we are in an anxious mood, and to see things as being unjust and offensive when we are in an irritable mood. I argue that such representation-oriented theories fail to illuminate the logic that governs how moods manifest themselves in our experience. To make my case, I focus on cases in which moods do not manifest themselves in the ways that these theories predict. For example, I examine cases in which moods do not function like colored lenses, in which we see (that is, perceptually represent) no particular danger in the things around us, and judge (cognitively represent) that there is no reason to be afraid, but we nonetheless remain stuck in an anxious mood. Through in-depth investigations of instances in which our experience of moods exceeds the explanatory capacity of these theories, I begin to uncover the deeper principles underlying the way that moods affect our experience.

I argue that moods cannot be adequately explained in terms of re-presentational states, because moods affect how the world is present to us in the first place. That is, we do not first encounter a given set of circumstances, and then represent those circumstances a certain way, depending on our mood. Instead, moods operate at a "pre-
intentional” level, determining in advance how our experiential world will be *intelligible* to us, even before we take up any representational attitude toward it. This is why our moods can be so *recalcitrant*—why, for example, we may cognitively and perceptually represent our lives as being full of accomplishments and blessings, while remaining in a depressed mood: Such cognitive and perceptual representations always come too late, after our depressed mood has already *presented* the world in ways that belie those relatively optimistic representations and disable their capacity to trigger an emotional response. Drawing on insights in the tradition of phenomenology—and particularly the work of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Matthew Ratcliffe—I discern three distinct aspects of “phenomenological presence”: *temporal* (our sense of what is happening at the present moment), *locational* (our sense of what is located in the present place), and *normative* (our sense of what is presently at stake). Thus, I argue that the major theories of moods in the literature presuppose, and so cannot account for, the way that a change in mood will alter our experience of the temporal, spatial, and normative structure of what is present, even before we represent what is present to us in any particular way. After all, even if we represent the things in our lives as accomplishments and blessings, this may count for little at a *time* when our lives seem to headed toward failure and meaninglessness, when we seem to be *located* in a world that is so full of injustice and absurdity, and when none of these accomplishments and blessings seem to be relevant to what is presently *at stake*.

Although the tradition of phenomenology offers invaluable resources for understanding affective phenomena in general, no theorist has yet attempted to apply the insights of phenomenology to the investigation of moods *in their particularity*, as affective structures distinct from emotions, temperaments, cultural attitudes, and so on.
Heidegger, for example, was not interested in investigating the differences between moods, emotions, and other kinds of affective phenomena. Ratcliffe, for his part, focuses on psychiatric conditions that bring about a relatively deep and totalizing change in the structure of our experience, rather than everyday moods like irritability and cheerfulness. If we want to understand moods in their particularity, I argue, we need theoretical concepts and tools that are not available in the work of Heidegger, Ratcliffe, or other phenomenologists. In contrast to psychiatric conditions like major depression, everyday moods function at an “intermediate existential depth”—deep enough to bring about a sweeping change in our sense of time, place, and normative grip, but not so deep as to alter our most basic sense of reality. What can moods be, such that they operate at this intermediate existential depth?

In Chapter Three I articulate a novel account of the phenomenon, according to which moods are not representations of any object or set of objects, but enactments of our pre-intentional interpretation of the temporal, spatial, and normative structure of the present situation. The present situation is not an object or set of objects, but a particular kind of setting in which objects can be located, namely, the setting in which the things that are happening here and now call upon to respond appropriately to what is happening. Our interpretation of the present situation typically reflects the activity that we are involved in. For example, we might be hiking a mountain and getting close to reaching the summit; we might be reading a book at home on a peaceful Saturday afternoon; we might be late for an appointment on Monday morning and stuck in a traffic jam. In each case, through our mood we enact a holistic sense of what is at stake in the events that are happening here and now. By establishing our sense of the situational context of our ongoing experience in this way, moods shape the way we will be
able to interpret the overall significance of the objects we encounter. Once our experience is organized within a particular situational structure, things will show up to us as being intelligible in certain meaningful ways, even before we adopt any particular representational attitudes toward them. It is this pre-intentional “framing effect” that can make us seem so passive and powerless in the face of our moods, though as we will see, the question of what role our agency plays in our experience of moods is quite complex.

In Chapter Four, I address a puzzle that arises from the account of moods I give in Chapter Three. In many cases, our moods seem disconnected from what is currently happening in the present situation. For example, when we are in an anxious mood, we may see that everything around us is perfectly safe, and that there is no apparent reason not to feel secure and content, and yet we may continue to have the sense that some unknown dangers are looming over us, and that these possible future threats are defining how things are going in the present situation. This kind of mood, which I call a “thematic mood,” does not seem to track what is happening in the present situation but remains stubbornly preoccupied with a certain kind of thematic concern. When we are “in” an anxious mood, for example, we can find ourselves transported into an affective space in which we are preoccupied with threats. Likewise, in an irritable mood, we become preoccupied with injustices, and in a depressed mood, we become preoccupied with loss.

I argue that in order to illuminate the logic that governs the distinctive way that thematic moods manifest themselves in our experience, another theoretical construct is needed—namely, the concept of “narrative emplotment.” When we get swept up into the plot of a gripping film or novel, we enter into a kind of alternative reality, a
“narrative world” that has its own temporal, spatial, and normative structure. The plot of a narrative typically encompasses many situations, and indeed, the meaning of any given situation depicted in a narrative is determined by its place within the narrative structure as a whole. For example, at the beginning of a horror film, we may encounter a scene in which the protagonists of a story are enjoying an idyllic moment of respite, where everything around them is peaceful. Nonetheless, we in the audience may feel a growing sense of dread as we anticipate that some disaster is about to befall them. In this case, the overall significance of what is happening in this moment is not determined by the peaceful situation considered in isolation, but by the situation’s place within a larger narrative structure that seems to be headed toward some sort of catastrophe.

Events within a narrative unfold according to a distinctive sort of “narrative logic,” such that certain sorts of events will seem to make sense as appropriate or even necessary ways for the plot to move from conflict to resolution. Likewise, I argue, thematic moods impose a narrative structure on our experience, wherein we respond to the present situation in terms of its place within an ongoing storyline that is governed by a distinctive narrative logic moving from conflict to resolution. Thus, when we are in an anxious thematic mood, our sense of the overall significance of the present situation is determined by its place within a larger narrative structure that may be similar to the narrative structure of a horror film, where it would make perfect sense from a narrative point of view for some catastrophe to unfold at any moment, even if no dangers are currently apparent.

In Chapter Five, I apply my account of the experience of moods to the topic of collective moods, moods shared by groups of people. Most theorists who research shared emotional experiences focus on collective emotions, rather than collective moods, and
their accounts typically seek to show how groups of people can acquire certain kinds of *shared mental states*. Drawing on the arguments and concepts developed in the previous chapters, I sketch a novel approach to the investigation of collective moods as collective enactments of a shared situation. I identify resources in the work of a number of sociologists and in the recently translated texts of the Mexican phenomenologist Jorge Portilla that can illuminate the mechanics of collective moods, helping us to understand how, exactly, groups of people manage to enact a shared interpretation of the temporal, locational, and normative structure of present events. As we will see, in many cases, collective moods arise in the context of a group project, in which group members participate in a shared, norm-governed activity, as when a group of people at a party cooperates to bring about a cheerful collective mood. Other times, however, a group of people may become preoccupied by a certain kind of concern, despite there being no particular activity grounding their shared preoccupation, and even when this shared preoccupation seems inappropriate to the present situation. I argue that such collective thematic moods arise when a group collectively interprets their ongoing experience through the framework of a *narrative structure*, as when the so-called “Tea Party” in the U.S. enacted a narrative of injustice that generated a collective mood of irritability in the run-up to the 2016 presidential election.

The results of my dissertation should prove to be of help to anyone who is interested in better understanding the nature of moods, regardless of his or her disciplinary domain. Unfortunately, researchers from empirical psychology, mainstream Anglo-American philosophy, and phenomenology have not worked together in their investigations of moods as well as we might hope. For this reason, this dissertation begins by seeking to clear away some obstacles to this sort of collaboration, beginning
with the foundational question: What is a mood?
Chapter One:
What is a Mood?

Moods are an important topic of investigation in at least three major research domains—empirical psychology, mainstream Anglo-American philosophy, and phenomenology. However, in each domain, moods are conceptualized quite differently. The lack of consensus regarding what phenomenon is even at issue when we speak about “moods” has become a significant obstacle to our understanding of the phenomenon, because it hinders collaboration between theorists in different research domains. For example, philosophers must be extremely cautious when they cite empirical research related to “moods” to support their arguments; indeed, they cannot even assume that other philosophical texts will use the term “moods” as they do. In light of these challenges, many theorists simply avoid engaging with any work on moods outside of their preferred domain, and as a result, the scholarly literature on moods is more confused and less productive than it could be.

In hopes of shedding some light on these issues and establishing a satisfying definition of moods to use in this investigation, I begin in Section One by reviewing the dispute between theorists in empirical psychology and mainstream Anglo-American philosophy regarding how to conceptualize moods. I argue that the dispute can be resolved by recognizing that each side is simply focused on a different kind or category of moods. Once we have a satisfying definition of moods in hand, Section Two establishes the criteria that I will use to evaluate whether various theories of mood provide an adequate account of this phenomenon. Finally, in Section Three, I review the phenomenological conception of moods, and I explain why Heidegger’s
phenomenological analysis of affectivity offers conceptual resources that promise to be particularly helpful for articulating an account of moods. I argue, however, that if we seek to understand moods in their particularity—that is, to understand moods as a kind of affective phenomenon that is distinct from emotions, dispositions, and other affective structures—we will need to develop new conceptual resources, beyond anything that can be found in the phenomenological literature today.

§1.1. Defining moods

The quantity of research that has been done on moods within the domain of empirical psychology is breathtaking. Countless articles have been published on the causal influences on a person’s mood and on the myriad effects that a change in mood can have (Morris 1989, Parkinson 1996, Fox 2008, and Freeman 2014). Some exciting research on moods is also being done in the sub-discipline of industrial-organizational psychology, which examines how moods function like a “contagion,” passing between members of a group, and how an organization’s norms regarding the expression of affect impacts group behavior and morale (Weiss & Cropanzano 1996, Kelly & Barsade 2001, Barsade 2002, Barsade et al. 2003, Erez et al. 2008, Sy et al. 2013). Thus, on first glance it appears that empirical psychology is making stunning progress toward understanding how moods work. However, a closer look reveals cause for concern, because in many cases the phenomenon that these studies actually investigate is not the phenomenon that most of us would call “mood.”

According to the dominant conception of mood in empirical psychology, “mood” is defined as “core affect,” that is “primitive non-reflective feelings” of pleasure and displeasure (or “hedonic valence”) and tension and relaxation (or “activation”) (Russell
On this view, then, the qualitative character of a person’s mood at any given time can be represented as a location on a two-dimensional circumplex, as shown in Figure 1 below (Posner 2005).

![Figure 1: The circumplex model of mood](image)

On this picture, our mood might be highly activated with a positive valence, as when we are in a “great” mood and feel energetically cheerful; or it might be de-activated with a positive valence, as when we are in a “mellow” mood and feel pleasantly tranquil. Alternatively, our mood might be highly activated with a negative valence, as when we feel agitated and distressed, or de-activated with a negative valence, as when we feel “low” and depressed. In this way, moods are said to be sharply distinguished from emotions by features such as low intensity and the absence of a known cause. (For examples of this older approach to the conception of moods, see the articles by Davidson, Ekman, and Frijda in Ekman & Davidson eds. 1994.) These features are questionable, however, since it is common to experience high-intensity moods and low-intensity emotions, and it is generally unhelpful to define a construct with reference to its cause. For discussion of this history, see Morris 1989, p. 2; Fox 2008, p. 24–40; and Ekkekakis 2012.

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2 This conception replaces an older conception of mood within empirical psychology, according to which moods are distinguished from emotions by features such as low intensity and the absence of a known cause. (For examples of this older approach to the conception of moods, see the articles by Davidson, Ekman, and Frijda in Ekman & Davidson eds. 1994.) These features are questionable, however, since it is common to experience high-intensity moods and low-intensity emotions, and it is generally unhelpful to define a construct with reference to its cause. For discussion of this history, see Morris 1989, p. 2; Fox 2008, p. 24–40; and Ekkekakis 2012.
emotions: while emotions essentially involve a cognitive appraisal of a specific intentional object, moods are simple, bodily feelings. Moods may have certain effects on our thoughts, perceptions, and motivations, but as configurations of core affect, moods are essentially just bodily feelings, and as such, they are not “psychologically constructed” in the way that emotions are.

Proponents of this model typically hold that we always have some mood or other, insofar as our experience is always more or less pleasant, and we are always feeling a certain amount of energy and tension. This is an important insight. Even when we are not experiencing a mood that has a specific name, like a “cheerful” or “bored” mood, a felt sense of the “emotional atmosphere” of our experience is constantly present in the background of our awareness, typically fluctuating fluidly in its qualitative character throughout the day. For example, we might be in a bad mood in the morning, then be in high spirits after lunch, and then feel mellow in the evening. Thus, this model of mood helps us to appreciate the idea that our moods are constantly fluctuating throughout the day. This model is insightful in another way as well, namely, in recognizing that moods have both a hedonic element and a motivational element. In everyday life, the hedonic element of our mood comes to the fore in the question, “How are you doing?” or “How is it going?”—where the answer is often given in terms of feeling good or bad, such as, “I’m doing great” or “not bad” or “terrible.” The motivational element of our mood—here described in terms of levels of activation and de-activation—is often what we have in mind when we speak of being (or not being) in the mood to do something, or being (or not being) in the mood for something—such as, “I’m in the mood to go dancing,” or “I’m not really in the mood for shopping.”
One major drawback of this conception of mood, however, is that it cannot adequately account for the difference between moods that we commonly differentiate in everyday life. This is because paradigmatic moods are typically distinguished from one other not merely by differences in bodily feelings, such as hedonic valence and level of activation, but also by the kind of concerns that we are preoccupied with when we are in that mood. When we are in an irritable mood, for example, we become preoccupied with concerns about things being unjust and offensive, while in an anxious mood, we become preoccupied by concerns about safety and security. These two moods are assumed to be quite distinct; indeed, as we will see in more detail in the following chapters, these moods affect the content and structure of our experience in quite different ways. Yet the differences between these moods cannot be accounted for merely in terms of differences in hedonic valence and level of activation, because both anxious and irritable moods tend to be unpleasant and highly activated.

Another way to put the concern here is that this model of moods is misleading, because it equates certain kinds of moods with certain configurations of core affect, when, in fact, each kind of mood can involve a whole range of configurations of core affect. For example, the circumplex depicted in Figure 1 above suggests that a fearful (anxious) mood is more highly activated than an angry (irritable) mood. But this is not necessarily so. We may experience anxious moods that are relatively mild, perhaps leading us to fidget in our seats, while an irritable mood might be highly activated, causing us to storm around, slamming doors and cursing at innocent bystanders. What is more, although irritable moods are supposedly defined by their unpleasantness, it is not uncommon to experience a certain pleasure from the righteous indignation we feel when we are gripped by an irritable mood. That is, despite appearances, it can feel quite
good to storm around, slamming doors and cursing at innocent bystanders. The way irritability can energize and organize us can be especially relieving and pleasant in circumstances where we might otherwise feel deflated and disoriented. These kinds of considerations suggest that while moods certainly involve configurations of core affect, they cannot be reductively explained in terms of hedonic valence and level of activation alone.

A better conception of moods is found in mainstream Anglo-American philosophy. On this view—the conception of moods that I endorse—a mood is a global and non-specifically directed emotional experience. By “global,” I mean that moods manifest themselves throughout the entire domain of emotional or affective experience, affecting our evaluative cognitions, evaluative perceptions, and motivational states, in addition to our bodily feelings. Thus, moods, like emotions, are complex and “psychologically constructed” states. In fact, each paradigmatic kind of mood is constituted by the same sorts of mental states as a corresponding kind of emotion. For example, the mood of anxiety is similar to the emotion of fear in being constituted by thoughts, perceptions, and motivations related to concerns about security and safety. In a similar fashion, the mood of irritability is similar to the emotion of anger, the mood of depression is similar to the emotion of sadness, the mood of cheerfulness is similar to the emotion of happiness, and the mood of tranquility is similar to the emotion of relief. The central difference between moods and emotions, then, is that unlike emotions, moods are “non-specifically directed,” that is, they are not directed toward specific intentional objects. For example, while the emotion of fear is directed toward a particular object that is threatening—such as an oncoming car or an upcoming exam—when we are in an anxious mood, it may be difficult to identify any particular threat that explains our anxiety. The anxiety may
seem to be directed at nothing at all, or it may be directed at one “target” after another, often targeting objects that would otherwise not be a cause for distress (Armon-Jones 1991, Ch. 2; Goldie 2000, p. 147-8). Likewise, the mood of depression is a kind of sadness that seems to be about “everything and nothing in particular,” the mood of cheerfulness is a kind of generalized happiness, and so on.⁵

When compared to the way mood is conceptualized in empirical psychology, the conception of moods in mainstream Anglo-American philosophy has the advantage of being able to make more fine-grained and intuitive distinctions between anxiety, irritability, and other paradigmatic moods. Moreover, this conception of mood insightfully reflects the fact that the thoughts, perceptions, and motivational states that we typically experience when we are in a mood are not mere effects of a particular configuration of core affect, but are integral aspects of a single, complex, embodied experience. A mood is not simply a way of feeling, but also a way of thinking, a way of seeing, and a way of actively relating to the world around us. While we may be able to pull apart these aspects of moods in theory, we experience them as being woven together, each aspect inflecting the others in a holistic way (Goldie 2004).

Although the conception of moods in mainstream Anglo-American philosophy is insightful, this literature has its own limitations. Theorists in this tradition tend to describe moods in similar terms, namely, as non-specifically directed emotional states that stubbornly persist for hours or days at a time and make us respond to things in

⁵ In defining moods as “non-specifically directed,” I am intending to remain neutral with respect to philosophical debates about the intentionality of moods. As we will see in the following chapter, some theorists argue that moods are intentional mental states that are directed toward very general objects, like “my life as a whole” or “things in general,” while others argue that moods are directed toward an indefinite series of targets, but not toward any genuine intentional objects. By defining moods somewhat vaguely as non-specifically directed emotional experiences (rather than as “generally directed” or “undirected” emotional experiences, for example), I mean to preserve the sense in which the philosophers who defend various positions about the intentionality of moods are talking about the same thing—namely, moods—and so are engaged in a genuine disagreement, rather than merely talking past one another.
ways that are inappropriate or out of character. This is certainly an important way that we experience moods in our everyday lives, but it is only one way that moods manifest themselves in our experience. Reading descriptions of moods in this literature, one gets the impression that we only experience moods on occasion, as though we have no mood at all in the intervals between being swept up into a stubborn, nameable mood like irritability, depression, or cheerfulness. Now, it is true that most of the time we are not preoccupied with a certain kind of concern in the way we are when we experience one of these paradigmatic kinds of moods. Most of the time we are more flexibly responsive to all of the concerns that we care about, insofar as they are relevant to what is going on at the present moment, and if we are not unusually eloquent, there are many times that we may not even be able to identify our mood more precisely than simply saying that we are "pretty good" or "not bad." But in the intervals between being swept up into a specific, paradigmatic kind of mood, we are not mood-less or even in a mood-neutral state. As the literature from empirical psychology recognizes, we always have some mood, if only in the form of a diffuse emotional atmosphere that feels more or less pleasant and more or less energized. We may not be consciously aware of our mood until someone asks us, "How are you doing?"—but upon reflection, we can usually see that our mood has been there all along in the background of our awareness, shaping our experience in myriad ways.

With this in mind, I suggest that these two traditions tend to focus on a different kind or category of moods, and therefore that each tradition offers important insights that the other overlooks. Empirical psychology focuses on what I call tracking moods, which fluctuate fluidly over the course of the day, corresponding to or “tracking” our ever-changing sense of how things are going and how we are doing as we navigate the
environments we find ourselves in. Anglo-American philosophy, on the other hand, focuses on thematic moods, which tend to remain stubbornly preoccupied with a certain thematic concern for relatively long periods of time, even despite being out of sync with the apparent features of our present environment. By drawing insights from each of these traditions in order to identify these two categories of moods, we can thus describe our experience of moods in a more accurate and intuitive way: Most of the time, our moods are constantly fluctuating as we journey through our day, while on occasion, our mood will coalesce into a kind of stubbornly persistent generalized emotion.

In order to resolve the dispute between theorists in these two traditions in the way I suggest, however, we must radically re-describe the conception of moods found in empirical psychology. If moods are a kind of global emotional experience, then they always manifest themselves throughout the entire domain of emotional or affective experience—including in the way we think about and perceive the things we encounter—rather than simply in primitive, non-relational bodily feelings that have no intrinsic connection to the outside world. To save the insights found in this conception of moods, then, we must re-imagine our constantly fluctuating configurations of core affect as part of a complex and multi-faceted relationship between a person and her environment.

To do so, we can re-describe the hedonic element of moods (what has been referred to as “hedonic valence”) as part of their self-monitoring function, in which our moods make manifest our sense of “how we are doing” at the present moment. Now, in empirical psychology, moods have long been viewed as playing an important part in our capacity for self-regulation (Morris 1989, p. 2-3). For example, Nowlis & Nowlis (1956, p. 352) originally described moods as “a source of information…to the organism, about
the current functioning characteristics of the organism.” In this way, a “bad mood” is said to function like an “alarm system,” warning us that we are not doing well and need to make some sort of an adjustment (Mandler 1975). I suggest, however, that this sort of self-monitoring is not simply something that moods facilitate by virtue of the fact that the hedonic valence of our moods tends to be correlated with our “current functioning characteristics.” Instead, self-monitoring is a constitutive part of what moods are—that is, a mood is an experience of our sense of subjective wellbeing. Thus, a bad mood does not merely provide reason to infer that we are not doing well but, rather, is itself the experience of not doing well.

Likewise, we can re-describe the motivational element of moods (what has been referred to as “activation level”) as part of their environment-monitoring function, in which our moods make manifest our sense of how the present environment is soliciting us to respond. Again, empirical psychologists have recognized the important role moods play in calibrating our activation level to the relative degree of risk and reward that is present in our environment, so that we tend to become more activated as rewards become more prevalent, and more de-activated as risks become more prevalent (Eldar et al. 2016). In my view, however, our moods monitor our environment in a more direct way, and not simply by virtue of the fact that our level of activation tends to be correlated with the prevalence of risks and rewards. Environment-monitoring is a constitutive part of what moods are, not merely something they do—that is, a mood is the experience of feeling called upon to respond in a certain way to opportunities and possibilities that are present in the environment. For example, to be in a “bad mood” is to experience the environment as presenting unwanted or unpleasant possibilities to avoid. Likewise, to be “in the mood” to do something is to experience that activity as
appropriate and fitting, given the kinds of opportunities and possibilities that are present in the environment.

Putting these ideas together, then, we can say that moods are global and non-specifically directed emotional experiences that make manifest our sense of how we are faring as we navigate the solicitations of our environment. This formulation echoes Heidegger’s (1927/1962, p. 173/134) view that moods “make manifest ‘how one is and how one is faring.’”4 In English, the phrase “how one is faring” calls to mind a journey or an ongoing activity that requires a person to cope with complications along the way. The phrase is thus particularly well suited to describe tracking moods, because it conveys the idea that as we go through the day, our moods fluctuate in ways that reflect our sense of subjective wellbeing in relation to the demands of the present environment. At one moment, when we are at our desk working to meet a deadline, we may feel tense, stressed, agitated, or frustrated. At the next moment, when we get up and go to the kitchen to eat a snack, we may relax as we enter a place that we experience as full of pleasant opportunities that we are successfully pursuing. In this way, our tracking moods fluidly fluctuate as we journey through our day, tracking our sense of how we are doing in relation to how things are going from one moment to the next.

Like tracking moods, thematic moods make manifest our sense of how we are doing with regard to the task of responding appropriately to certain demands. But in contrast to tracking moods, thematic moods remains stubbornly preoccupied with a certain kind of concern and do not fluctuate fluidly in a way that corresponds with the activity we are currently engaged in. While the theoretical distinction between tracking moods and thematic moods is thus fairly clear, in practice, it is not always obvious in a

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4 For a discussion of the relationship between the self-monitoring and environment-monitoring functions of moods and Heidegger’s analysis of Befindlichkeit and Stimmung, see Blattner 2006, p. 79-81.
given case whether we are currently in a tracking mood or a thematic mood. Because thematic moods are defined *counterfactually*—namely, thematic moods dispose us to respond in a way that is different than how we *would normally* respond, if we were not in this mood—we sometimes must wait to see if our mood changes in response to changing circumstances, or if it remains stubbornly fixed despite being out of sync with environmental solicitations.⁵

In sum, then, moods are a particular kind of emotional experience that is global and non-specifically directed, and which make manifest our sense of how we are doing and how things are going. Tracking moods, which fluctuate fluidly in response to environmental solicitations, are the most common way we experience moods in everyday life, but on occasion, we enter into a thematic mood, which remains stubbornly preoccupied with a particular thematic concern. Before turning to the question of what an adequate account of moods entails, it will be helpful to pause here to note that because moods, as I have defined them, are constituted by occurrent mental states, moods can be distinguished from purely “dispositional” constructs such as *concerns*, *cultural attitudes*, and the *traits* that define our temperament and personality. Unlike moods, such purely dispositional constructs endure even when they are not currently manifest in our experience. For example, even if Scrooge is in a *cheerful mood* on some occasion, he will continue to be an *irascible person*—that is, he will continue to have the trait of irascibility—because despite his cheerful mood, he remains disposed to

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⁵ Besides tracking moods and thematic moods, are there other kinds of moods as well? If so, then my accounts of tracking moods and thematic moods will not be sufficient to provide an account of moods in general. But what might count as another class of moods? As I said, in everyday life we sometimes speaking being “in the mood” to do something or “for” something, but I argue that these are dimensions of tracking moods. There are no other common ways that we use the term in everyday life, and I am aware of no theorist who proposes another class of moods. Thus, for the purposes of this dissertation, we will assume that tracking mood and thematic moods are the only kinds of moods we commonly experience in everyday life.
experience angry emotions and irritable moods much more easily and frequently than most people. Moods do dispose us to experience certain mental states, but unlike purely dispositional constructs, a mood is something that is currently manifest in our conscious experience for as long as the mood lasts.

Someone might object here that I am wrongfully excluding the possibility of a mood that is unfelt and inaccessible to our introspection. As we will see in Chapter Two, Jesse Prinz (1994) puts forward an account of moods that emphasizes the role of unconscious information-processing mechanisms, and with this in mind, someone might argue that at least some moods are entirely unfelt, unconscious, and inaccessible to introspection. This objection allows me to clarify two important points about the definition of moods I am proposing here. First, my goal is to describe the most central, defining features of moods as we normally experience them, and to do so in a way that largely conforms to the way we think about moods in everyday life, while also incorporating insights from the research traditions where the concept of mood plays a prominent role. From this perspective, an entirely unfelt and consciously inaccessible dispositional state is simply a different kind of affective state than the one I am interested in here. Moods are, chiefly, a kind of experience that manifests itself in our feelings, thoughts, perceptions, and motivations, in addition to our dispositions. We may not always be consciously aware *that* we are in a mood, and sometimes we become aware of our mood only when someone else points it out to us, or when something else happens to draw our attention to it. However, through reflection, we are usually able to discern the basic features of our present mood, and we do so by noticing how we are currently feeling, thinking, and so on.

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6 In a similar vein, LeDoux and Pine (2016) argue that fear and anxiety are subserved by two distinct neural systems, so that being exposed to certain stimuli can lead us to be aroused behaviorally without experiencing any felt state corresponding to fear or anxiety.
The second point to make here is that I am intending only to map the boundaries of the phenomenon, leaving entirely open any questions about what causes, explains, or accounts for moods. Prinz may be correct that unconscious information-processing mechanisms are responsible for triggering and maintaining our mood at the causal level, but this idea is irrelevant to the question that is at issue here. The question at issue here is *which phenomenon* this kind of causal explanation of moods is supposed to explain. On my view, causal explanations of moods are meant to explain the causal forces that generate a certain kind of *experience*—namely, a global and non-specifically directed emotional experience.

This brings us, then, to the question: If what I seek in this investigation is a satisfying account of how moods affect the content and structure of our experience, what, exactly, does it mean to give an “account” of this phenomenon? What are the criteria that we can use to determine whether a certain account has satisfactorily illuminated the way that moods affect the content and structure of our experience?

§1.2. Desiderata for an account

The question that guides this dissertation is: How do moods affect our experience? The kind of answer that this question calls for is an account of the phenomenon of moods that is “illuminating” rather than “explanatory”—that is, one that allows us to understand as clearly as possible how moods manifest themselves in our experience, rather than a scientific explanation of the causal factors that trigger and maintain this kind of experience. Thus, for example, this investigation does not seek to understand *why* we enter into certain moods at certain times, but it may discover interesting facts about how moods alter our *experience of why* we are responding
emotionally to things in certain ways. In my view, a satisfying account of the
phenomenon of moods—in this sense of an “account”—will have two components: a
descriptive component, in which we correctly identify the central features of the
experience, and an analytical component, in which we articulate a conceptual paradigm
that can illuminate how the various features of the experience fit together as part of a
single, unified phenomenon. Let us examine these two components of a satisfying
account of moods.

First, any satisfying account of moods should accurately identify and describe
the most important features of the way we experience moods. If an account of mood
does not describe the way we experience moods accurately, or if it ignores important
aspects of the phenomenon, then it will fail to be a satisfying account of the
phenomenon. We have already identified many of the central features of the way we
experience moods, although we have done so in fairly general terms. We have seen that
moods alter our feelings, motivations, cognitions, perceptions, dispositions, and pre-
intentional attunements, and that they do so in such a way as to make manifest our
sense of how we are faring as we respond to certain concerns—either concerns that
emanate from the way we are actively engaged with our environment, or thematic
concerns that persist despite appearing to be inappropriate to our current
circumstances. But much more can be said about each of these features in order to
describe the experience as clearly as possible. How, exactly, do moods alter the way we
think and reason? How, exactly, do moods affect the content and structure of our
perceptions? How, exactly, do moods affect our bodily feelings, motivational states, and
pre-intentional attunements? And stepping back, how, exactly, are tracking moods
related to thematic moods? These are the kinds of questions that various accounts must
answer in order to meet the first desideratum. As we will see in the following chapter, most accounts of moods do an excellent job of describing certain aspects of the experience, but they tend to do so at the expense of ignoring other aspects. For example, the cognitivist account focuses on the way that thematic moods alter our evaluative cognitions and judgments, and in doing so, this account reveal some fascinating aspects of moods that other accounts fail to appreciate. However, in emphasizing evaluative cognition, cognitivism fails to account for other important features of moods, such as the way that moods can alter our pre-intentional attunements, and so it falls short of offering a fully satisfying account of the phenomenon—or so I will argue.

The second major desideratum for an account of moods is that the account should articulate a conceptual paradigm or theoretical model that can help us understand how all of the features of the experience of moods fit together as a unified phenomenon. An ideally satisfying account of moods will go beyond simply pointing out that moods have features $a, b, c, d$, and so on. Instead, a satisfying account will identify some further feature that can help us to understand why moods manifest themselves in just those ways and not others. For example, imagine an “account” of the mood of boredom that offered nothing but a long list of detailed descriptions of various cases of boredom. Even if this list of descriptions were impeccably accurate—and indeed, even if it were totally thorough, encompassing all known instances—it would be completely unilluminating as an account of boredom. For one thing, this approach would give us no insight into how to identify the relevant similarities and differences between the cases. Moreover, it would give us no insight into why boredom manifests itself in just those ways and not in others.
To provide a truly illuminating account of moods, then, theorists might offer a metaphor that illustrates what they see as the essential feature of moods and clarifies the logic behind the various ways that moods manifest themselves in our experience. For example, the perceptualist account of moods argues that moods are like colored lenses that lead us to perceive the objects we encounter as having certain kinds of evaluative properties. On this view, moods alter our perceptual dispositions, and this is the fundamental feature of moods that can explain why moods manifest themselves in just the ways they do. Whether through constructing a metaphor (like perceptualism’s “colored lens” metaphor) or through some other means, the aim here is to identify the most basic feature of moods, and to do so in a way that enables us to see the structural simplicity behind the phenomenological complexity of our experience. If we can do this, we will be able to understand the phenomenon of moods in a much deeper way. We will discover something surprising but revealing, a pattern behind the various manifestations of moods. We will gain a deeper understanding of what moods are, such that they are global, non-specifically directed emotional experiences—that is, why moods involve a systematic alteration in our evaluative cognitions, evaluative perceptions, bodily feelings, motivational states, and pre-intentional attunements, and exactly what sort of “non-specifically directed” relationship moods have to the world.

It is possible, of course, that despite my best efforts in the following chapters, it will prove to be impossible to articulate an adequate account of the phenomenon. For example, it may be that the only unifying factor behind the various manifestations of moods is physiological rather than phenomenological in nature. In this case, we would be forced to conclude that what we think of as a mood is nothing more than a syndrome, a set of relatively disconnected symptoms. Imagine, for example, that there was a certain
physiological process that caused us to perceive *red* objects as being *green*, to feel a tickle in our left foot, and to think about ice cream. In this case, a search for a satisfying account of this “phenomenon” would prove to be fruitless, because we could do no more than simply describe the individual features of the experience as clearly as possible. We could never illuminate the underlying logic behind these various manifestations, because the unity of this imaginary syndrome is not to be found at the level of experience, but at the level of physiology. This, then, is the task before us—to provide some conceptual paradigm that can help us understand why we should not conclude that a mood is a mere syndrome, but is a unified phenomenon with a single, coherent experiential structure.

Now that we have a clearer understanding of what we are talking about when we speak about “moods,” and a stronger grasp of what is required for any account of the phenomenon to be satisfactory, let us take a look at why I find the phenomenological approach to analyzing affective experiences so promising, despite the fact that the phenomenological conception of “moods” does not actually tell us much about moods in their particularity.

§1.3. The promise of phenomenology

The phenomenological tradition offers a conception of moods that is quite different from the conceptions found in empirical psychology and mainstream Anglo-American philosophy. Heidegger’s work, in particular, is the central touchstone for most phenomenological discussions of affectivity, and indeed, I will draw a great deal from his work in my own account of moods. Heidegger’s primary goal was to understand the

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7 There are a few other important discussions of “mood” in the phenomenology literature—most notably,
structure of human sense-making in general, and as we will see, his work will help us to appreciate the way that moods function as a particular kind of *sense-making structure*. I will argue that moods function as a kind of “framework of interpretation” that makes things *intelligible* to us in certain ways.\(^8\)

The two central concepts in Heidegger’s analysis of affectivity are *Befindlichkeit* and *Stimmung*. *Befindlichkeit*—which might be literally translated as “so-finding-ness” (Haugeland 2000, p. 52)—refers to a general structural feature of human sense-making, namely, that we never start our sense-making activities “from scratch,” but, rather, we always “find” ourselves having been “thrown” into a world that is already meaningful.\(^9\) As Heidegger (1927/1962, p. 177/136-7) puts it, “*Existentially, [Befindlichkeit] implies a disclosive submission to the world, out of which we can encounter something that matters to us.*”

In other words, on Heidegger’s view, we always find ourselves situated in a context in which things are simply showing up to us as mattering in certain ways—without any obvious choice on our part about whether and how these things are showing up in our experience—and likewise, we find ourselves disposed to understand and respond to things in certain ways, according to how they show up as mattering to us.

*“Stimmung” is the ordinary German word for “mood,” but Heidegger uses the term in a technical way. For Heidegger, *Stimmung* is a particular mode of* *Befindlichkeit*—namely, in our *Stimmungen*, the general structure of “so-findingness”*

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\(^8\) Thus, the kind of “phenomenology” that is at issue here is not the same as the “phenomenology” that is discussed in certain debates in Anglo-American philosophy. In those debates, the term “phenomenology” is used to refer to the “raw qualitative feel” of an experience, or “what an experience is like” for an experiencing subject (Harman 1990, Crane 2003, Mendelovi 2014). This is not the focus of Heideggerian phenomenology. Heideggerian phenomenological analysis can indeed help us to understand “what it is like” to have a certain kind of experience, but it does so by helping us to understand *how things show up* and *make sense* to us when we are in that state, rather than by merely analyzing the raw qualitative feel of the experience.

\(^9\) For discussions of the various ways that Anglophone interpreters have translated *Befindlichkeit* and *Stimmung*, see Blattner 2006, p. 79, and Freeman 2014, fn. 7.
becomes manifest through our affective states and dispositions.\(^{10}\) Some examples of Stimmungen include such states as “being elevated” and “being depressed” (Heidegger 1925/1992, p. 255), “hope, joy, enthusiasm, gaiety,” as well as “satiety, sadness, melancholy, and desperation” (Heidegger 1927/1962, p. 345/295)—affective states and dispositions in which we find that things matter to us in a certain way, and find ourselves disposed to respond to the way those things matter.

Although “Stimmung” is often translated simply as “mood,” Heidegger’s analysis of affectivity is not actually focused on moods as we commonly think of them. That is, Heidegger’s work does not focus on a kind of affective phenomenon that is distinct from emotions, feelings, concerns, desires, traits of temperament, cultural attitudes, and other ways that our experience can be affectively structured and organized. Indeed, Heidegger rarely made any fine-grained distinctions between various kinds of affective phenomena, but instead tended to lump them all together into the category of Stimmung.\(^{11}\)

Heidegger’s focus was on the big-picture phenomenological insights afforded by the analysis of affectivity in general, and so he simply did not say much about the differences between the various kinds of affective states and dispositions we experience in everyday life. Heidegger (1927/1962, p. 178/138) acknowledges this oversight in *Being and Time*, saying, “The different modes of [Befindlichkeit] and the ways in which they are interconnected in their foundations cannot be interpreted within the problematic of the present investigation.” Following Heidegger’s example, phenomenologists typically use the term “mood” quite broadly to refer indiscriminately to all kinds of affective states and dispositions. This creates the misleading impression

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10 Heidegger (1927/1962, p. 137) states that sensation is another mode or “exponent” of Befindlichkeit, for example. For a discussion of Heidegger’s conception of Stimmung, see Withy (forthcoming).

11 One exception to this rule is found in Heidegger’s occasional discussions of “Grundbefindlichkeit” and “Grundstimmungen” (Held 1993, Stachler 2007).
that the Heideggerian literature has a great deal to say about moods, when in fact no theorist has yet attempted to apply the insights of Heidegger’s phenomenology to moods in their particularity.

Because Heidegger’s concept of *Stimmung* cannot be equated or reduced to our concept of mood, it is helpful to translate “*Stimmung*” as “attunement.” This translation avoids the misleading implication that Heidegger is talking specifically about moods, and it also has the advantage of emphasizing Heidegger’s important insight that affective attunements are constituted by a receptivity and sensitivity to certain meaningful aspects of the world, like a radio “tuned” to certain frequencies (Sherman 1999, p. 297). Indeed, a hallmark of Heidegger’s work is the idea that our affective attunements are conditions for the possibility of meaningful objects being *intelligible* to us and *present* in our experience.

To illustrate this idea, consider Heidegger’s (1927/1962, p. 176/137) discussion of a fearful attunement in *Being and Time*. Heidegger argues that if we were not already attuned to the concern for our security—for example, if we had a psychiatric condition in which we could not feel fear—we could never “discover” or make sense of something as being threatening to us. Even if we were in a locked room with a hungry tiger, a threat could never be present as such in our experience. Other people observing the situation might see us as being threatened, but threats would not show up in our experiential “world,” since being threatened would not even be intelligible to us. In that case, we could be neither afraid nor brave.

The fact that this sort of thing can matter to it is grounded in one’s attunement; and as an attunement it has already disclosed the world—as something by which it can be threatened, for instance. Only something which is in the attunement of fearing (or fearlessness) can discover that what is environmentally ready-to-hand is threatening (Heidegger 1927/1962, p. 176/137, translation modified).
Thus, on Heidegger’s view, our affective attunements not only dispose us to respond to the meaningful objects we encounter in certain ways, they also enable those meaningful objects to be present in our experience in the first place.\textsuperscript{12}

Heidegger is thus particularly interested in the way that our affective attunements function at what Ratcliffe (2010) calls a “pre-intentional” level. In contrast to ordinary mental states that are directed toward particular intentional objects, affective attunements play a special role in our lives, because our affective attunements have already determined what objects are available for us to respond to, shaping in advance the world in which we find ourselves situated at any given moment (Ratcliffe 2008, p. 49). Thus, affective attunements are not merely \textit{psychological}, but also \textit{existential} in nature—not mere \textit{mental states} but \textit{structural conditions} that are presupposed by any mental state.

To clarify this distinction, consider again Heidegger’s example of a fearful attunement. This example illustrates the idea that our “pre-intentional” attunement to the concern for our safety enables us to experience intentional states directed toward particular threats as such. Thus, in an encounter with a given threat, such as a hungry tiger, we may be afraid, or we may be resolute and “fearless,” but either mental state

\textsuperscript{12}Heidegger (1927/1962, p. 375/327, 293/249, 277/234) says repeatedly that, on his view, understanding (\textit{Verstehen}) and discourse (\textit{Rede}) are “equivital” with attunement (\textit{Befindlichkeit})—each being an inseparable aspect of care (\textit{Sorge}). (A fourth aspect of care is fallenness (\textit{Verfallenheit}).) Thus, for Heidegger, while our affective attunements enable us to make sense of the world as mattering in certain ways, the reverse is also true: making sense of the world as mattering in certain ways enables and explains our affective experiences. Nonetheless, Heidegger emphasizes the important role of affective attunement in disclosing the world—even suggesting at one point that attunement is responsible for the “primary discovery of the world” (177/136-7). This emphasis is meant to correct what he sees as the traditional view of affectivity, according to which affective experiences are merely bodily feelings that are sometimes “added to” essentially affectless thoughts or perceptions. For example, Heidegger (1992, p. 286-7) argues that fear “is not at first an awareness of an impending evil to which a dose of dread would then be added. Rather, fearing is precisely the mode of being in which something threatening is uniquely disclosed and can be encountered in concern in being approached by the world.” For expositions of Heidegger’s account of affective attunement, see Blattner (2006, Ch. 8), Elpidorou & Freeman (2015a, 2015b), Freeman (2014, 2015), Guignon (2000, 2009), Mulhall (1996, 2013, Ch. 4), Ratcliffe (2013), Slaby (2015), Wrathall (2005, Ch. 3) and Withy (2013, 2014, 2015).
presupposes a fearful attunement. That is, even the state of resolute fearlessness is made possible by virtue of the pre-intentional disclosure of the possibility of being threatened. This sort of resolute fearlessness is thus quite different than the mere lack of fear that would be exhibited by a person who is unable to feel fear and cannot really make sense of what it means to be threatened. These cases might be similar at the level of the content of experience—that is, in both cases there is no experience of fear—but they differ dramatically at the level of the structure of experience, because a person with a fearful attunement will always be able to make sense of the things she encounters in terms of their relevance to her concern for safety and security, while that entire class of meanings is simply unavailable to a person without a fearful attunement.  

More generally, then, we can say that pre-intentional attunements are best understood as alterations not merely in the content but in the structure of our experience. Pre-intentional attunements may manifest in our experience in a whole range of ways—as, for example, a fearful attunement can manifest in fear or fearlessness—but in any case, a pre-intentional attunement will make the world intelligible to us in a certain way, and thus will make a whole class of meanings available to us, about which we can then form any number of attitudes.

With this idea in mind, we can see that although Heidegger’s analysis of “mood” (Stimmung) is not actually about moods—at least not specifically—his work can help to illuminate an important aspect of the phenomenon that is missed by the other conceptions of mood discussed above. As I will argue in more detail in the following

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13 Blattner (2006, p. 37) makes a similar point in response to Haugeland’s (1979) well-known quip about artificial intelligence, “The problem with artificial intelligence is that computers don’t give a damn.” Blattner notes that from a Heideggerian perspective, it would be more accurate to say, “the problem with artificial intelligence is that computers neither do nor don’t give a damn. Our lives matter to us, they concern us, even when they matter by being negligible or irrelevant, whereas non-human things have no concern with anything at all.”
chapters, Heidegger’s work can help us to understand the way that moods shape the pre-intentional landscape in which we find ourselves, altering *which* objects are present in our experiential world, and *how* they are present to us.

But although Heidegger’s analysis of affectivity can provide crucial insights into the nature of moods, we cannot simply apply his analysis of *Stimmungen* to moods and be done with it. Because Heidegger did not investigate the differences between various kinds of affective attunements, he did not develop the conceptual tools that are necessary to understand the unique features that distinguish moods from other kinds of affective states. Heidegger’s work focuses on the *generative* and *organizing* role played by our attunements—for example, the way our attunements determine what will show up in our experiential world and how they will be intelligible to us—and for this reason, his analysis is particularly well suited to explaining why our experience tends to be relatively *consistent* and *coherent* with our affective states. By the same token, however, Heidegger’s analysis does not shed much light on experiences of emotional *dissonance* and *disconnection*. And as we will see, our experience of moods is often marked by dissonance and disconnection, such that any adequate account of moods must be able to explain these features of the phenomenon. When we are in an irritable mood, for example, we may find that our mood is affecting us in ways that are dissonant with the fact that we deeply *value* being a kind person and strongly *desire* to have a pleasant evening. We may also find our irritable mood gives rise to experiences of emotional disconnection, as when we perceive a person’s actions as being kindhearted and judge that we should appreciate their efforts, but we find that, in our irritable mood, we are unaffected by this kindness and remain emotionally numb to our evaluative perceptions.
and judgments. For this reason, new conceptual tools are needed to account for moods in their particularity—tools that I will develop in the following chapters.

Another limitation of Heidegger’s analysis is that in emphasizing our passivity with regard to our affective attunements, Heidegger loses sight of the extent to which our relationship with our moods is mediated by what Sherman (1999) calls “emotional agency.” As we have seen, Heidegger argues that we “find” ourselves always already “thrown” into an affectively structured context, and that because our attunements play such a foundational role in generate our experiential world, we can never get “behind” them in order to choose from an objective or mood-neutral position how we are attuned. This analysis is particularly compelling when it is applied to the kinds of affective attunements that constitute our basic sense of reality. But when we think about everyday moods like irritability and cheerfulness, we can see that we are not nearly so passive in our relationship with these sorts of attunements. Instead, we commonly employ a wide variety of strategies in order to press into our moods, to nurture, intensify, and facilitate them, or else to resist, diminish, and contain them. We will return to this issue in the Conclusion.

Now that we have reviewed some of the strengths and weakness of the three most prominent conceptions of mood in the literature, articulated the conception of moods that we will use in this investigation, and clarified the criteria by which we will evaluate the adequacy of any account of moods, let us begin the search for an illuminating account of this phenomenon.
Chapter Two:  
The Search for an Adequate Account of Moods

This dissertation seeks a satisfying account of the phenomenon of moods—that is, a satisfying account of how moods affect the content and structure of our experience. In the previous chapter, I defined moods as a kind of global and non-specifically directed emotional experience, and I argued that a person’s mood is typically what we are asking about when we ask, “How are you doing?” or “How’s it going?” A mood, in other words, is a general sense of subjective wellbeing with respect to our ongoing efforts to navigate the solicitations of our environment. I argued that any adequate account of the phenomenon of moods must satisfy two criteria: First, the account must accurately and thoroughly describe the most important ways that moods manifest themselves in our experience, and second, the account must articulate a conceptual paradigm that clarifies how all of these various features of the experience fit together as part of a single phenomenon, thereby illuminating the logic that governs how moods manifest themselves in our experience. There are two basic kinds of moods that we commonly experience in everyday life—tracking moods, which are flexibly responsive to a variety of concerns, and thematic moods, which are stubbornly preoccupied with a particular kind of concern. As such, we can expect that a fully adequate account of the phenomenon of moods will describe and analyze both of these kinds of moods in an accurate and illuminating way and will clarify how, exactly, these two kinds of moods are related.

In this chapter, I examine four leading theories of emotions and moods in the mainstream Anglo-American philosophical literature—non-cognitivism, perceptualism, cognitivism, and attitudinalism—in order to critically assess their prospects for
providing an adequate account of the phenomenon of moods. I argue that while each of these theories contains a number of important insights into how moods affect our experience, each theory fails to satisfy the criteria for an adequate account of the phenomenon. In my investigation of non-cognitivism, perceptualism, and cognitivism, I find significant counterexamples that indicate that the theory has failed to accurately describe the logic governing how moods manifest themselves in our experience. In my investigation of attitudinalism, I find that the theory fails to provide an illuminating analysis of the sort of “attitudes” that drive our moods. The fundamental reason these theories err, in my view, is that they ignore the existential dimension of moods, overlooking the ways that moods alter our pre-intentional attunements. In particular, I argue that these theories presuppose, and so cannot account for, the ways that moods alter our lived experience of the temporal structure of the present moment, the emotional accessibility of the objects we encounter, and the normative grip of the considerations we entertain. As we will see, the tradition of phenomenology offers a wealth of conceptual resources that can help us to understand these three ways that moods alter our experience of the presence of what is present. Thus, the process of clarifying where these various accounts go wrong promises to point the way toward a truly illuminating, phenomenological account of how moods affect our experience.

§2.1. Non-cognitivism and the experience of time

Non-cognitivist accounts of moods hold that moods manifest themselves in our experience as they do because moods are “embodied perceptual representations” of the current trends in our lives. Jesse Prinz offers the most prominent non-cognitivist theory of moods in the philosophical literature. As Prinz (2004a, p. 4–6) explains, the non-
cognitivist approach to the analysis of emotions and moods is inspired by William James’ (1884, p. 189f) famous claim that emotions are perceptions of bodily changes:

> Common sense says, we lose our fortune, are sorry and weep; we meet a bear, are frightened and run; we are insulted by a rival, are angry and strike...the more rational statement is that we feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble.

Although James may have articulated his idea in an overly provocative way, Prinz sees great insight in James’ approach. James’ essential insight, for Prinz, is that our affective responses are not driven by our conscious and rational evaluations of the meaning of the objects we encounter, but by sub-personal mechanisms that have evolved to facilitate our ability to react to important events swiftly, instinctually, and in ways that tend to ensure our survival. Building on James’ evolutionary-biological approach to the analysis of emotions, Prinz argues that the things we experience when we experience a particular mood or emotion—the distinctive changes in our bodily feelings, thoughts, perceptions, and motivational states—are best understood as manifestations of an “affect program” that has been “designed” by evolution to run whenever our brains detect certain cues in the environment, in order to help us respond in adaptive ways to the things we encounter. Thus, when James says that “we are afraid because we tremble,” Prinz takes him to mean that we experience fear and we tremble *for the same reason*, and that reason is basically physiological rather than cognitive in nature—it has to do with how our brains and bodies respond to certain stimuli, rather than how we consciously and rationally think about the things we encounter. In other words, the changes in our feelings, thoughts, perceptions, and motivations that are associated with the experience of fear are part of the same affect program that causes us to tremble—namely, the affect program that evolved to help humans respond to immanent danger by triggering a wide
variety of physiological and cognitive processes whenever they encounter certain kinds of environmental conditions associated with such danger.

Prinz sums up the non-cognitivist view by saying that moods and emotions are essentially “gut reactions”—automatic and often unconscious responses of the body and brain to cues in the environment that may be significant to our concerns. Although we might assume that, in contrast to our ordinary *thoughts about* and *perceptions of* the things we encounter, our gut reactions have no intrinsic connection to the external world, this is not the case. According to the non-cognitivist account, our gut reactions are a form of “embodied appraisal” (Prinz 2004) or “unconscious perception” (Prinz 2015)—that is, that they *represent* things in the world, and so are genuinely intentional mental states. To explain how sub-personal bodily processes can represent a state of affairs—and thus how a set of automatic and unconscious reactions in our brain and body can be a form of perceptual representation—Prinz (2004b) points to the account of representation offered by Fred Dretske (1988). Dretske argues that a mental state represents *danger*, for example, if (a) it reliably occurs in the presence of danger, and (b) it evolved for that purpose. Analogously, the tone of a smoke alarm can be said to represent the presence of smoke, because it reliably occurs in the presence of smoke, and it was designed to do just that. In a similar way, the bodily feeling of pain can be said to represent damage to the area that is in pain—thus functioning as a kind of “damage alarm”—because it reliably occurs in this circumstance, and it was “designed” by evolution to do just that. Likewise, then, when we are afraid, an elaborate set of sub-personal mechanisms become activated, causing us to experience a variety of bodily feelings, such as tightness in the chest, butterflies in the stomach, and a racing heart. On Prinz’s view, these are not merely primitive feelings that happen to *accompany* conscious representations of danger;
rather, these bodily feelings are themselves representational in nature, because they are part of a set of responses in the brain and body that occur reliably in circumstances in which we face danger, and that evolved to do so. As Prinz (2004a, p. 245) puts it, “The heart pounds with significance”—that is, our pounding heart is a constitutive element of our body’s perceptual representation of danger in the environment. Our fear is not always appropriate, of course; sometimes our body misperceives a certain object as being dangerous when it is not, just as a smoke detector might occasionally sound the alarm at inappropriate times. However, because the bodily processes associated with fear are the output of a “danger-detecting mechanism” that is sufficiently reliable, these processes can be said to represent danger.

Thus, in contrast to those who argue that moods are mere configurations of core affect, Prinz (2004a, p. 184) argues that the difference between emotions and moods “should be captured by what they represent, not whether they represent.” He argues that emotions represent particular and short-lasting changes in organism-environment relations, while moods represent pervasive and long-lasting changes. A mood, in other words, is an embodied representation of a long-term change in an organism’s relationship with its environment.

Emotions refer to specific things or situations. Moods refer to things or situations more generally… Emotions respond to isolated objects and events, whereas moods respond to one’s general standing in the world. The difference is subtle but significant. Sadness represents a particular loss, while depression represents a losing battle. Fear represents a specific danger, whereas an anxious mood represents general peril. Anger represents a demeaning offense, while irritability represents the general offensiveness of the world.

The distinction can be easy to miss in any given case, because emotions and moods can be directed toward the same object. For example, we might experience both the emotion

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14 For more on the representational structure of bodily feelings, see Proust 2014, 2015 and Pliushch 2014.
of sadness and the mood of depression in response to the loss of a job. But whereas the emotion of sadness represents the short-term impacts of this loss, the mood of depression represents the long-term impacts of this event.

To support the claim that the bodily feelings associated with moods evolved in order to occur reliably in the presence of long-term changes in organism-environment relations, Prinz (2004a, p. 187) suggests that the capacity to experience moods is evolutionarily adaptive.

A creature with emotions, but no moods would fail to pick up on general trends. It would be no more apprehensive after a tenth threat than after a first threat in the environment. A creature with moods, but no emotions, would not experience fear when it faced an immediate physical threat, but it might experience an apprehensive mood after a series of threats in its environment.

As embodied representation of long-term trends, moods help to safeguard us against being misled by short-term changes that might obscure larger patterns in our relationship with our environment. For example, if our environment has recently become more risky, a mood of anxiety may give rise to a “general wariness” and a more cautious disposition. In this state, we may not be as emotionally responsive to short-term pleasures, and this muted response may help to prevent us from being seduced into complacency regarding the increased riskiness of the environment. In this way, moods help to facilitate long-term planning. “Where emotions may cause us to reprioritize immediate goals,” Prinz (2004a, p. 187) says, “moods may cause us to reprioritize long-term goals.” In an anxious mood, for example, youthful plans to pursue certain high-risk projects may not seem as appealing or important as they once did.

Prinz’s theory makes some important claims and predictions about how moods affect our experience, and these claims about the phenomenon of moods are generally insightful, as far they go. Prinz’s view suggests that a mood is a gut reaction to the
long-term trends in our lives, and while we may not always be consciously aware of the
stimuli that are being represented by the body as a change in the long-term trends in
our lives, thus triggering the gut reaction, it is likely that we will be able to see the
effects of this gut reaction in our bodily feelings, motivational states, thoughts, and
perceptions, which are available to conscious introspection. For example, a change in
our mood might alter how we perceive the likelihood of certain events happening in the
future, and likewise, it might lead us to “rationalize” these perceptions by seeking out
supporting evidence, while explaining away counter-evidence. If losing our job has put
us into a depressed mood, for instance, we might perceive our chances of finding
another job as being slim at best, and we might find plenty of evidence to support that
assessment. If something happens to put us into a cheerful mood again, however, these
perceptions and thought processes regarding our future prospects of finding
employment may be completely reversed. This observation is indirectly supported by
empirical research on how optimism, pessimism, and likelihood judgments are affected
by positive and negative affect and by mood-related psychiatric conditions such as major
depression and anxiety disorders (Johnson & Tversky 1983, Mayer & Bremer 1985,
Alloy & Ahrens 1987, Lewis et al. 1995, Zelenski & Larsen 2002). Likewise, changes in
our mood may alter the way we think about our long-term plans and the way that we
are motivated to act in light of those changes, an idea that is indirectly supported by
research on the effects of positive and negative affect on planning and “executive
function” (Mayer 1986, Phillips et al. 2002).

Prinz’s account also helps us to understand why changes in our mood often lead
us to perceive the value and importance of short-term changes in our environment
differently from how we otherwise would. If we are in a depressed mood after losing our
job, for example, we may be unmoved by events that are pleasant but which our body represents as being insufficient to change the long-term trends in our lives. Thus, as Lazarus (1991, p. 266) notes, “When good things happen to someone whose general mood is dysphoric, they may remain unappreciated; and when bad things happen to someone whose general mood is euphoric, they may fail to produce the expected distress.” Furthermore, Prinz’s account helps us to understand how moods might affect the way we remember the past. When we are in an anxious mood, for instance, we may find that memories of past dangers are more salient and easily accessible than they otherwise would be, and this alteration in the way we remember the past might help to facilitate the kind of general wariness that is appropriate for the long-term trends that we seem to be currently facing. This idea finds support in a wealth of research on “mood-congruent recall” showing that positive and negative affect and mood-related psychiatric conditions can have significant effects on our memory in just this way (Isen et al. 1978; Bower, 1981; Blaney 1986, Perrig & Perrig 1988, Singer & Solovey 1988, Matt et al. 1992, Joorman & Siemer 2004, Russo et al. 2006).

Although Prinz’s account of the phenomenon of moods offers some important insights, it ultimately fails to provide an illuminating account of the phenomenon. For one thing, it ignores the fact that many moods exclusively affect our relationship to short-term trends, without significantly altering the way we perceive or think about anything beyond the immediate past, present, and future. For example, when we are engaged in an activity, we often become absorbed in that activity in such a way that our mood comes to reflect our sense of how well we are performing in that particular context (Hsee et al. 1991a, 1991b, 1994). For instance, imagine that José is struggling to assemble a small bookshelf, and as he becomes annoyed about the faulty design of the
bookshelf and the lack of clarity in the instructions, he finds himself in an irritable mood. Although he has become temporarily absorbed in the task at hand, he does not really care very much about the bookshelf, and soon his mood will change as he becomes engaged in a different activity. In this case, José’s irritable mood may be entirely confined to the activity of assembling the bookshelf, with no impact on his sense of the long-term trends in his life. His struggle does not alter his perception or judgment of whether he will be able to accomplish other, more important things in his life, for example, nor does it alter his general sense of whether people can be trusted. Rather, his irritable mood simply reflects his sense that things are not going well for him at the moment, in this short-term context. Many of the moods we experience in everyday life are confined to these sort of short-term concerns that revolve around a particular activity, particularly the class of moods that I have called “tracking moods.”

A more promising way to understand tracking moods is found in an alternative non-cognitivist account of moods that has recently emerged in the psychological literature. According to Eran Eldar and his colleagues (2016), moods are best understood as representations of momentum, that is, embodied perceptual representations of the trajectory of short-term changes our environment. On this view, it is precisely because moods track short-term trends that they are evolutionarily adaptive, because this short-term responsiveness allows us to calibrate our feelings, perception, thoughts, and motivational states to the moment-by-moment changes in our environment. Imagine, for example, that a person in an ancient hunter-gatherer society is exploring a wooded area in search of food. If this person were suddenly to find a small bush full of ripe berries, her mood would likely improve. This change in mood would manifest itself

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15 An objector might argue that José’s mental state here is better described as an emotion, rather than a mood, because it is directed toward the building activity. I will return to this example and address this objection in detail in the following chapter.
in her experience as a more optimistic outlook on the possibility of finding more food in the immediate future and an increased motivation to continue exploring. In this way, her mood gives rise to the kind of cheerful mental states that maximize her chances of securing all of the resources that are available to her. If she then finds another berry bush that is even larger than the last, and then discovers an entire tree full of fresh fruit, this trajectory of outcomes exceeding her expectations would lead her to become even more cheerful and even more motivated to continue exploring. But as her optimism grows in proportion with her cheerfulness, so does the likelihood of encountering outcomes that are less pleasant than expected. As she encounters more disappointments relative to her now-inflated expectations, her mood becomes less and less cheerful, and she becomes increasingly pessimistic about the prospects of finding more food in the immediate future and less motivated to explore the local environment. This “negative” change in her mood is also adaptive, insofar as finding less and less food in the area is a good indication that there is not much food remaining there to be found, and so pessimism is likely to be appropriate. In this way, moods “facilitate efficient learning by accounting for statistical dependencies in the availability of rewards that are prevalent in nature” (Eldar et al. 2016, p. 15). In other words, as embodied representations of short-term trends, our moods help us to adapt in real time to our ever-changing environmental conditions.

The theory of moods offered by Eldar and his colleagues insightfully describes the way moods manifest themselves in our experience in at least some cases, particularly in cases of tracking moods, such as the irritable mood that arises when José’s forward momentum in the task of assembling the bookshelf is hindered. As this account would predict, José’s mood might affect his bodily feelings and motivational states, leading him
to feel agitated and discouraged, as well as his perceptions and judgments regarding the short-term trajectory of events, perhaps leading him to conclude, “This is never going to work!” These experiences would make sense as effects of an embodied representation of his diminished momentum toward his goal. But although this account offers some insights into the phenomenon of tracking moods, it fails to provide an adequate account of the phenomenon of moods as a whole. Most obviously, it ignores the fact that, as Prinz points out, many moods are insensitive to short-term trends but instead are focused exclusively on long-term trends. If José had been in a tranquil mood, for example, he may have been unmoved by the difficulties he was having with the bookshelf, as he remained secure in his sense that, in the long term, the most important things in his life will be taken care of.

These considerations raise significant worries about the validity of the claim that moods represent current trends of any kind. Recall the idea that the tone of a smoke alarm can be said to be a representation of the presence of smoke because the alarm (a) reliably sounds in the presence of smoke, and (b) it was designed to do so. The non-cognitivist accounts we have examined claim that moods are like “current-trend detectors” because they (a) reliably occur in the presence of certain short-term or long-term trends, and (b) they were “designed” by evolution to do so. However, we have already seen some reasons to believe that our moods are so unpredictable, relative to our circumstances, that they cannot be said to occur “reliably” in appropriate conditions. As Prinz shows, in some cases, moods track long-term trends, and to this extent, they do not occur reliably in response to what would seem to be appropriate short-term trends. But as Eldar et al. show, in other cases, moods track short-term trends, and to this extent, they do not occur reliably in response to what would seem to be appropriate
long-term trends. Thus, ironically, the insights of Prinz and Eldar et al., considered together, suggest that both accounts are conceptually misguided.

In fact, however, there is a much deeper problem that faces both of these non-cognitivist accounts. To say that we “perceptually represent” something implies that we are relating ourselves to something that exists independently of our relating to it, such that the representation can be either accurate or inaccurate. For example, smoke exists independently of whether any alarm detects it, and so if an alarm reliably sounds when smoke is present, then there is a meaningful sense in which the alarm can be said to “detect” and “represent” the presence of smoke. In contrast, imagine a “shmoke detector” that is designed to detect “shmoke”—except that what constitutes shmoke is determined by whatever is present when the shmoke detector sounds. Because what is being “detected” in this case does not exist independently of the process of detecting it, there is no meaningful sense in which the “representation” of shmoke can be said to be accurate or inaccurate, reliable or unreliable. In this case, then, the concept of representation is inherently unsuitable for describing the relationship between the sound of the detector and what this sound supposedly “represents.” In a similar way, it is misleading and wrongheaded for non-cognitivists to claim that moods function as “current-trend detectors.” As we will see, the current trends in our lives are nothing more than whatever it is that, in our present mood, we experience as the general course of events. If it is true that “current trends” do not exist independently of the way that our moods establish the temporal structure of our experience, then it is not merely the case that moods are unreliable in how they represent those trends; in fact, the concept of representation is inherently unsuitable for describing the relationship between moods and the trends in our lives.
To better understand how moods alter our experience of time, then, we can turn to Husserl's (1966) phenomenology of “internal time consciousness.” Husserl notes that from an external, scientific perspective, the “present moment” can be thought of as an infinitesimally small “knife edge” that separates the past from the future on the “arrow of time” (Parnas & Zahavi 2002, p. 148). But, Husserl argues, this is not at all how we experience the present moment. We never encounter the present moment in isolation, but always within a broader temporal context. Indeed, the present moment is present to us only insofar as it stands out against a temporal “horizon” that extends into the future and past. Thus, the way we experience the particular qualities of what is present is always already structured by our implicit, background grasp of how what is present is related to the past and future. As Kant (1781/1998) showed, even to experience something as an object involves a background understanding that the object “exhibits regularity through time,” and will not “pop in and out of existence” (Blattner 2006, p. 23). For Husserl, then, the basic unit of experienced time is not a knife-edge present, but a temporal field that contains all three temporal modes—present, past, and future.

Husserl (1966, §3ff) argues that because our experience of the present moment is always already structured by a background understanding of how the present is related to the past and future, conscious memory and conscious expectation are not the only ways that we relate to the past and future. When we consciously remember something, we turn our attention to an object (a memory) that is experienced as past. But even when we are not explicitly thinking about the past in this way, the past is “present” in the present moment, in the sense that past experiences are implicitly structuring our experience of the present. Likewise, our expectations of the future implicitly structure our experience of the present moment even when we are not consciously thinking about the future, that
is, attending to an object (a possibility) that is experienced as futural. In order to offer a more faithful description of our experience, then, Husserl develops the concepts retention and protention. “Retention” is a way of relating to past experience that is distinct from memory: when a past moment is “retained” (rather than remembered), we attend to the present, but we experience the significance of what is present differently because of the way it relates to what happened in the past. Likewise, “protention” does not involve explicitly thinking about the future but, rather, experiencing the significance of the present moment as being implicitly structured by what we expect will likely happen.

With these Husserlian concepts in hand, we can describe the relationship between our moods and our experience of time more precisely. A change in our mood will affect our experience of “current trends” by altering the way we retain the past and protend the future in our experience of the present moment. When we compare our experience of the same circumstances when we are in different moods, we can see that each mood will lead us to experience the significance of the present moment quite differently, as we experience the things we are encountering “in terms of” different events and possibilities in the past and future. In a depressed mood, for example, our sense of “how things are going at the present moment” may be defined by the fact that we lost our job several weeks ago and may face some difficult financial circumstances in the next few weeks if we cannot find another job. But in the same circumstances, a cheerful mood may generate a very different sense of current trends. For example, in a cheerful mood we may retain in our experience of the present moment only the events of the past few minutes, in which we have been eating a particularly tasty sandwich, and we may likewise protend only the pleasant prospect of enjoying dessert in the next few minutes. Thus, in this cheerful mood, we might say, “Yes, I have been in a bit of rough
patch these last few weeks, but it seems like things are now starting to look up!” This cheerful view of what constitutes “current trends” would seem ridiculously shortsighted to us if we were in a depressed mood; in a depressed mood, we might say, “Yes, this sandwich is tasty, but it does little to alter the basic trajectory of events in my life right now.” Alternatively, a cheerful mood might lead us to experience an expanded sense of the present moment. In this state, we may feel that our depression had made us lose our perspective by focusing too narrowly on a few difficult weeks, failing to take into consideration some important, positive events in the more distant past, such as graduating from college and getting married: “Yes, I lost my job and may face some challenges ahead, but I have a degree and a wonderful partner, and so I’m doing really well, all things considered.” In a depressed mood, however, we might acknowledge that those past events were important and positive, but we may simply have the sense that they are part of the past and do not define how things are going at the present time. Thus, by altering how past events are retained and how future events are protended, our mood establishes the temporal context that determines the significance of what we are experiencing in the present moment.

These considerations show that there is no mood-neutral way to determine the nature of the “current trends” in our lives. The significance of any trend is constituted by the significance of the individual events that make up the trend—a “negative” trend, for example, is constituted by a string of “negative” events. But as we have just seen, the significance of any particular event—eating a tasty sandwich, losing our job, and so on—is determined from the perspective of a holistic interpretation of how things in general are going, all things considered, and this holistic interpretation is dramatically altered by our mood.
Husserl (1966, §3) offers a helpful analogy to illustrate this idea. Examining the way we experience a melody, Husserl points out that when we are listening to a melody, we hear each note differently as a result of the notes that came before and those that we expect will come after. This interpretive process happens implicitly and automatically, without necessarily involving any explicit thought about what we heard in the past or any explicit prediction of what we will hear in the future. For example, compare the sound of a note played in isolation to the sound of the “same” note embedded within a melody, as depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Comparing a B note in isolation to a B note in a C major scale

In (I), on the left side of the box, we see the note B in isolation, whereas in (II), on the right side, we see the same note as part of a melody in which B functions as the “leading tone,” that is, the note in a scale that precedes the “tonic” that completes the scale. When we hear a B note in isolation, our experience of this note is remarkably different than when we hear the B note in the context of a scale in which the note functions as a leading tone. This is because we hear leading tones as being full of tension and suspense, as though the note were literally “leading” us toward the tonic, which provides a satisfactory resolution and relief from this tension. Thus, we can see that as we listen to the notes of a scale played one by one, we experience each note “in terms of”
the notes that preceded it and those that we implicitly anticipate will follow. As a result, each note gains rich qualitative properties that cannot be explained by the mere “addition” of the properties of each individual note, played in isolation. Indeed, any note played in isolation could never provide the sense of tension or relief that we experience when hearing those notes in the context of a melody. The quality of tension that we experience is not located “in” the B note, because the “same” note would be experienced very differently in a different key. Thus, the musical properties of the individual notes in a melody are generated by the dynamic relationships that unfold within our temporally structured experience of the melody.

As with melodies, so, too, with moods: Just as the experience of melody cannot be explained by simply “adding together” the experience of each note in isolation, the significance of a set of events cannot be determined by simply “adding together” the significance of each particular event in the set, considered in isolation. There is no mood-neutral way to determine the current trends in our lives, then, because the significance of any of the individual events in such a trend is determined by its temporal context, and this temporal context is established by our mood. This is why our moods are often remarkably unresponsive to events that would, from another perspective, seem to constitute reasons to feel differently than we currently do. In a depressed mood, for example, we may dismiss the pleasantness of our current circumstances and even shrug off a recent string of excellent luck, experiencing all of this as being an ultimately inconsequential deviation from a larger trajectory of events headed toward failure and meaninglessness. When we are in a cheerful mood, on the other hand, our cheerfulness may be remarkably resilient in the face of misfortunes, as we carry with us the sense that, all things considered, these misfortunes are minor aberrations in the larger pattern
of improving life circumstances. Just as, in music, the same note will sound quite
different in the context of a different key, the same circumstances will be experienced
differently in the “key of depression” than in the “key of cheerfulness.”

Thus, the non-cognitivist account of moods gets the order of explanation
backwards. The non-cognitivist account holds that (objectively existing) current trends
trigger our moods, which are embodied perceptual representations of those trends. In
fact, however, it is our moods that first establish what we experience as the current
trends in our lives by organizing our experience within a temporal structure in which
certain past events and future possibilities implicitly structure the significance of what
we are currently encountering. Indeed, it is because our moods organize our experience
within this sort of temporal context that we are able to respond emotionally to events in
the ways described by the non-cognitivists. For example, when we are in a depressed
mood, our mood establishes a temporal context in which events seem to be headed
toward failure and meaninglessness, and this enables our body and brain to carry out
the automatic and unconscious processes involved in interpreting and responding to the
significance of the things we encounter within this depressing temporal context. In sum,
then, the non-cognitivist accounts of moods discussed in this section are inadequate to
illuminate the logic that governs the way that moods manifest themselves in our
experience, because these account presuppose, and so cannot account for, the way that
moods alter our experience of time.
§2.2. Perceptualism and the experience of emotional accessibility

One of the most prominent theories of emotions and moods in mainstream Anglo-American philosophy is known as “perceptualism.” On this view, moods dispose us to perceive the objects we encounter as having certain evaluative properties and not others. For example, when we are in an anxious mood, we become disposed to see things as being threatening, while in a cheerful mood, we become disposed to see things as being pleasant. Likewise, moods dispose us not to perceive evaluative properties that do not fit our mood. For example, when we are in an anxious mood we tend to overlook any reassuring qualities in the things we encounter, just as when in a cheerful mood we might fail to perceive the unpleasant qualities of the things around us. Some perceptualists thus use the metaphor of “colored lenses” to describe the function of moods: Entering a mood is said to be like putting on a pair of “tinted spectacles,” altering the way we perceive the objects we encounter. The perceptualist account holds that this change in our perceptual dispositions explains why moods manifest themselves in our experience in the ways they do.

While this account offers some important insights, I will argue that there are many cases in which moods do not function like colored lenses. In these cases, we continue to be able to perceive evaluative properties that do not fit our mood, but we find that we simply do not respond to our evaluative perceptions as we normally would. In a depressed mood, for example, we might see quite clearly that the things around us are good and worthwhile, but remain emotionally numb to them nonetheless. In a cheerful mood, on the other hand, we may perceive threats and offenses, but do so

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without feeling the fear and anger that would normally accompany those perceptions. Such cases of “seeing but not feeling” are difficult to understand from within the perceptualist paradigm. These cases show that the perceptualist theory, like the non-cognitivist theories discussed previously, gets the order of explanation backwards. Evaluative perceptions do not drive our moods; rather, our mood functions as an *enabling condition* that allows our evaluative perceptions to generate an emotional response. If we are not in the right mood, we will remain emotionally unresponsive to an evaluative perception that would otherwise elicit a strong reaction. As we will see, a closer examination of where perceptualism goes wrong reveals that the way moods affect our perceptions is itself a manifestation of the way that moods alter what I call the “emotional accessibility” of the objects we encounter. Thus, perceptualism offers an inadequate analysis of the phenomenon of moods, because it presupposes, and so is unable to account for, the way that moods alter the emotional accessibility of the objects we perceive.

The perceptualist theory of moods is grounded on the view that all emotional responses are generated by *construals* of a certain kind. A construal is a kind of aspect-perception that is essentially interpretive in nature. Construing is sometimes described as “seeing-as,” in the sense that it involves seeing X as Y. In many cases, construals are “sub-doxastic” states that do not rise to the level of a full-fledged propositional judgment—not genuine *beliefs*, but *suspicions, imaginings,* or *wonderings,* for example.

Brady (2009, p. 415) offers the following examples:

I might construe a duck-rabbit figure as a duck at one time and as a rabbit at another; I might see a face in terms of another, as when I see my father’s face reflected in my own; I can think of a chimpanzee in human terms; I can have the impression that the person behind me in the queue is standing too close...
As these examples make clear, the kind of perception that is of interest to perceptualists is quite different from the kind of perception that drives moods on the non-cognitivist account. As we saw in the previous section, non-cognitivists argue that moods are embodied and often unconscious appraisals of the current trends in our lives. In contrast, perceptualists are focused on construals that are directed toward particular objects and that are typically consciously accessible mental states.

On the perceptualist view, the driving forces behind our emotional responses are construals that are *evaluative* in nature. In particular, emotional responses occur, on this view, when a person construes an object as having an evaluative property that is important to her. For example, if a person construes the man in line behind her as standing too close in a threatening sort of way, we would say that she construes this object (the man, or the man’s posture) as having the evaluative property of being *dangerous* or *threatening*. Because this evaluative property bears upon her concern for safety, the construal will trigger the bodily feelings, thoughts, and motivations that are characteristic of fear.\(^\text{17}\) Thus, as McDowell (1996) puts it, just as sensory perception is a form of “openness” to the sensible world, emotional responsiveness is best understood as a kind of perceptual “openness to values.”

Moods arise, perceptualists argue, when something happens to make us perceptually sensitive to certain evaluative properties, so that we are disposed to construe the objects that we encounter as having these evaluative properties. In this

\(^{17}\) Perceptualists disagree about a number of important philosophical issues that are not directly at stake in the present discussion. For example, do evaluative perceptions merely cause emotions and moods or also partly constitute them? What are the mechanisms by which construals trigger emotional responses? What is the metaphysical status of an evaluative property? Are such properties objectively given or merely subjective projections? And can we be properly said to perceive "thick" evaluative properties (such as perceiving *the right thing to do*) or only "thin" evaluative properties (such as perceiving the threatening nature of an event)? For discussion, see McDowell (1996), Goldie (2000), Audi (2013), and Matthen’s (2015) edited volume on the philosophy of perception.
perceptually sensitized state, we will be disposed to experience a certain emotional
response to object after object, for as long as the mood lasts. Some perceptualists argue
that it is biochemical changes that typically give rise to this sort of perceptual
sensitivity—a view that suggests that the best way to manage moods is through
medication, exercise, diet, sleep, and other means of altering one’s biochemistry. But
regardless of what the underlying causal mechanism may be, perceptualists agree that
moods dispose us to perceive an indefinite series of particular objects as having
evaluative properties of a certain kind.

There are several ways of articulating the detailed analysis supporting the
perceptualist view of moods. The simplest analysis holds that moods directly alter the
kinds of evaluative properties that a person is disposed to perceive: Instead of seeing $X$
as $Y$, a person who is in an irritable or cheerful mood would be disposed to see $X$ as $Z$.

This is the sort of description that lends itself most easily to the comparison between
moods and colored lenses, insofar as colored lenses directly alter the content of what we
perceive by imposing a single color on the scene before us, thereby making other colors
invisible. As Emerson (1844) puts the idea, “Life is a train of moods like a string of
beads; and as we pass through them they prove to be many colored lenses, which paint
the world their own hue, and each shows us only what lies in its own focus.” Fish (2005,
p. 29) puts the idea this way:

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

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18 The appeal to biochemistry is defended in Roberts (2003). For a computational account of the
underlying causal mechanisms of moods, see Sizer (2000). Goldie (2000) offers an insightful discussion of
the way moods can develop out of previous emotions.
To illustrate this idea, consider the following example, which I have adapted from Armon-Jones (1991, p. 88), who also advocates a colored-lens model of moods. Imagine that Maria wakes up one morning to find that she is already running late for work; as she hurriedly gets ready, her dog gets into the trash and makes a mess in the kitchen, and then on the way to the office, Maria gets stuck in a traffic jam. Now, if Maria happened to be in an especially cheerful mood that morning, she might be disposed to construe these events quite differently from the way she otherwise would. Seeing that she is late to work, she might feel relieved that she will miss the morning meeting at her office, which is likely to be terribly dreary. Catching her dog in the trash, she might find the guilty look on his face to be adorable and post a picture of the humorous scene to social media. Stuck in traffic, she might feel grateful to have more time to listen to her favorite podcast. On this version of perceptualism, moods directly alter what evaluative properties Maria is disposed to perceive, insofar as Maria’s cheerful mood will dispose her not to perceive the bad-making features of the events she encounters. Indeed, the unjust and offensive aspects of these events may not even register perceptually.

There is evidence that moods can directly alter our perception in some cases. But Maria’s case is fairly extreme. A more sophisticated version of perceptualism—one that can offer a more plausible description of less extreme cases—focuses on the concept of attention rather than perception as such. On this view, moods indirectly alter the way we perceive the world by disposing us to perceive certain kinds of evaluative properties as being especially salient, that is, as standing out in our perceptual awareness. Because attention is a “finite resource,” as Brady (2007) puts it, when our attention is “captured

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19 For reviews of the empirical literature on the significant but limited influence of “mood” (i.e., core affect) on perception, see Fox (2008), Barrett & Moshe (2009), and Engelmann et al. (2015).
and consumed” by one aspect of our situation, we will tend not to notice other aspects that would otherwise be salient. Likewise, when we do notice mood-incongruent evaluative properties, our attention will be more easily distracted by the aspects of the situation that fit our mood. Thus, by selectively focusing our attention in this way, being in a mood will dispose us to construe object after object in a certain way, and to react accordingly.

Roberts (2003) defends this analysis of moods. On his view, moods do not directly alter the content of a person’s evaluative perceptions; instead, moods cause certain evaluative properties to become more salient than they otherwise would be. When we are in a mood, we will still see X as Y as we always do, but now, in our present mood, X and its Y-ness will stand out in the foreground of our perceptual awareness. Thus, on this version of the perceptualist account of moods, when Maria is in a cheerful mood she may still perceive and react to the bad-making features of events to some extent, but she will be disposed to focus her attention elsewhere—namely, on the evaluative properties that fit her mood. Thus, if Maria was asked why she was so cheerful, she would be able to offer many reasons, such as the opportunity to avoid having to attend a dreary meeting, the cuteness of her dog, and so on. But “despite these reasons,” Roberts (2003, p. 115) says,

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

On Roberts’ view, then, a mood causes a person to be perceptually sensitive to a certain kind of evaluative property, so that if there are any reasons to construe an object as having such a property, the mood “helps the reasons to obtrude” (p. 115).
Thus, perceptualism holds that moods alter our experience of particular objects by changing the *content* of our evaluative perceptions when we encounter those objects—either by determining which evaluative properties will be perceptible to us, or by determining which evaluative properties will be salient in our perceptual awareness. In this way, moods are said to be like colored lenses, altering the way we perceive the things we encounter. This account is intuitively appealing, and perceptualists are correct that when we are in a mood, our ongoing experience is organized—and, in that sense, “filtered”—in a distinctive way. But on closer examination, we find that perceptualism does not accurately describe the experience of being in mood. In many cases moods do not function like colored lenses by determining which evaluative properties will be perceptible to us or salient in our perceptual awareness. In these cases, we remain disposed to perceive and attend to a wide variety of evaluative properties, even those that do not fit our mood—but we find that perceiving such mood-incongruent properties does not generate an emotional response. Investigating this experience of “seeing but not feeling” can help us to clarify the precise way in which moods “filter” our experience, thereby demonstrating the limitations of the perceptualist paradigm.

Imagine the following scenario, which I have adapted from an interview I conducted with a close friend. It is early spring, and Gloria is finishing setting up her new plot in the community garden. Although the weather is lovely and the birds are chirping, Gloria is in an anxious mood. Earlier in the day she had felt a sharp twinge in her back when she lifted a heavy bag of dirt, and she worried that she might have injured herself. She worried about her physical wellbeing and the potential financial cost of getting medical treatment for a back injury, and she was angry with herself for lifting
the bag so casually. But later, as she was getting ready to leave for the day, these particular concerns had faded from her awareness, leaving her with a more vaguely directed mood of anxiety.

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

The perceptualist account of moods is inadequate to describe or explain Gloria’s experience in this case. Gloria’s anxious mood did not function like a colored lens, because she did not see the things around her as being threatening in any way. On the
contrary, she saw nothing but good and beautiful things; she simply felt numb to them. Since hearing this account, I have noticed that this sort of “seeing but not feeling” or *emotional disconnection* often occurs when I am in a mood. For example, I was recently in an especially cheerful mood as I was walking down the street with some friends when a homeless woman asked me for spare change. I value being a compassionate person, and I clearly perceived her suffering and the cruelty of her situation. But despite perceiving an evaluative property that is relevant to my values and concerns, in my cheerful mood, I did not experience the bodily feelings, thoughts, or motivational states associated with the emotion of compassion. In this case, my cheerful mood did not function like a colored lens, making the situation appear to be good in some way. On the contrary, I was able to perceive the sadness of the situation clearly and attend to it, but it felt like I was able to grasp the fact that this person was suffering and needed help in a “merely intellectual” way. I did not feel fully “present” in the situation, and when I gave her a few dollars, it felt like I was acting mechanically, without feeling—merely “going through the motions.”\(^{20}\)

This experience and many others like it show that emotional disconnection is a common feature of the experience of being in a mood. In an irritable mood, for example, I have felt numb to actions that I can see are kind and would otherwise be quite touching; in a tranquil mood, I have found myself temporarily emotionally unresponsive.

\(^{20}\) Little (1995, p. 127) offers an insightful description of an obverse experience, though she uses the term “see” in ways that I will argue are misleading: “Take, for instance, someone who gives change daily to the homeless person near her office but who does so to quell her furtive feelings of guilt, to compensate for the irritation she can’t help feeling at his presence, and to maintain a self-image she can tolerate. Now imagine that one day, walking toward the homeless person, she suddenly sees the situation differently. Her perspective shifts; the elements fall into place; she has fit the case into a different context. Perhaps she suddenly sees in this person the loneliness she herself has felt, and the picture resolves itself into a simple case of helping a fellow human in a bit of need. This change is a change in her apprehension of the situation. This is not to say that she necessarily came to know some new detail of the case. Seeing more clearly is often a matter of discerning a different gestalt of the individual elements one already apprehends: one sees the elements in a way that lets one recognize some further property they together fix.”
to the burden of responsibilities that I can see are pressing. If I am right that such experiences are common when we are in a mood, then we have reason to seek out an alternative account of moods that can better illuminate the logic of the phenomenon. Perceptualism holds that it is our evaluative perceptions that generate the feelings, thoughts, and motivational states that constitute emotions and moods. But such cases of emotional disconnection illustrate that the direction of influence goes the other way, that our mood functions as an enabling condition, determining whether a given evaluative perception will be able to generate an emotional response.

The force of the sort of “phenomenological testimony” I have provided relies on the reader’s ability to recognize the accuracy of such descriptions in his or her own experience. Thus, the perceptualist may insist that such experiences are rare and so do not pose a serious challenge to the perceptualist account of moods. To lend further support to my claim that moods often involve experiences of emotional disconnection, then, I turn to empirical psychology. Unfortunately, I know of no studies that have directly addressed the question of how frequently people experience emotional disconnection while in a mood. However, indirect evidence for my claim can be marshaled from a variety of sources. Studies have shown that emotional disconnection is a common feature of certain psychiatric conditions related to mood, such as major depression, anxiety disorders, and posttraumatic stress disorder (Simpson et al. 2010, pp. 33-35; Feeny et al. 2000; Sherman 2015, Ch. 1). In this vein, Ratcliffe’s (2015) groundbreaking phenomenological-empirical analysis of major depression shows that people suffering from major depression very commonly report that they can perceive the good things around them and know that they “should” feel happy, hopeful, and grateful in response, but simply cannot do so. Surveying 145 people who suffered from
major depression in 2011, Ratcliffe and his colleagues asked them to describe various aspects of their experience. Ratcliffe (2015, p. 33) reports that emotional disconnection was a particularly “salient and consistent theme” in the questionnaire responses. For example, respondents said things like, “When I’m depressed it is like I have become separated from the rest of the world”; “It feels as though you’re watching life from a long distance”; “I feel disconnected from the rest of the world, like a spectator”; “It feels as if I am a ghost”; “I feel like I am watching the world around me and have no way of participating.” Similar descriptions of the experience of depression are a prominent feature of so-called “depression memoirs,” where authors often compare the experience of depression to being imprisoned behind a transparent barrier, as in Sally Brampton’s (2008, p. 171) descriptions of being confined behind a “glass wall that separates us from life, from ourselves” and Sylvia Plath’s (1966, p. 178) famous description of being trapped in a “bell jar.” Unlike the metaphor of a colored lens, the metaphor of a transparent barrier captures the experience of “seeing but not feeling.”

It is prudent to be cautious when comparing psychiatric conditions like mood disorders to ordinary, non-pathological moods. However, consensus continues to build in the psychological literature in favor of the “continuity hypothesis,” the idea that everyday moods differ from mood-related psychiatric disorders only in degree rather than in kind (Morris 1989, Ch. 5; Angst & Dobler-Mikola 1984; Flett et al. 1997; Enns et al. 2001). Furthermore, empirical evidence suggests that the experience of emotional disconnection is not restricted to psychiatric conditions (Ray 1996; Dalenberg & Paulson 2009; Steel et al. 2009). The psychiatric construct of “dissociation,” a state in which there is a lack of normal integration among a person’s mental states—as when evaluative perceptions are divorced from the feelings, thoughts, and motivational states
with which they are typically associated—is conceptualized as forming a spectrum that ranges from major forms of psychopathology to benign, everyday experiences (Fischer & Elnitsky 1990; Kihlstrom 2005; Simeon & Abogel 2006). In some surveys, 80 to 90 percent of respondents report having experiences of dissociation at least some of the time (Gershuny & Thayer 1999). According to Simeon (2004, p. 344), “Short-lived experiences of depersonalization [a type of dissociation] are very common in the general population,” and include experiences in which one has “a sense of just going through the motions...feeling detached from body parts or the whole body...feeling disconnected from one’s own thoughts; and feeling detached from one’s emotions (numbed or blunted).” While these studies do not specifically address moods, they lend substantial, if indirect, support for my argument by showing that experiences of emotional disconnection are not confined to psychiatric conditions but are relatively common in everyday life.

Further evidence in favor of my claim that moods often involve experiences of emotional disconnection can be found in our ordinary language practices. We commonly describe the experience of being in a mood with specific phrases that are naturally interpreted as ways of communicating the experience of emotional disconnection: “I am in a funk,” or “I feel out of it,” or “I do not feel like myself”—expressions that we might use to explain why we are emotionally unresponsive to things that would otherwise elicit strong emotional reactions. We also sometimes employ the language of presence and distance to indicate that we are emotionally disconnected from what we are perceiving, as when we speak of feeling like we are not “fully present” in the situation, or feeling like we are “distant” or “disconnected” from what is happening.
A potentially misleading aspect of our everyday language practices concerns the way we use the term “perceive.” It is common to use “perceive” as a success term, such that a person counts as genuinely perceiving a certain evaluative property only if this perception makes an appropriate emotional impact, relative to some norm. For example, a person describing her experience in retrospect might say (falsely), “I was so caught up in my irritable mood that I could not even see how kind that person was being.” Again, sometimes moods do alter our perception in just this way, but in many cases, we do perceive the mood-incongruent evaluative property but simply feel numb to it. In the latter case, the practice of using “perceive” as a success term—and so saying that we did not really “see” the kindness simply because it did not make an appropriate emotional impact—may lead us to underestimate how common it is to experience emotional disconnection when we are in a mood.21

If experiences of emotional disconnection are characteristic of being in a mood, as these considerations suggest, then any adequate account of the phenomenon of moods must account for this sort of experience. In my view, many of the emotional disconnections we experience when we are in a mood are best understood as cases in which we perceive the evaluative properties of an object, but we nonetheless experience that object as being emotionally inaccessible. The term “emotional accessibility” refers to the quality of immediacy that enables an object to elicit emotional responses to its perceived evaluative properties. When we experience an object as being emotionally inaccessible, we perceive it as having certain evaluative properties, but nonetheless we experience it as being unable to elicit from us any emotional response to those

21 Little (1995) defends the usage of “perceive” as a success term. On this view, we only genuinely perceive an evaluative property when we emotionally respond to it in an appropriate way. However, this view simply begs the question that is at issue in the present debate, namely, whether evaluative perceptions necessarily generate emotional responses.
properties. As we will see, when we encounter an object that is emotionally inaccessible to us, the object may seem distant or unreal, or we may have the uncanny sense of being suddenly unfamiliar with it or alienated from it. In contrast, when we experience an object as being emotionally accessible, we experience it as being able to elicit emotional responses to the evaluative properties we perceive. An emotionally accessible object is able to get under our skin, so to speak, and enter into the intimate sphere of our emotional receptivity.\(^{22}\)

For example, consider the experience of listening to music. On some occasions, we might experience a piece of music as being emotionally accessible, so that we find ourselves deeply moved by the various features and details that we encounter in the music as we listen. In these moments, it feels as though we can enter into the music, as though the music were washing over us and embracing us, sweeping us along on a thrilling ride through its peaks and valleys. On other occasions, however, we experience the music as being emotionally inaccessible, and we remain emotionally unmoved by it. In these moments, the music seems to remain “flat,” and it does not open up a space for us to enter into. As the music peaks and gets louder, it does not envelop us and sweep us along but, rather, seems to be assaulting our ears, as though the sound were being projected at us, rather than interacting with us. In this case, we may continue to perceive the evaluative properties of the music—for example, we may be able to hear the profound sadness in the composition, to appreciate the excellent performances of the

\[^{22}\text{Thus, in contrast to the concept of emotional disconnection, the concept of emotional accessibility refers to a quality of an object; that is, we can experience an object as being emotionally accessible or emotionally inaccessible. The kinds of emotional disconnections I have been discussing, on the other hand, are instances in which we perceive an evaluative property that matters to us but fail to respond emotionally to that property as we normally would; an emotional disconnection is thus a kind of event, rather than a quality of an object. By deploying the concept of emotional accessibility here, I am providing a phenomenological analysis of emotional disconnection—that is, I am aiming to articulate and illuminate how we experience instances of emotional disconnection. My claim is that in many cases, we experience the emotional disconnection that occurs when we are in a mood as something that arises when objects have a certain quality—when, as Heidegger (1929a/1995) puts it, objects “refuse themselves to us.”}\]
musicians, and so on. But without being able to access the music emotionally, we remain unmoved. If we were to try to communicate our feeling in this moment, we might say, “Yes, yes, this song is tragic and amazing and everything—but can we please listen to something else?”

Moods systematically alter the way we experience the emotional accessibility of the objects we encounter. Consider, for example, the mood of boredom. In his well-known analysis of boredom, Heidegger (1929a/1995) describes the way that boredom leads us to experience every object we encounter as being emotionally inaccessible. As he puts it, when we are bored, every object that we try to engage with seems to “refuse itself” to us, refusing to “offer” us anything that we can connect with emotionally, so that we are “left empty” and find ourselves “held in limbo,” unable to become absorbedly engaged in any activity (p. 103ff). Heidegger offers the following example of boredom.

We are sitting…in the tasteless station of some lonely minor railway. It is four hours until the next train arrives. The district is uninspiring. We do have a book in our rucksack, though—shall we read? No. Or think through a problem, some question? We are unable to. We read the timetables or study the table giving the various distances from this station to other places we are not otherwise acquainted with at all. We look at the clock—only a quarter of an hour has gone by. Then we go out onto the local road. We walk up and down, just to have something to do. But it is no use. Then we count the trees along the road, look at our watch again—exactly five minutes since we last looked at it. Fed up with walking back and forth, we sit down on a stone, draw all kinds of figures in the sand, and in so doing catch ourselves looking at our watch again—half an hour—and so on (p. 93).

Heidegger’s description of the way objects “refuse themselves” to us when we are in a bored mood calls to mind an analogous case of a friend who is clearly upset by something, but remains sullen and withdrawn, refusing to open up about what is bothering her. In this case, try as we might, we cannot gain “empathic access” (Schechtman 2001) to our friend’s emotional world. So, too, in a mood of boredom, we
cannot gain emotional access to the objects we encounter, so that these object remain withdrawn and refuse to open themselves to us, “abandoning us to ourselves.”

While the bored mood in Heidegger’s example seems to alter the experience the emotional accessibility of nearly every evaluative property of every object, in most cases, moods will our alter of emotional accessibility in more specific, complex, and nuanced ways. For example, when we are in a tranquil mood, we may find that the objects we perceive as being dangerous and threatening have become emotionally inaccessible, while the objects we perceive as being comforting and lovely have become much more emotional accessible than they normally are. In contrast, an anxious mood may lead us to find reassuring and lovely objects to be emotionally inaccessible, while dangerous and threatening objects are especially emotionally accessible. But we should be wary not to assume—as the perceptualist account does, perhaps due to being misled by the comparison of moods to colored lenses—that our experience of each kind of moods is monochromatic, that is, that each kind of mood affects us in a uniform way with regard to a certain class of evaluative properties. For example, when we are in an anxious mood, we are not necessarily uniformly fixated on threats and insensitive to the reassuring quality in the objects we encounter. If we are in an anxious mood and stuck in a traffic jam, for instance, we may be disposed to experience threats as being emotionally accessible, but we may also feel especially touched by the generosity of stranger who lets us pass in front of her. Likewise, when we are in a depressed mood and encounter objects we perceive as being good, worthwhile, and beautiful, these objects may tend to be emotionally inaccessible to us, but at the same time, we may find that the goodness, worth, and beauty of our bed is more emotionally accessible to us than ever before, as we take refuge there from the rest of the world. These examples show that any adequate
account of the phenomenon will need to recognize that moods are not monochromatic, but complexly articulated, and will need to illuminate the logic behind this complex articulation.

An objector might balk at the sort of analysis I have given above, arguing that I have simply labeled the phenomenon that I was supposed to explain. In other words, it may be argued that my claim—namely, that the way moods alter how we respond emotionally to the objects we encounter can be explained by understanding how moods alter our experience of the emotional accessibility of these objects—is vacuously tautological, or at least that it does not make much progress toward helping us to understand the logic that governs the way moods manifest themselves in our experience. Now, it is true that, to some extent, the concept of emotional accessibility is functioning at this point as a kind of placeholder for a more illuminating explanation of the phenomenon. In the following two chapters, I aim to provide a theory that can explain—in satisfying detail—why and how moods alter our experience of emotional accessibility. But even without having such a theory in hand, however, it should be clear that such a theory is needed in order to illuminate the phenomenon of moods, and that perceptualism will be unable to provide it. As we have seen, the perceptualist account of moods is fundamentally unequipped to help us to understand why moods often lead us to experience objects as being unable to elicit emotional responses to their perceived evaluative properties.

An advocate of perceptualism might object here, however, by suggesting that it is possible to reformulate the perceptualist theory in order to avoid my criticisms. Even if moods do tend to alter our experience of the emotional accessibility of objects, perhaps this experience can still be analyzed in terms of perception. Why not simply conclude
that moods dispose us to *perceive* certain kinds of evaluative properties as being emotionally accessible and to *perceive* other kinds of evaluative properties as being emotionally inaccessible? The reason this strategy will not work is that the emotional accessibility of an object—the quality of being able to elicit emotional responses to the evaluative properties we perceive in the object—is not a property that can be perceived in the same way as we can perceive the object’s other properties. Compare the quality of emotional accessibility to a normal evaluative property, such as dangerousness. When we encounter a bear while hiking in the woods, for example, we can perceive the *dangerousness* of the bear by perceiving the features of the bear that make it dangerous or that indicate that it is dangerous—its sharp teeth and claws, its large size, its aggressive posture, and so on. But there are no such perceptible features of the bear that make its dangerousness emotionally accessible to us, or that indicate that it is emotionally accessible to us. We perceive the same evaluative properties, but we experience those same properties differently—as we might say, we experience them as being able to reach us, get under our skin, and enter into the intimate sphere of our emotional receptivity. Thus, if we are in an anxious mood and experience the dangerousness of the bear as being particularly emotionally accessible, this does not necessarily mean that we perceive the bear as being *more dangerous* than we otherwise would—that is, that we would estimate the likelihood of being harmed by the bear any differently than we would in another mood. Rather, in an anxious mood we may simply respond emotionally to that *same* perception of danger more intensely—with more intense bodily feelings, stronger motivational states, and more vivid and compelling thoughts—because of the way our anxiety opens us up to the threatening nature of threats.
For these reasons, it is helpful to think of emotional accessibility of an object as a *mode of presentation*—that is, a way that an object can be present in our experience—rather than a property that is present in the object, to think of it as a matter of the *form* or *structure* of our experience rather than the *content* of a mental state. After all, if we were to conceptualize emotional accessibility as a property of an object that could be the content of an evaluative perception—as suggested by the objection—what would we have in mind? Perhaps we might think of a friend who is warm, open, and eager for emotional connection, rather than sullen and withdrawn; in this case, we might perceive this person as having an evaluative property that we might call “emotional accessibility.” But such a property is not identical to kind of emotional accessibility at issue here, namely, the quality of being able to elicit from us an emotional response to perceived evaluative properties. To see the difference, consider that if we were in an irritable mood, we might experience our friend’s “emotional accessibility” (*qua* evaluative property) *itself* as being emotionally inaccessible—that is, we might see that she is warm and open in ways that would normally elicit a whole range of positive emotions from us, but we may find that, in our present mood, she seems strangely distant from us, as though she were separated from us by a transparent barrier, so that her warmth and openness are unable to elicit any emotional response from us. As this example illustrates, there is no way for the perceptualist account of moods to explain this feature of our experience, because emotional accessibility is different in kind from the evaluative properties that are the content of our evaluative perceptions.

So far, this discussion of emotional accessibility has focused on illustrating the limitations of the perceptualist account of moods, and so it has done little to illuminate the nature of emotional accessibility itself. However, now that we have some idea about
how the concept may figure into the analysis of moods, we can begin to investigate emotional accessibility as a positive phenomenon—that is, as something that we experience, rather than merely as a condition for the possibility of having experiences of a certain kind. When we experience an object as being emotionally inaccessible to us, for example, we are unable to respond emotionally to its evaluative properties, but this does not imply that we have no emotional experience whatsoever at this moment. To the contrary, to experience an object as being emotionally inaccessible is to have a distinctive kind of experience, indeed, an experience that is often frustrating, puzzling, or disturbing. In many cases, encountering an object that is emotionally inaccessible can generate a number of changes in what Ratcliffe (2008, p. 39) calls “existential feelings”—that is, the “non-conceptual feelings of the body, which constitute a background sense of belonging to the world and a sense of reality.” We will have occasion to examine the concept of existential feelings in more depth in Chapter Four, but it may be useful to say a few words about the topic here in order to fill out the notion of emotional accessibility a bit.

Ratcliffe (2008) discusses four kinds of existential feelings that I suggest are affected when we experience an object as being emotionally accessible or inaccessible: the sense of familiarity (and unfamiliarity), belonging (and alienation), reality (and unreality), and existential proximity (and existential distance). For example, when we are in a bored mood, we may experience the objects we encounter as being so emotionally inaccessible that they feel unreal, distant (as though they were “a million miles away”), unfamiliar, and alien. Camus (1988) describes this sort of mood in his novel, The Stranger. The protagonist, Meursault, is living in a state very much like a mood of profound boredom, and as a result he is unable to become absorbedly involved in any
particular activity, and the objects he encounters seem to be out of place, purposeless, and “absurd.” In this state, Meursault experiences his environment with “that detached amazement which comes from watching an ant struggle up a heap of sand,” as Nagel (1971, p. 720) puts it. In “The Myth of Sisyphus,” Camus (1955, p. 191) argues that such a mood of profound boredom can arise when everyday life becomes routine.

Rising, streetcar, four hours in the office or the factory, meal, streetcar, four hours of work, meal, sleep, and Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday and Saturday according to the same rhythm—this path is easily followed most of the time. But one day the “why” arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement.

In this moment, he says, “the stage sets collapse,” and “in a world suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger” (189). These descriptions of being totally estranged from the world are a dramatic illustration of the kind of experience that can be involved when we experience objects as being emotionally inaccessible. As we have seen, other moods can affect some or all of these existential feelings as well, the way that Gloria’s anxious mood made her feel existentially distant from the lovely objects in her garden. Likewise, a cheerful mood can make threats and injustices feel unreal, and a mood of tranquility can make us feel “at one with the universe.” Again, none of these existential feelings refer to properties of objects that can be perceived; rather, they are better understood as modes of presentation, ways in which an object’s properties can be present within our experience.

This discussion provides reason to think that although the perceptualist account is correct to suggest that moods often dispose us to perceive the evaluative properties of the objects we encounter in ways that fit with our moods, this account is incorrect to hold that such changes in our perceptual dispositions are what drive and explain the changes in our moods. In fact, the order of explanation is reversed: it is changes in our
moods that drive and explain the changes in our perceptual dispositions that arise when we are in a mood. That is, it is the way that moods alter our experience of the emotional accessibility of objects that explains why we tend to perceive those objects differently when we are in a certain mood, because emotionally accessible objects are more likely to recruit and maintain our attention. When we are in an anxious mood, for example, we find it easy to appreciate the possible threats around us, and the more we dwell on the threatening nature of our environment, the more threats we are likely to see there. Nonetheless, we often override this natural tendency to attend to the objects that are emotionally accessible to us, and as a result, we often remain able to perceive evaluative properties that do not fit our mood—and when we do so, we tend to experience an emotional disconnection from our evaluative perceptions. There are many reasons why we may remain disposed to perceive certain evaluative properties despite the fact that they are incongruous with our mood. For instance, in the example I gave of Gloria looking over her garden while in an anxious mood, she remained disposed to see evaluative properties that did not fit her anxious mood because she had a habit of thinking positively, and she valued this practice, and she was also especially motivated to savor the beauty she was able to perceive. As we move forward toward a more satisfying account of moods, then, it will be important to investigate how, exactly, our moods interact with other affective phenomena, such as habits, motivations, and values, in order to generate this sort of dissonance or mismatch between our moods and other kinds of affective phenomena.
§2.3. Cognitivism and the experience of normative grip

The last major theory of moods in mainstream Anglo-American philosophy that I will examine in this chapter is known as “cognitivism.” According to the cognitivist theory of moods, moods are generalizing judgments, beliefs about how things are in general. As we will see, cognitivism offers some important insights regarding how our moods alter the way we tend to think and reason. However, I will argue that in many cases, moods do not manifest themselves in our experience in the way cognitivism suggests. In some cases, our moods can be recalcitrant, stubbornly persisting in the face of repudiating judgments. In these cases, a change in our mood does not involve a change in the way we think and reason; instead, our judgments remain undisturbed while other dimensions of our emotional experience, such as our motivational states, bodily feelings, and perceptions, are systematically altered. These cases show that the cognitivist theory, like the other theories we have examined, gets the order of explanation backwards. Evaluative judgments do not drive our moods; rather, our mood functions as an enabling condition that allows our evaluative judgments to generate an emotional response. A closer look at where the cognitivist account of the phenomenon goes wrong will reveal that the way moods affect our judgments is itself a manifestation of the way that moods alter our experience of what I call “normative grip.” Thus, although cognitivism is correct to suggest that moods tend to alter the way we think and reason, the theory nonetheless fails to offer an adequate analysis of the phenomenon of moods, because it presupposes, and so is unable to account for, the way that moods alter our experience of normative grip.

Cognitivism holds that emotions and moods are triggered by cognitive appraisals of how events are impinging on our values and concerns. A full-throated
defense of the cognitivist theory of emotions is found in Nussbaum’s (2004, p. 185) defense of the Stoic idea that “emotions are evaluative judgments.” A *judgment*, on her view, can be distinguished from a perception insofar as a judgment is an “assent to an appearance,” in which we form the explicit or implicit belief that, *yes, the way things appear to me right now is, in fact, the way they are in reality*. On Nussbaum’s view, the particular qualitative texture of an emotion, as well as the particular way that the emotion unfolds and interacts with other emotions, beliefs, and desires, cannot be understood without properly identifying the precise cognitive content of the proposition that underlies the emotion and reveals how the object of the emotion relates to a person’s values and concerns. For example, Nussbaum describes the way she experienced receiving the news that her mother had just died. At first, she says, she felt numb. In this state of shock, she may have assented to the abstract proposition, “Betty Craven is dead,” but for some time she did not combine this thought with the thought of how much she loves her mother, and how central her mother is in her life, and so she did not experience an emotional response to the news. But as the reality sank in, she experienced a powerful wave of grief and sadness, an emotional response that, she argues, is best understood as the assent to the evaluative proposition, “my wonderful mother is dead” (p. 192-3).

Moods, on the cognitivist view, are also grounded in evaluative judgments. But while emotions are directed toward particular objects, moods are directed toward *things in general*; in other words, moods are *generalizing judgments*. As Solomon (1976, p. 172f) puts it, “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.” For
example, while both the emotion of sadness and the mood of depression involve beliefs about loss, the mood of depression involves the belief that the whole world is irrevocably lacking or disappointing in some way. Likewise, Lazarus (1994, p. 84f) argues that while “acute” emotions “refer to the immediate adaptational business in an encounter with the environment,” moods are cognitive appraisals “of the existential background of our lives”—“who we are, now and in the long run, and how we are doing in life overall.” The term “existential,” as Lazarus uses it, does not refer to the pre-intentional presentation of reality, as when I speak of the “existential dimension of moods.” Instead, on Lazarus’s view, moods are evaluative appraisals of how events are impinging on our identity and worldview, cherished beliefs about who we are and what the world is like.

“[Moods] have to do with meanings and ideas about who we are, our place in the world, life and death, and the quality of our existence. We have constructed these meanings for ourselves out of our life experience and the values of the culture in which we live, and we are committed to preserving them (Lazarus & Lazarus 1996, 41).

Thus, moods arise when something happens that significantly impacts our view of fundamental issues such as the kind of person we are, how secure our attachments are in general, our basic ability to cope with life, and so on. For example, while the emotion of fear might involve the thought that a particular threat is impending, the mood of anxiety might involve a more generalizing thought like “the universe is basically cold, chaotic, and uncaring,” or “people cannot be trusted.” Likewise, the emotion of sadness may be grounded in the thought, “I have lost an important opportunity,” but the mood of depression may be grounded in the more profoundly disorienting thought, “I fail at everything I try to do; there is no use in even trying.”
The cognitivist theory of emotions and moods is central to “cognitive therapy,” which aims to help patients identify and rationally reconstruct the beliefs that drive their emotional responses. As Ellis (1991) explains, cognitive therapy is based on an “ABC model” of emotional reaction, according to which beliefs (“B”) are the necessary medium through which an activating stimulus (“A”) is causally connected to its emotional consequence (“C”): \( A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C \). Thus, if a person can identify the precise content of the cognitive schemas that she relies on to make evaluative judgments about the things she encounters, and if she can alter those schemas to reflect a more rational and healthy perspective, then she will be able to improve the way she reacts emotionally to what she encounters. For example, Beck (1991, p. 370) argues that people suffering from major depression tend to hold irrational beliefs about how particular situations are likely to develop (“Since I have not succeeded yet, I will never succeed”) or how situations in general tend to develop (“Things never work out for me”)—instances of a particularly pernicious kind of “cognitive distortion” known as “fortune-telling.”

Cognitive therapy aims to help patients rationally evaluate the evidence that supposedly supports these conclusions. This therapeutic method has proven to be fairly effective in improving people’s ability to manage everyday emotions and moods, as well as mood disorders (Teasdale & Fennell 1982).

The cognitivist theory suggests an account of the phenomenon of moods according to which moods will manifest themselves in our experience in distinctive patterns in the way we think and reason about things that we take to be important.

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23 While cognitive therapists describe these ways of thinking as “cognitive distortions,” this does not imply that the distinctive patterns in thinking and reasoning that are involved in moods are always incorrect or irrational. Some predictions about how events are likely to unfold will be perfectly reasonable, after all. In this vein, Graham (1990, p. 399) argues that “the effort of Aaron Beck to show that depressive reasoning is necessarily illogical and distorted is flawed,” because in some circumstances—such as when a Jew in a Nazi concentration camp has lost his wife and children to the gas chamber—“a person has good reason to feel depressed.”
Cognitivism offers important insights here—insights which are supported by a wealth of empirical evidence—even if the theory will ultimately prove to be inadequate to account for the phenomenon as a whole. For example, a person in a mood will tend to generalize from specific cases—this \( x \) is \( y \), therefore all \( x \)'s are \( y \)'s—and will tend to engage in “fortune-telling,” making distinctive sorts of predictions about how events are likely to unfold.\(^{24}\) Likewise, a person in a mood will tend to “jump to conclusions,” as when we are in an irritable mood and encounter some particular behavior or state of affairs—for example, the judgment that a colleague has behaved inconsiderately—and infer that it demonstrates the truth of some more general trait or state of affairs—“he is a jerk,” or “other people cannot be trusted,” or “I am not in control of what happens in my life.”\(^{25}\) In some cases, this sort of thinking might take the form of “personalization,” in which we interpret the things that people do and say as though they were a direct reaction to us, as when we infer that our colleague acted inconsiderately because “he does not like me.” Through personalization, we might also see ourselves as the cause of external events, as when we are in a depressed mood and find a way to blame ourselves for some bit of bad luck.\(^{26}\)

Armon-Jones (1991, p. 29) describes another way that moods might manifest themselves in a distinctive pattern of thinking and reasoning, which she calls “imagination-based thought.” When we are in a mood, our thoughts may persistently

\(^{24}\) For research in empirical psychology on the effect of mood on generalization, see Johnson & Tversky 1983, Mayer 1986, and Mayer & Bremer 1985. For research in empirical psychology on how optimism, pessimism, and likelihood judgments are affected moods and mood-related psychiatric conditions such as major depression and anxiety disorders, see Alloy & Ahrens 1987, Lewis et al. 1995, Zelenski & Larsen 2002, and Phillips et al. 2002.


\(^{26}\) For research in empirical psychology on how moods distort our judgments of the cause of our moods and inflate our personal contribution to events, see Schwarz & Clore 1983, Kramer et al. 1993, and Poon 2001.
circle around a certain set of possibilities and “what-if” scenarios. The judgments
driving this pattern of thinking are not definitive assertions of a state of affairs but,
rather, assertions of the possibility of a state of affairs. For example, an anxious mood
might not involve the judgment, “people cannot be trusted,” but, rather, “it is possible that
people cannot be trusted.” In this case, the mere assertion of such a possibility is not
necessarily incorrect or irrational, but in the grip of a mood, we may repeatedly return
in our minds to this possibility in ways that are out of character and would seem
inappropriate to anyone who is not in this mood. For example, in an anxious mood, we
might think, “I see that my wife loves me, but what if she is cheating on me? How would I
know? What would I do?”— or, “what would happen if a car suddenly crossed the
yellow line and hit us head on?” Thus, when we are in a mood, imaginative thoughts
sometimes transport us into a certain “space of possibilities” in which we consider the
things we encounter from the perspective of counterfactual considerations (Morton
2013). In some cases, we imaginatively project ourselves into what Goldie (2005) calls
an “external perspective,” in which we imagine ourselves as having been oblivious to
some important facts, thus experiencing the kind of “dramatic irony” in which an
audience is privy to information that the protagonist of a novel, film, or play is unaware
of—as expressed in the phrase, “little did he know….”

Thus, it is true that in many cases moods do manifest themselves in our
experience in explicit generalized judgments and distinctive patterns of reasoning and
imaginative thinking, just as the cognitivist account suggests. However, in other cases,
moods do not manifest themselves in this way. As many critics of cognitivism have
pointed out, our moods are often recalcitrant. For example, we may continue to be
captured in an anxious mood despite our sincere judgment that the thought, “people
cannot be trusted,” is false, and indeed, despite knowing that our anxiety has no rational basis whatsoever. In these cases, our mood might manifest itself in changes in our motivational states, perceptions, and bodily feelings, without changing our judgments or the general pattern of our thinking. As Stocker (1979, p. 744) points out in his critique of “internalism” in meta-ethics—that is, the view that our moral judgments are necessarily motivating—a mood of depression can sap our desire to do what we value doing and believe that we should do. Armon-Jones (1991, p. 94) imagines how a person in a depressed mood might describe the experience of recalcitrance: “Well, yes, I know it’s a rewarding and worthwhile job; and there is no denying that I’ve been successful. It’s just that I feel negative about everything. My heart is not in it.” In a similar manner, in a cheerful mood we might say, “I know that funerals are solemn occasions, it’s just that I was in high spirits,” while in a tranquil mood, we might say, “I know it is dangerous to float out to sea, it’s just that I was feeling so peaceful.”27 If it is common for moods to be recalcitrant in this way, this suggest that the cognitivist account of the phenomenon of moods has failed to identify the logic that governs how moods manifest themselves in our experience.

In my view, the cognitivist account overlooks a deeper dimension of moods that helps to explain the ways they affect our thinking—namely, it overlooks the way that moods alter our experience of “normative grip.” Normative grip refers to the sense of being called upon or required to uphold some standard or “norm” in the way we think or

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27 Proponents of cognitivism seem to be committed to the view that recalcitrant moods involve simultaneously judging that \( P \) and \( \sim P \), a position that leads one into a variety of thorny philosophical issues. The theoretical problems arising from these sorts of cases have motivated the shift in the literature away from cognitivism and toward perceptualism. Perceptualism is able to explain recalcitrant moods as being similar to optical illusions. Because perception and cognition are semi-independent faculties, we may continue to perceive a reed in water as being bent despite knowing that it is straight; likewise, perceptualists argue, we may continue to perceive ourselves as being in danger despite knowing that we are safe. For discussion of these points, see Brady (2007, 2009), Roberts (2009), Railton (2011), Döring (2015), and Helm (2015).
behave, or in the attitudes that we take toward things. We can analyze the experience of normative grip along three dimensions: cognition, action, and identity. In each case, normative grip is involved in our experience of something as being *appropriate* or *inappropriate*. In the case of cognition, a paradigmatic experience of normative grip is the sense that a certain proposition is rationally required or certain. For example, when we are asked the sum of two and two, the answer, *four*, is experienced as being not merely correct but rationally required—not optional or uncertain in any way. In fact, we are “gripped” by this sense of the appropriateness of the answer to such an extent that, as Williams (1970) notes, if someone were to put a gun to our head and demand that we cease to believe that 2+2=4, we would most likely not be able to conjure any doubt. In contrast, if we are asked to do a more complex arithmetic problem involving large numbers and numerous steps, we may sincerely believe that we have come to the correct answer without experiencing the same sense of rational requirement—that is, without experiencing the same sense that the correctness of any other answer is impossible. In this case, it would relatively easy for us to be convinced that we might be wrong.

In general, the thoughts we have about “how the world is” are infused with varying degrees of normative grip—from a sense of absolute certainty and necessity, at one end of the spectrum, to a sense of absolute uncertainty and contingency, at the other end. In the middle of the spectrum, our experience of normative grip determines our sense of how we ought to proceed in thinking about issues that are *somewhat uncertain*. For example, Kukla (2014, p. 452) points out that sexism can affect our everyday epistemic practices when we attempt to discern the significance of an instance of possible sexism: “When women claim that someone is being dismissed, sexualized, or diminished on the basis of her gender, often the response is to point out how the behavior in
question might perfectly well have an explanation other than sexism, and how we don’t know enough to judge.” In such cases, the skeptical interlocutor may be “in the grip of a picture,” as Wittgenstein might put it—a picture in which claims of sexism are often exaggerated, and so it is usually prudent to wait for more evidence before rushing to judgment. The effect of this hesitance in the face of uncertainty can be subtle in any given instance, but over time this sort of epistemic bias can radically alter a person’s experiential landscape. As Kukla points out, “taken in isolation, almost any incident has plausible explanations other than sexism,” and so in many cases the only thing that can move a person from uncertainty to certainty about the sexist nature of a given comment or action is having had many experiences with sexism that allow a person to discern a definitive pattern behind the isolated incidents. However, if each possible incident of sexism is approached skeptically and dismissed as “probably an overreaction,” it will be impossible for these individual incidents to “add up” together to form a coherent and unified pattern. This example illustrates how our experience of normative grip can shape our reasoning and thought processes in subtle but important ways.

In the domain of action, normative grip manifests itself as a sense of which actions are appropriate, obligatory, permitted, or right, or conversely, which actions are inappropriate, prohibited, or wrong. For example, we might experience this kind of normative grip when we have the sense of certainty about how to act in a given case, or conversely, a sense that the choice of how to act is entirely optional. In other cases, we experience a sense of normative grip when we endeavor to weigh competing considerations and arrive at an all-things-considered assessment of how to act in a given case. In this process of weighing considerations against each other, we are guided by an
underlying sense of which sort of considerations have more weight or importance, and which considerations are relatively less “gripping.”

This dimension of normative grip is closely related to the third dimension, that of identity. Here normative grip manifests itself in our sense of what thoughts, actions, or attitudes are “appropriate” in the extended sense of “proper” and “property”—that is, in the sense of ownership, familiarity, and identification with something, as opposed to disowning it as external or foreign. One end of the spectrum here is identifying with something to such an extent that it is “impossible for him to forebear” any other alternative, as Frankfurt (1988, p. 86) puts it, as in Luther’s famous declaration: “Here I stand; I can do no other.” The kind of necessity involved here is one in which “every apparent alternative…is unthinkable.” In such cases, of course, a person could—literally speaking—take a different action or attitude, but the point is that by doing so, this person would no longer be herself, that her identity would be shattered. For example, Sherman (2015, Ch. 4) describes soldiers who wrestle with the knowledge that they have acted in ways that they do not identify with, and as a result have suffered from a kind of “moral injury” that can be every bit as devastating as a physical injury. In less extreme cases, normative grip might manifest itself in a more subtle sense of feeling “at home” and familiar—or alternatively, feeling “out of our element” and uncomfortable—with a certain setting, thought, attitude, or action.

Moods systematically alter our experience of normative grip along all three of these dimensions. A change in our mood often leads to a change in the thoughts that our minds gravitate toward and in our sense of how considerations follow from one another and lead to an all-things-considered assessment of what is appropriate. For
example, in George Eliot’s (1965, p. 336) novel, *Middlemarch*, Mr. Vincy’s cheerful mood dramatically changed his mode of thinking in all of these ways.

[He] was inclined to take a jovial view of all things that evening; he even observed to Lydgate that Fred had got the family constitution after all, and would soon be as fine a fellow as ever again; and when his appropriation of Rosamond’s engagement was asked for, he gave it with astonishing facility, passing at once to general remarks on the desirableness of matrimony for young men and maidens, and apparently deducing from the whole the appropriateness of a little more punch.

As this example illustrates, when we get swept up into a mood, we can feel utterly certain about things that would otherwise be quite uncertain; we can find it easy to dismiss countervailing considerations in our all-things-considered judgments; and we can feel as though our present thoughts, perceptions, feelings, and desires were awakening a deep part of ourselves that should not or cannot be denied. As Dreyfus and Kelly (2011, p. 58-61) point out, when a mood affects how we feel called upon or required to respond in this way, the experience is similar to how Homer describes the experience of being visited by a god, as when, for example, Aphrodite, the goddess of erotic love, inspires Helen of Troy to abandon her husband and child to run off with Paris. The ancient Greeks felt humbled in the face of this power.

For Homer, moods are important because...they manifest what matters most in the moment and in doing so draw people to perform heroic and passionate deeds. The gods are crucial to setting these moods, and different gods illuminate different, even incompatible ways a situation can matter. The goddess to whom Helen was most attuned was Aphrodite; she illuminates a situation’s erotic possibilities and draws one to bring these out at their best. Achilles, in contrast, is sensitive to Ares’ mood—an aggressive mood in which opportunities to shine as a ferocious warrior become the most important aspects of the situation at hand (60).

In this way, Homer’s epics illustrate how each kind of mood can transport us into a distinctive, normatively structured space of possibilities.
If the ancient Greeks saw moods as divine, it may be because moods are *transcendent* in the way they alter our experience of normative grip—that is, they affect the extraordinary human ability to move from part to whole and from evidence to conclusion. For example, imagine that Carrie asks her colleague, Alex, why he is in such an irritable mood, and Alex replies, “It’s obvious: I’m surrounded by jerks!” When pressed to explain, Alex makes a long list of instances of inconsiderate and incompetent behavior of his co-workers, and he feels certain that there is more than enough reason to support his conclusion. However, it is never so obvious how a collection of instances adds up to a meaningful whole, and so Carrie, who is in a cheerful mood, might sincerely deny that the list reflects an accurate overall assessment of the group. For example, she might point to instances when co-workers were considerate and competent and argue that these instances deserve more consideration in Alex’s all-things-considered judgment. Furthermore, Carrie might deny that the behavior listed by Alex reflects the true nature of the people involved, insisting that if the circumstances were different, they would act more considerately and competently: “They may have *acted* like jerks, but it is unfair to judge them to *be* jerks.” In this disagreement, Carrie and Alex inhabit different possibility spaces, and there is nothing in the facts themselves that can help them to determine who is correct. After all, no set of facts can tell us what those facts *mean*, and our all-things-considered judgments about the significance of the evidence necessarily outstrips the evidence itself. Thus, when an anxious mood leads us to affirm the proposition, “The world is a dangerous place,” this judgment “transcends” the particulars and imposes a normative shape upon the whole. The proposition has the surface grammar of an existential quantification—that is, it may seem as though it were equivalent to the statement, “There exist many dangerous things”—but it actually
functions in a modal key, expressing the sense that danger is ultimately impossible to avoid.

Adrienne Martin (2011, p. 149-150) describes a case that highlights how moods can alter all three aspects of normative grip at once.

Consider, for example, a participant in early stage cancer research, who declares that she hopes to “be the 1%” who receive medical benefit. An uncharitable interpretation says she is irrational, and doesn’t understand that she is no more likely to be the 1% than any other participant. A charitable and, I believe, more plausible reading is that she understands the probabilities just fine, and declares hope not to defy them, but to convey how much she values that small chance of medical benefit.

As this passage makes clear, a cheerful mood in which we feel buoyed by hope can radically affect how we experience the things we encounter, not necessarily by changing the content of our judgments, but by changing their normative grip. We can imagine that in this case, the possibility of survival, though extremely slim, is decisive, entirely determinative of how the patient experiences herself as being required to respond. Responding to this 1% chance with hope may feel profoundly important to her sense of identity, to her feeling of being an agent who can take a stand on what is most proper and authentic to her, and may even allow her to feel at home in quite adverse conditions.

As these examples illustrate, when a change in our mood alters our experience of normative grip, we often find ourselves disposed to form judgments that fit with our mood. The reason for this tendency, in my view, is that we find it relatively easy and pleasant to formulate judgments that fit with our sense of normative grip, while it is difficult and unpleasant to think in ways that violate our sense of normative grip. As many studies in empirical psychology have demonstrated, for example, when our reasoning leads us to affirm a proposition that violates a normative requirement—such as when Socrates leads his interlocutors to recognize the irrationality of their deeply
cherished beliefs—we experience an unpleasant sense of “cognitive dissonance” and tend to engage in a variety of more or less irrational “dissonance reduction strategies.” But while changes in our mood thus dispose us to think and reason in ways that fit our mood, the cognitivist theory is nonetheless inadequate, because it fails to recognize that moods also dispose us to experience a kind of emotional disconnection—in this case, an emotional disconnection from our evaluative judgments, rather than from our evaluative perceptions—in those instances where our judgments are out of sync with our sense of normative grip. For example, a depressed mood may lead us to form the judgment that “I am a loser,” but in other cases, we may be motivated or otherwise disposed to insist that we are not “losers,” despite the fact that we continue to feel as though we were. As we move forward toward a more satisfying account of moods, then, we will seek out a more illuminating explanation of the logic that governs the complex relationship between moods and evaluative judgments.

But while more needs to be said on the subject, one thing that is clear is that the alteration in normative grip that we experience when we are in a mood cannot be explained in terms of changes in the content of our evaluative judgments, just as our experience of emotional accessibility could not be explained in terms of the content of our evaluative perceptions. As we have seen, any judgment that a certain thought, attitude, or action is normatively required can itself be normatively gripping or not, depending on our mood. For example, the judgment that we definitely ought not to float out to sea might fail to motivate us when we are in a tranquil mood, just as the judgment that it is impermissible to make jokes at a funeral may fail to grip us when we are in a cheerful mood. The concept of judgment is fundamentally inadequate to explain

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28 For an excellent review of research on cognitive dissonance, see Haidt 2001.
the experience of normative grip, because while judgments are representational attitudes toward specific objects that exist in our world—or even about our world or ourselves as a whole—normative grip operates at a deeper level, affecting how the various considerations that are present in our mind are presented in the first place. This is why, when we are in an anxious mood, the judgment that it is possible that we may be involved in a car accident at any moment might be so compelling, even when the same judgment is easily dismissed when we are in a cheerful mood.

We find further evidence of the inadequacy of the cognitivist account when we consider that the “judgments” we might form about “the existential background of our lives” when we are in a mood—that is, the attitudes that express our identity and worldview—do not function like typical judgments at all. For example, when we have the sense that a certain thought or behavior reflects or does not reflect who we are as a person, or that our identity requires a certain response from us, this attitude cannot be true or false in any standard sense, because who we are as a person is not independent of, but is partially constituted by this same sense of what our identity requires of us. Thus, when we are in a mood of anxiety and ask, “Who am I? Have I been wasting my life in the wrong career?”, there is no way to answer these questions without reference to our sense of whether and how we are gripped by certain concerns and considerations. A persistent mood of anxiety may therefore be taken, legitimately, as an indication that the anxiety is warranted; if a person is persistently anxious in this way, then perhaps she is not in the right career after all. However, a change in mood might indicate that the anxiety was not, in fact, warranted. In this way, judgments about our identity seem to generate their own supporting “evidence.” While judgments are typically distinguished by their world-to-mind “direction of fit” (Searle 1983), these kinds of
judgments seem to be more like desires in the way they exhibit a *mind-to-world* direction of fit. This does not mean that the normative grip of these sorts of big-picture judgments should be analyzed in terms of desire. Rather, it indicates that the rationality of such judgments can only be justified by reasons *from within* a normatively structured space of possibilities. Thus, while we do “have” judgments about the existential background of our lives, as Lazarus suggests, and moods can and do affect them, these judgments always arise within an experiential landscape that is *already* structured by a “lived” sense of who we are and how the world may and must be—that is, structured by our experience of normative grip.

§2.4. Attitudinalism and the logic of moods

We conclude our review of the literature with a brief discussion of the theory known as “attitudinalism.” This theory, as developed by Julien Deonna and Fabrice Teroni (2012), has recently begun to pick up traction in the literature.⁴⁹ However, as we will see, the theory remains rather underdeveloped. To date, as far as I am aware, attitudinalism has been applied only to emotions and not to moods. But a brief discussion of what an attitudinal account of moods might look like will provide an opportunity to summarize the results of this chapter and set the stage for the positive account of moods that I articulate in the following chapters.

Attitudinalism aims to develop a new sense in which emotions are evaluations. On this view, emotions are not grounded in the *content* of an evaluative representation but, rather, in a distinctive sort of evaluative *attitude* that we take toward that content.

⁴⁹ See, for example, the special issue of *Dialectica* 69.3 (2015) entitled “Beyond Perceptualism,” dedicated to discussing the attitudinal theory of emotion.
This theory gets its impetus from a recognition of the myriad difficulties that arise from the view that emotions are grounded in evaluative representations. In the previous sections, we have examined some of these problems in the context of our discussion of moods. As we have seen, no matter how we articulate the kind of representational content that is supposed to drive the experience of moods—embodied appraisals (non-cognitivism), evaluative perceptions or construals (perceptualism), or evaluative judgments (cognitivism)—we can find many counterexamples, cases in which representations of this sort fail to generate the relevant emotional response. In light of these problems with representational accounts, attitudinalism argues that emotions are specific kinds of non-representational attitudes that we take toward the content of an evaluative representation. Thus, the emotion of anger, for example, is a certain kind of angry attitude that we take toward an object. Likewise, we experience the emotion of joy when we take a joyful attitude toward the content of our appraisals, perceptions, or judgments.

Proponents of attitudinalism argue that this theory provides the best explanation for the fact that we can experience a variety of different emotions in response to the same evaluative representations. Consider the case in which a person is no longer amused by a joke he has heard a hundred times (Herzberg 2012, p. 81). In this case, the person may insist that the joke is very funny, but explains that he has simply heard it too many times to be amused. As this example illustrates, we often find a divergence between the content of an evaluative representation and the attitude we take toward that content. Indeed, there is in principle no restriction on the kind of attitude that we might take toward any given evaluative representation. In fact, proponents of attitudinalism argue, we can see that emotions are individuated with respect to our
attitudes, rather than our evaluative representations. As Deonna & Teroni (2015, p. 298) put it,

The fact that an evaluative property features in the content of a mental state is hardly sufficient to make it an emotion, let alone an emotion of a specific type. For instance, one may among other things wonder, imagine, be surprised, disappointed, or indeed afraid that something is dangerous, and the same observation seems to hold for any evaluative content.

Thus, representing something as being dangerous does not necessarily generate the emotion of fear, because we can take up a different attitude toward that representation. If we adopt a disappointed attitude toward the fact that this object is dangerous, for example, we will experience the emotion of sadness, rather than of fear.

While the proponents of attitudinalism have yet to apply the theory to moods, we can imagine what such a theory might look like. Depending on our view of the intentional object of moods—for example, whether moods are distinguished from emotions by virtue of the fact that they are directed toward an indefinite series of particular objects, or by virtue of the fact that they are directed toward a very general object, such as the current trends in our lives, our lives as a whole, or the world in general—we can imagine how attitudinalism might work. For example, an attitudinalist theory of moods might hold that the mood of depression involves taking a depressed sort of attitude toward each of our construals. As we walk down the street in such a mood, for instance, we might perceive a beautiful building, a woman walking with her cute baby, an upbeat song playing on a car radio and so on. The depressed mood in this case would be constituted by the depressed attitude we now take toward these perceptions, rather than any change in the content of the perceptions themselves. If we were to try to articulate what it is like to experience such an attitude, we might use non-verbal cues such as tone of voice to express it, so as to avoid locating the depression in any
representational content. Imagine the drooping shoulders and the slow, despondent voice of Eeyore from the Winnie-the-Pooh books by A. A. Milne: “Well, [sigh], there’s another beautiful building… and, yeah… that baby is pretty cute I guess [sigh]…” In a similar manner, each kind of mood would be constituted by a distinctive sort of attitude that we would take toward each particular thing we encounter, or toward things in general.

While I agree with attitudinalism that moods are not grounded in the content of an evaluative representation, and I have advanced my own arguments to that end, I am skeptical of the explanatory value of the view that moods are grounded in attitudes. As I argued in Chapter One, an adequate account of moods is one that illuminates the logic governing how moods manifest themselves in our experience. What we seek is some sort of conceptual paradigm that can help us to understand the structural unity behind the variety of ways that the phenomenon shows up in our experience. But the attitudinal theory does little to illuminate the logic of moods. It is unhelpful to define a mood like depression in terms of a depressed attitude, because this self-referential formula provides no insight into why depression is experienced in the particular way that it is, and not in any other way. In this regard, the concept of attitude seems to function, at best, as a placeholder for a more specific concept that can explain why moods alter the content and structure of our experience as they do.

In recognition of this sort of concern, Deonna & Teroni (2015, p. 302) suggest that the specific sort of attitude that grounds emotions is a “felt action readiness”—in other words, a distinctive combination of bodily feelings and motivational states. Although this suggestion helps to specify the sort of attitude that supposedly drives emotions, adopting this suggestion for an account of moods would not go much distance
toward making the account more adequate. First, the account faces the difficulty of explaining why the relevant bodily feelings and motivations states will not turn out to be representational states, after all, and if not, what sort of intrinsic connection they have with the world. Second, the account would still face the challenge of explaining what sort of configuration of bodily feelings and motivational states are characteristic of each kind of mood. And as we have seen, there are likely to be counterexamples to any such proposal. In Chapter One, for example, I argued that the righteous indignation of an irritable mood might be pleasant to experience, rather than unpleasant, that a bored mood might bring about a state of intense agitation, rather than lethargy, and that a mood of profound tranquility might make our hearts pound in our chest, rather than making it calm and steady. Third, and most importantly, by focusing on bodily feelings and motivational states, the account would be in danger of leaving the other aspects of moods unaccounted for, including not only perceptions and cognitions, but also the pre-intentional attunements that I have described in the previous sections—namely, the way moods alter our experience of time, emotional accessibility, and normative grip. How, exactly, would a change in our felt action readiness bring about a systematic alteration in these other aspects of our experience? In light of these unanswered questions, we must conclude that, as things stand at present, developing an attitudinalist theory of moods does not appear to be a promising way to approach the task of constructing an adequate account of the phenomenon.

Let us review, then, where things stand in our search for an adequate account of the phenomenon of moods. Our central question is: What are moods—if not embodied appraisals of trends, perceptual dispositions, generalizing evaluative judgments, or kinds of felt action readiness—such that they alter the content and structure of our
experience in the particular ways they do, and not in other ways? This overarching question has several components that we can pull apart.

First, as we have seen, moods are global emotional responses, involving evaluative cognitions, evaluative perceptions, bodily feelings, motivational states, and pre-intentional attunements. Thus, we seek an account of moods that can allow us to answer the following questions regarding the logic that governs the ways that moods manifest themselves in our experience:

1. What are moods, such that they are global emotional responses? What is it about moods that can explain why they tend to alter all of these sorts of mental states in a simultaneous and systematically coordinated fashion?

2. Why do moods dispose us to think and reason in certain ways (often in ways that reflect “cognitive distortions” such as overgeneralizing) and dispose us to form certain kinds evaluative judgments (such as judgments that reflect our identities and worldviews)—while in some cases disposing us to remain emotionally disconnected from our evaluative judgments?

3. Why do moods dispose us to perceive objects as having evaluative properties that fit our mood—while in some cases disposing us to remain emotionally disconnected from our evaluative perceptions?

4. Why do moods dispose us to experience certain kinds of bodily feelings and motivational states—without being reducible to any particular configuration of bodily feelings and motivational states?

5. How is it possible that moods dispose us to experience certain kinds of emotions—but in some cases, we are able to experience an emotion that does not fit our mood, while our mood remains stable?
6. Why do moods alter our experience of time, emotional accessibility, and normative grip in the particular ways they do?

In contrast to emotions, which are directed toward specific intentional objects, moods are also non-specifically directed emotional responses. With this feature of moods in mind, an adequate account of moods should also allow us to answer the following questions regarding the kind of relationship that moods have with the world:

7. If moods are not directed toward specific intentional objects, what gives moods their shape, form, and logic?

8. What is it about moods that explains the way they are self-monitoring—manifesting our general sense of how we are doing?

9. What is it about moods that explains the way they are environment-monitoring—manifesting our general sense of how things are going?

Furthermore, we have seen that there are two broad classes of moods—tracking moods and thematic moods. As such, an adequate account of moods should help us to answer this question regarding the nature of moods:

10. How, exactly, are tracking moods and thematic moods related to one another?

And finally, we have seen that we sometimes experience moods as part of a group. In some cases, moods are shared by the group as a whole, even when individual members of the group have quite different mental states. As such, an adequate account of moods should help us to answer this question regarding collective moods:
11. How is it possible for a group to share a mood, even when individual members of the group have quite different mental states?

Each of the accounts I have discussed in this chapter has attempted to provide answers to some of these questions, though in each case, the theory fails to examine other questions on this list. As I develop a novel account of moods in the following chapters, I will endeavor to provide satisfying answers to all of these questions. In my view, moods are *enactments of the present situation*, and as such, moods establish a specific kind of temporal, locational, and normative context of significance that structures how we make sense of the particular objects we encounter. In the case of thematic moods, the situation that is enacted is one that has a distinctive *narrative structure*. Groups can experience a shared mood when they collectively enact a situation or a narratively structured context of significance, even when individual group members have different mental states about the context of significance that the group is enacting. Let us turn, then, from our critical analysis of the literature and toward an examination of this new way of thinking about the phenomenon of moods.
Chapter Three: Tracking Moods and the Present Situation

In the previous chapter, I argued that the major theories of emotions and moods in mainstream Anglo-American philosophy have failed to articulate an adequate account of the phenomenon of moods. While each of the theories we examined offers some insightful descriptions of ways that a change in our mood can alter our mental states, in each case we found that the theory is subject to significant counterexamples, instances in which moods do not manifest themselves in the ways the theory describes. Many of these counterexamples involved experiences of emotional disconnection, in which being in a mood leads us to become emotionally unresponsive to evaluative perceptions or judgments that would otherwise provoke a strong emotional reaction from us. Close examination of these cases has revealed that any attempt to account for moods in terms of a representational state of one kind or another will be unable to illuminate the logic governing the way that moods manifest themselves in our experience. Any such theory will inevitably presuppose, and so fail to account for, the existential dimension of moods—that is, the way that moods affect our experience of how things are present to us, even before we take up a re-presentational attitude toward what is present.

In this chapter and the following, I articulate a novel, positive account of moods that applies the insights we have gained in the previous chapter. This chapter focuses on the class of moods that I have called “tracking moods.” As I explained in Chapter One, tracking moods correspond to or “track” our sense of how we are faring in general, particularly with regard to our ongoing efforts to navigate the solicitations of our environment. As such, tracking moods typically fluctuate fluidly in the background of
our awareness as we move through our day. The central claim of this chapter is that a close examination of tracking moods reveals that moods affect our experience as they do because moods enact the “situational” character of our experience, thereby establishing a local context of significance that influences how we make sense of the objects that we encounter. By attuning us to what is (and what is not) at stake in the present situation, moods alter our sense of the overall significance of the things we experience.30

In order to clarify and develop the idea that moods are enactments of the present situation, I begin in Section One by discussing the nature of *situations* and arguing that *the present situation* is a distinctive kind of “sense-making structure,” a framework of interpretation that organizes our experience and enables us to direct our finite psychic resources toward responding appropriately to what matters most at present, all things considered. In Section Two, I argue that moods make manifest the situational character of our experience, and that this is what explains the logic governing the way moods manifest themselves in our experience. In Section Three, I argue that moods are not *representations* of the present situation, but *enactments* of it. Thus, moods both actively participate in the construction of the situational parameters of our experience—rather than merely representing the present situation, as though it were an independently given object—and passively respond to the situation as it develops. Finally, in Section

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30 In the following chapter, I will examine the other class of moods that I have identified—“thematic moods,” in which we become stubbornly preoccupied with a certain kind or category of concerns, even when these concerns do not seem to correspond to the actual solicitations of the present environment. It is important to note here that although the present chapter focuses on tracking moods, in the following chapter I will argue that thematic moods are essentially a distinctive kind of tracking mood, in the sense that, on my view, thematic moods enact a situation that is part of a larger narrative structure. As such, the observations that I make here about tracking moods will largely apply to thematic moods as well—both kinds of moods are enactments of the present situation—though some additional analysis will be needed to explain the unique features of thematic moods. For this reason, although this chapter focuses on tracking moods, and the examples I use will exclusively feature tracking moods, I will frame my discussion as an analysis of *moods* in general. (See fn5 in Chapter One for my argument that these two classes of moods are the only kinds of moods we commonly experience in everyday life, so that an account of them suffices as an account of moods in general.)
Four, I argue that by appreciating the idea that moods enact the situational character of our experience, we can better understand why this same process can generate experiences of emotional disconnection in cases where we encounter an object that seems “out of place” in the present situation. In these ways, then, my account of moods as enactments of the present situation illuminates several important aspects of the phenomenon that alternative accounts struggle to explain.

§3.1. The present situation

Although the concept of situation plays a prominent role in the tradition of existential phenomenology, it is used in a variety of ways and rarely defined with much precision. Heidegger offers some brief but insightful remarks about the nature of a situation in an early lecture on Aristotle. In this lecture, Heidegger (1987, p. 173) defines a situation as “a specific unity in natural life–experience,” or as Guignon (2000, p. 84–5) puts it, “a cohesive…unity within the ongoing flow of life.” What, then, accounts for the relative “unity” of a situation? On Heidegger’s view, a situation is constituted by a collection of objects (items, events, states of affairs, relationships, and possibilities) that are unified insofar as they are all located within a shared context of significance. For example, when we are late and stuck in traffic on Monday morning, all of the elements of the situation—the brake lights, movements, and horns of the other cars, the traffic signals, the streets and sidewalks, the clock on the car’s dashboard, the sounds of the radio station we are listening to, and so on—are experienced as parts of a single, meaningful whole. These various objects are all experienced as elements of a single situation characterized by urgency and frustration, as we attempt to cope with the complex puzzle of traffic while everyone else on the crowded road is also trying to get
the week’s business started and arrive at their destinations without being late. This is not to say that every individual element of the situation will have the *exact same* significance, of course. If a driver graciously lets us cut in front of her, for example, this moment of generosity might contrast sharply with the other, more frustrating things we are encountering. However, all of these individual elements, including this driver’s generosity, are experienced in terms of a shared context of significance—that is, in terms of the fact that they are things that we encounter as we are running late and stuck in traffic on Monday morning, dealing with the urgency, frustration, and petty injustices that are assailing us.

While the precise boundaries of a situation usually cannot be determined with precision—for example, it is often difficult or impossible to say precisely when or where any such situation begins and ends—when we step back from the details, it is fairly easy to see that the situation described above has a meaningful structure that distinguishes it from the other situations, such as the situation of listening to upbeat music as we get ready to go out with friends on a Saturday night, or the situation of relaxing and reading a book at home on a Sunday afternoon. Heidegger (1987, p. 173) argues that because the elements of situations are unified through their shared context of significance, a situation can be distinguished from a mere “process” (*Vorgang*), in which objects are unified merely through *causal connections*, such as the process of electrical discharge, which “could be theoretically observed in the physics laboratory” (p. 173). In contrast, he says, what happens in a situation we are involved in “has a relation to me” (p. 174), and indeed, what happens *matters* to me in ways that are determined in part by the “motivation” I bring to the situation (p. 173).
Heidegger (1987, p. 175ff) emphasizes that situations must be understood holistically, because each element of a situation is experienced in the particular way that it relates to the other elements of the situation in the context of the situation as whole. He offers an example of a hiker climbing a mountain to see the sunrise (p. 173–4). At the moment of reaching the summit, he says, the hiker is absorbed in the situation of the climb, and this alters how she experiences the various things that she encounters at the summit. As Guignon (2000, p. 86) puts it, “The sun, clouds, and rock ledge fill the moment and have a distinctive quality that is sharpened and brought into focus by the long climb.” The hiker experiences each of these individual objects differently from the way she otherwise would if she were not absorbed in this situation; the sun, clouds, and rock ledge seem different somehow within this context of significance.

Digging more deeply into this line of thought, we can discern three constitutive and interrelated aspects of a situation: time, place, and normative grip. First, a situation is a cohesive temporal unity within the ongoing flow of life. Although we may not be able to say exactly when a situation begins and ends, we experience situations as being episodic in nature, lasting for a certain period of time before another situation arises. Thus, we might say that a situation involves a set of circumstances that take place within a “duration-block,” the timeframe in which the situation unfolds. This duration-block has a distinctively holistic temporal structure. That is, it is a chunk of time in which prior events within the duration-block are experienced in terms of the (anticipated) future events, which in turn are experienced in terms of the previous events, and all events are experienced in terms of the significance of the situation as whole. For example, in the case described by Heidegger, the situation of finally reaching the summit after a long, early morning hike to see the sunrise might be defined with reference to a number of events
that happened that morning—waking up early, quietly getting ready by lamplight, braving the cold morning air, navigating difficult passes on the mountain, and so on. The experience of reaching the summit is experienced “in terms of” these past events, in the sense that it is experienced as being a culmination of the morning’s efforts, so that the distinctive qualitative character of that experience is different than it would be if it occurred in a different temporal context. In contrast, this situation is not experienced in terms of many other events in the past, such as having lunch the previous Tuesday.

As this example illustrates, situations are often nested within other situations, and any given duration-block may “refer” to another, wider duration-block. As Heidegger (1919/2000, p. 174) puts it, “The individual ‘durations’ of various situations interpenetrate each other.” The situation of finally reaching the summit, for instance, is embedded in the situation of climbing a mountain to see the sunrise. This situation, in turn, might be nested within another situation with a more extended temporal scope. For example, we might imagine that the hiker is grieving the loss of a loved one, so that the times she shared with the departed and the painful moments in her time of mourning are also present in the moment of reaching the summit, influencing the way she experiences the significance of the sun, clouds, and rock ledge that she encounters there. While we may not be able to identify a definite limit to this “nesting” pattern, this does not mean that every past experience is equally present in the moment of reaching the summit. As I noted above, the hiker’s quiet, early-morning preparations might alter the way she experiences the sunrise in a way that having lunch last Tuesday does not. Moreover, although some past events (such as learning how to walk as a child) might have been causally necessary for her to reach the summit, those events might not be experienced as part of the content or structure of the context of significance that defines
the situation, even while an event that is not directly causally implicated in this way (such as the death of a loved one) may play a large role in shaping this particular context of significance.

The duration-block that defines a situation also extends into the future, in the sense that situations are defined in part by the meaningful ways that they might develop, which Heidegger (1919/2000, p. 174) refers to as a situation’s “tendencies.” For example, the situation of reaching the summit is partly structured by the implicit or explicit anticipation of a range of possible events that would make sense as “following from” the previous events. Perhaps upon reaching the summit, the hiker might have a joyful moment of appreciating the beauty of nature, for instance, or perhaps she might experience a more peaceful reflection on the meaning of life, or an exhilarating epiphany that helps her come to terms with her loss. These would all be meaningful developments of the situation. Not every future event, however, will be experienced as a development of the situation. At any given moment, countless things are happening around us, and most of them are not particularly relevant to the situation’s context of significance. These events are experienced as “random” occurrences rather than developments—“noise” rather than “signal,” so to speak—and they are usually relegated to the background of our awareness fairly quickly as we return our focus to the situation at hand. Some events might even inaugurate a new situation by radically altering the terms in which we experience the significance of the things we are encountering. For example, if upon reaching the summit, the hiker encounters an angry bear, growling and preparing to attack, the situation may change completely. In this case, the duration-block that constitutes the new situation makes reference to the two prominent
possibilities of escaping or not escaping a bear attack, and it does not make reference to the morning’s quiet preparations or the hiker’s grief.

In addition to being a “temporal unity” in the ways I have just described, a situation is also a cohesive locational unity within the ongoing flow of life. Indeed, the present situation is definitive of our sense of here, the place in which we are located, in a way analogous to how it defines our sense of now, the current duration-block. The kind of “place” in which we are located when we are located within the present situation is more than a mere geographical position. Instead, a place is a location where certain kinds of “imports” (Taylor 1985, p. 48) become practically, perceptually, cognitively, and emotionally accessible to us—that is, where we are able to respond to certain kinds of environmental solicitations and certain kinds of evaluative properties that the objects that we encounter may have.31 For example, the summit is a place where the beauty of a particular vista is accessible. In this place, not only is the beauty of this landscape displayed majestically, the particular configuration of the objects at the summit—an outcropping of rocks where a person can sit and look over the valley, with no trees to block the view, and nothing else to distract a person from her reflections—lend themselves to appreciating the view. Organized by this shared context of significance, all of the particular elements that surround a person in this place are experienced as constituting a meaningful whole—the rocky ledge, the vista, the bracing gusts of wind, the wildflowers, the scrubby bushes hanging onto the sides of rocks, the smells of the air and earth, and so on. Again, this does not mean that every individual element that is geographically nearby has exactly the same significance. For example, a pile of litter left

31 Heidegger’s (1927/1962) work—particularly his distinction between the “present-at-hand” and the “ready-to-hand”—can be a particularly valuable resource for clarifying the distinction between place and geographical location. For excellent discussions of Heidegger’s views on the experience of space and place, see Malpas 1997, 2000; Arisaka 1995, 1996; Blattner 2006; Dreyfus 1991. Also see Heidegger’s (1972) discussion of place in the essay, “Building Dwelling Thinking.”
on the summit by other hikers might contrast sharply with the other objects located there. Rather, the point here is that when the hiker is on the summit, a shared context of significance frames the hiker’s experience of the things that are in this location—a holistic, unified, distinct, and meaningful setting within which objects will take their particular places, or else will stand out as being “out of place.”

The place that defines a situation may be “nested” within other places. For example, the summit is defined in part by the way it opens up onto the larger landscape, the hills, valleys, opens skies, and so on. Likewise, there might be smaller places nested within the locational boundaries of the summit itself, such as a particular outcropping of rocks that forms a natural bench, with a perfect spot to set down a water bottle and eat a snack while taking in the view. While there is no fixed limit to this inward and outward nesting process, not every place will be experientially connected to the present situation. For example, the summit might “refer” to the mountain path in a way that it does not “refer” to the parking lot of a nearby grocery store. The qualitative character of the experience of the summit’s open vista is made more dramatic and impactful by the way that this expansive vista suddenly explodes into view at the end of a long path where visibility is limited by the surrounding trees. In contrast, the experience of the summit is not similarly affected by the grocery store parking lot. However, the summit might be implicitly or explicitly experienced in terms of a more distant place, such as a certain rooftop where the hiker once shared a memorable conversation with her departed loved one.

Because places are locations where certain imports are accessible, places are themselves only accessible when we are responsive to those imports. Just as a reconfiguration of objects might change the nature of a place, if we approach these
“same” objects differently, they might constitute a different place altogether. For example, if a person were on the same summit for the purpose of doing a geological survey for a coal company, the beauty of nature may not be accessible to him, as all of the elements there would be interpreted within a different context of significance—the sun being a mere source of light, the wind being an obstacle to the task at hand, the wildflowers being an indication of soil composition, and so on. In this sense, we might suspect that a dog could never truly be in an art museum as such, because while the dog might be inside the relevant building, an art museum as a place is a location where the aesthetic qualities of paintings and sculptures are accessible, and a dog could never be solicited by these particular kinds of imports. In a similar way, we can never ascertain what place a person is in just by knowing his geographical position. However, although our projects, abilities, and cognitive, perceptual, and emotional states are essential for our capacity to experience a given place as the place it is, we typically do not experience our own contributions as being essential in this way. Rather, in most cases, when we are in a place we simply experience the things around us as soliciting our responses; as Heidegger (1919/2000, p. 174) puts its, “The I does not need to be in view, it flows with the situation.”

A third definitive aspect of a situation is its normative character; a situation is a cohesive normative unity within the ongoing flow of life. A situation involves a set of concerns that are at stake in the situation and so shape the way we make sense of the various environmental solicitations we encounter. For example, if the central concern of the morning climb is the appreciation of the beauty of nature, this concern will determine what objects we experience as being relevant or irrelevant to the present situation. The smell of the pine trees, for instance, might be experienced as being
relevant to what it is at stake in the situation, while the fact that the hiker’s clothes are out of fashion this season is irrelevant. The normative context that defines a situation can be thought of as a pre-reflective, *all-things-considered* assessment of what matters overall, here and now. As the hiker gets up early in the morning and heads out into the cold, for example, she may find it unpleasant to get out of her warm bed and shiver in the brisk air. But in the context of this situation, these concerns about her comfort are outweighed by other concerns, so that the prospect of going on the hike is experienced as the appropriate response to her present environmental solicitations, all things considered.

The normative aspect of a situation is closely interrelated with its temporal and locational aspects. What is experienced as being a constitutive element of the present situation—what objects are *here*, within the present place, and what is happening *now*, within the present duration-block—will be determined by what is currently *at stake*, just as what is currently at stake will be determined by what is going on here and now. If the appreciation of natural beauty is what is at stake in the situation, then the mountain path will be able to present itself as a place where this kind of beauty is particularly accessible. As such, certain objects in this place, such as the smell of the surrounding pine trees, will resonate deeply and with immediacy. Likewise, the whole morning will be structured as a unified duration-block in which reaching the summit and taking in the majestic sunrise is a fulfilling *culmination* of the hike. And because the smell of the pine trees was relevant and emotionally accessible in this context, this past experience will be retained when the hiker is standing on the windy summit and the smell of the trees is no longer detectable, helping to structure the distinctive qualitative character of
her experience in that moment in time. In these ways, the temporal, locational, and normative aspects of the present situation all co-vary as parts of a structured whole.

The normative structure of a situation can be further clarified by comparing situations, as I have described them, to the way that Dewey (1925/1986) describes what he calls “experiences.” As Burke (2000, p. 105) explains, Dewey defines an experience as an “episode of reactive stabilization.” Experiences of all kinds, Dewey argues—from momentary experiences such as feeling a cold draft or viewing a tree, to more enduring experiences like watching a movie, shopping for groceries, pursuing a scientific inquiry, owning a house, and so on—all of these experiences “begin with a disturbance” in an agent’s “field of interactivity” that “calls for a response.” As Burke (p. 106) puts it,

An experience is thus a process with (roughly) a beginning, a middle, and an end—moving from some kind of tension (conflict, disturbance, imbalance, threat, disequilibrium, etc.) toward some kind of resolution (safety, balance, solution, security, equilibrium, etc.). It begins as an activity (a stimulus), and it ends as an activity (a response), and in between, it moves more or less continuously through various phases of activity towards some more acceptable way of being, acting, doing, etc…. Innately, the aim or goal of an experience is to achieve an acceptable and conclusive manner of operating which is not problematic….

To be clear, an experience, as Dewey describes it, is not identical to a situation: a situation is a setting within which a number of experiences will share a common temporal, spatial, and normative context of significance. But despite this difference, a situation can also be described as a kind of “episode of reactive stabilization,” in the sense that a situation begins with an initiating disturbance, such that some concern or concerns are at stake and solicit an appropriate response that will be “an acceptable and conclusive manner of operating.” The initiating disturbance here need not be unpleasant or negative in character. For example, the situation of relaxing and reading a book on a Sunday afternoon may be initiated by “disturbances” such as not having any errands to run and the extraordinary peacefulness of the afternoon. In this case, the activity of
relaxing and reading a book makes sense as an acceptable and conclusive manner of operating in response to these particular “disturbances” or solicitations.

In the light of these pragmatist considerations, we can describe a situation as being essentially an arena for appropriately responsive activity. In particular, the present situation is a setting in which we are called upon to respond to what matters, overall, here and now. By making sense of our experience in terms of the present situation, we thus interpret the things that we encounter through a kind of “frame” that allows us to direct our finite psychic resources toward responding appropriately to what is at stake in the present situation, all things considered. The framing effect that occurs when we are embedded in a situation is crucial to our capacity to function in the world. As Pirsig (1974, p. 69) notes in Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance,

All the time we are aware of millions of things around us…. We could not possibly be conscious of these things and remember all of them because our mind would be so full of useless details we would be unable to think. From all this awareness we must select … a handful of sand from the endless landscape of awareness around us…

By packaging our experience into the shape of a situation, we make just this sort of “selection” regarding what is relevant to the concerns that are at stake, here and now, thus altering the terms in which we will interpret the objects that we encounter.

If this analysis is correct, it implies the present situation is a sense-making structure that is always already organizing our everyday experience. This sense-making structure is interactive in nature, insofar as experiencing a situation necessarily involves making sense of our own responses as being appropriate or inappropriate with regard to the situation’s inherent demand for a “reactive stabilization” of a certain kind. Thus, in each case our sense of how things are going is intrinsically interconnected with our sense of how we are doing with regard to responding to how things are going. In this section,
we have focused on the “object” side of this relation—that is, the sense of *how things are going in general*. Now that we have examined the nature of situations, we are in position to examine the “subject” side of this relation—that is, the sense of *how we are doing in general*. This takes us, then, to moods: the experiential manifestation of our sense of the present situation.

§3.2. Moods and the present situation

According to my account of moods, the reason moods affect the content and structure of our experience in the ways they do is because moods are *enactments of the present situation*. Moods are *global* emotional experiences, because the situations that moods enact are settings in which we are called upon to respond appropriately to what matters, overall, here and now, and this appropriate response typically involves our cognition, perception, bodily feelings, and motivational states. And in contrast to emotions, which are directed toward particular objects, moods are *non-specifically* directed, because the present situation is not a particular object but a temporal, locational, and normative context of significance, a general setting within which the particular objects we encounter are made present to us. In this section, I begin by developing the idea that there is an intrinsic connection between moods and the present situation; in the following section, I will argue that the nature of this intrinsic connection is one of “enactment” rather than representation.

As we have seen, moods make manifest our sense of how things are going *in general*. The various accounts we have examined have offered different views of how we should understand the phrase “in general.” Cognitivism, for example, holds that moods are evaluative judgments about *everything*—for example, about one’s life or the world as
a whole—while perceptualism holds that moods are a disposition to perceive *each thing*—that is, each particular object we encounter—in a certain way. On my view, in contrast, the phrase “in general” here refers to the specific kind of “generality” involved in the present situation. That is, moods make manifest our sense of how things are going *within the present situation as a whole*. Now, in some circumstances, the present situation might be relatively wide in its scope. For example, if we are hiking a mountain and pensively wrestling with thoughts about how a traumatic experience in our childhood has shaped our life decisions, what we experience as “the present situation” might encompass almost the entirety of our lifetime: “What am I going to do about this situation—about my messed up life?” In most cases, however, the temporal, locational, and normative scope of the present situation is far more restricted, perhaps including the morning climb as a whole, or an even more specific “episode of reactive stabilization,” such as encountering a fork in the path and trying to decide which direction to take. This is why our moods often do not reflect our sense of how our whole lives are going, or how the world is as a whole. A person can feel fairly secure with regard to the grand, existential questions of her life but still find herself in an anxious mood, simply by becoming involved in a situation that may be threatening.

Likewise, while moods make manifest our sense of how we are faring with respect to navigating *the solicitations of the environment*, there are several ways of understanding phrase “the solicitations of the environment.” Perceptualism, for example, holds that moods dispose us to perceive an indefinite series of particular objects as having a certain kind of evaluative property. On my view, in contrast, “the solicitations of the environment” should be understood as referring to these solicitations *as a structured whole*. Moods are not merely the “sum” of our emotional responses to each
individual solicitation (considered in isolation) but, rather, an all-things-considered response to the way that these individual solicitations collectively form a holistic “gestalt.” This is why our moods often do not reflect our evaluations of the particular objects we encounter. A person can perceive and judge many things around her to be wonderful but still find herself in a depressed mood, as she experiences these individual wonderful things as being located within a basically depressing context. Thus, we might say that our mood is an answer to the question, “What is the nature of the present situation as a whole?” Or in other words, “What is the overarching temporal, locational, and normative structure that is organizing what is taking place, here and now?”

In this way, our mood “tracks” or corresponds to the present situation as it develops, and our mood changes when the present situation evolves into a different situation. For example, we might imagine that when José begins to assemble a bookshelf he ordered online, he is in high spirits and a cheerful mood as he sets to work, enjoying the delicious beer he has just opened and the excellent music he has put on for the occasion. In this case, the temporal context of the situation is structured in part by his anticipation of the nice addition that this handsome and practical bookshelf will make to the room. The situation is taking place in his home, a place where the distinctive goods of the domestic realm are accessible. The normative context of the situation is thus structured by José’s involvement in the activity of constructing the bookshelf as part of his larger project of creating and enjoying a happy and comfortable home. As Dreyfus and Kelly (2001) might put it, in this moment it is as though José has been touched by Hestia, the ancient Greek goddess of the hearth, as he is gripped by the imports related to dwelling in the ease and intimacy of his home. On my view, then, José’s cheerful mood is the experiential manifestation of this situational context.
This situational context is a general setting within which José can encounter particular objects and make sense of them in terms of how they are relevant to what is at stake at this time and place. For this reason, it is possible for José to remain in a cheerful mood despite encountering particular objects that have evaluative properties that do not fit his cheerful mood, and even despite experiencing mood-incongruent emotions in response to these objects. For example, as he opens the box that his bookshelf was shipped in, José may feel apprehension about how many pieces there are to keep track of and how confusing the instructions seem to be; he may be disappointed to find that there are some blemishes and imperfections on the pieces; he may feel frustrated that he cannot find a certain tool he needs, and so on. But as he encounters each of these objects and experiences the corresponding emotion, he may remain embedded within the temporal, locational, and normative parameters of the situation. As such, he may remain in a cheerful mood—though perhaps his cheerfulness may be beginning to wane a bit. This is because, despite these setbacks, the whole of the situation presents itself to him in a generally positive light. If he were to express his state of mind at this moment, he might say, “Well, I’m worried about keeping track of all these pieces, and I’m disappointed about these ugly blemishes…but overall, I’m looking forward to enjoying this bookshelf, and besides, the music is great and I’m loving this beer.”

But after some time, we can imagine that José’s sense of the present situation changes, along with his mood. As José continues to face frustrating setbacks, we may find that the temporal scope of his present situation has become more restricted, no longer shaped by the long-term prospect of enjoying the bookshelf as a part of his home, but shaped only by the ever-growing possibility that he may be forced to give up without accomplishing the task at hand. The locational context becomes more restricted.
as well, as he becomes more focused on his workstation, rather than on his home as a whole. Likewise, the normative structure of the situation is no longer oriented around the concerns of happy homemaking. Ares, the god of war, takes the place of Hestia as José is gripped by the injustice of those who designed this bookshelf and wrote the instructions. As he becomes absorbed in a grim determination to finish the job, he feels increasingly distant and disconnected from the music and beer, which he still “likes” well enough, but which now have little weight in his all-things-considered interpretation of how things are going in general. In a word, José’s mood has become irritable.

As this example illustrates, moods organize our experience in a distinctive way. A change in our mood will bring about a change in our experience of the temporal structure of the present moment, the emotional accessibility of the objects around us, and the normative context of what is present. Moods do not affect these aspects of our experience in merely random ways; rather, they co-vary as elements of the situation in which we are embedded. By thus making manifest the situational character of our experience, moods systematically alter the terms in which the things we encounter are intelligible to us, “framing” our experience in such a way as to alter the overall “gestalt” of what is present to us.32

By establishing the situational context of our experience in these ways, moods tend to give rise to certain thoughts, perceptions, bodily feelings, and desires. However, although moods dispose us to experience certain kinds of mental states, moods cannot be reduced to, or fully explained in terms of, these mental states. For example, in the

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32 The analysis of moods as a kind of interpretive frame finds deep resonances with the view of emotions found in Maiese (2011, 2014), whose work is also broadly Heideggerian in orientation. Maiese argues that emotions—or “conscious embodied desires”—establish a “pre-deliberative evaluative backdrop” that “frames” our decisions and moral judgments. For a discussion of “framing theory” and the framing effects generated by emotions, see Druckman & McDermott 2008.
normative context that is established by his irritable mood, José may be disposed to think certain sorts of thoughts. He may think that the designers of the bookshelf are incompetent, inconsiderate, or predatory, and he may concoct a larger story about the injustice, perhaps putting it into a political context, or perhaps seeing it as typical of his crummy lot in life. Alternatively, however, he may think about how lucky he has been not to have this problem before, or about the importance of forgiveness and compassion to those who harm us. In the latter case, while these “positive” thoughts may not appear to reflect an irritable mood, on closer inspection we can see that all of these thoughts assume that an injustice has occurred and must be reconciled with or forgiven—that is, all of these thoughts are ways of making sense of things in terms of the same situational context. This is one reason why our bad moods can be recalcitrant despite our efforts to think positively. Whatever sort of cognitive attitude we take toward particular objects and aspects of the situation, as long as we remain embedded in the present situation we will make sense of those objects and aspects in terms of the situation’s basic normative structure. As such, certain considerations will be normatively gripping while others will not seem as compelling. This example illustrates Heidegger’s (1929a/1995, p. 82) insight that, “Attunements are not a class of lived experience, such that the realm and order of experiences would themselves remain untouched.” I would put the point this way: moods are not explained by the mental states we experience when we are in a mood, but by the way that those mental states are structured. For this reason, a mood does tend to alter the content of our mental states, but this manifestation of the mood is determined by the underlying change it brings about in “the realm and order of experiences”—that is, by the way it alters the terms in which we make sense of the things we encounter.
Likewise, because moods embed us in a certain locational context, they will dispose a person to have certain kinds of perceptions, although these perceptions do not themselves constitute or explain the mood. For example, in his irritable mood, José finds himself in a place where the injustice of the situation is particularly accessible. Although he is geographically located in his house, from a phenomenological perspective it might be more accurate to describe him as located at a workstation, contending with the setbacks that assail him as he tries to complete the task at hand. In this place, José will likely be disposed to see things as being unjust, inadequate, contemptible, and so on. However, it is possible that he might be disposed to attend to other, more positive features of the things around him, such as the excellent quality of the beer or music, perhaps as a way of temporarily escaping the desperateness of the situation. In this case, these objects may appear as being good but nonetheless seem out of place or distant from him, so that he experiences an emotional disconnection from these evaluative perceptions. Alternatively, he may find that he does respond emotionally to these evaluative perceptions, but this emotional response does little to change his mood. In fact, appreciating the goodness of the beer and music may only highlight the comparative badness of the situation, and so entrench his irritable mood.

Thus, while moods do bring about sweeping alterations in our evaluative perceptions, these changes are specifically structured by the present situation. With this in mind, we can see that the perceptualist account is too simplistic. Perceptualism holds that moods are like colored lenses, disposing us to be especially responsive to certain classes of evaluative perceptions. For example, anxious moods are said to dispose us to be especially responsive to perceptions of threats, irritable moods dispose us to be responsive to perceptions of injustices, and so on. But José’s irritable mood does not
necessarily dispose him to be responsive to every perception of injustice. Embedded in his battle to assemble the bookshelf, he may not be particularly responsive to news about a war crime that has been committed in a foreign country—even if he would normally be quite upset by this information—because this object is out of place in the present situation. In this case, his mood has not organized the situational setting in such a way to enable him to respond effectively to that particular injustice. Likewise, contrary to what perceptualism would predict, moods do not dispose us to be unresponsive to all mood-incongruent evaluative properties. In José’s irritable mood, he may be unresponsive to the deliciousness of his beer and the excellence of the music, because these particular items are irrelevant to the present situation. But it is also possible that José does respond emotionally to these evaluative perceptions, but simply responds to them in terms of the situational context—for example, as being emblematic of the things that his present situation is preventing him from enjoying more fully. And if José suddenly figures out how to proceed with a certain step in the assembly, he may be especially responsive to this event’s positive evaluative properties, because the event will make sense as an important development of the present situation. In each case, José does not respond in a uniform manner to a given class of evaluative property but, rather, responds in more complex ways that reflect the particular situation in which he is embedded.

In a similar manner, a change in mood will dispose us to experience certain kinds of “felt action readiness”—that is, certain configurations of bodily feelings and motivational states—and will tend to dispose us not to experience states of felt action readiness that do not fit our mood. For this reason, when we desire to do something that does not fit our mood, our mood can prevent us becoming involved in that activity.
by disabling our capacity to experience the relevant bodily feelings and motivational states. This point is illustrated by the case of boredom, in which we experience a kind of breakdown in the normal connection between our mood and the solicitations of our environment. For example, in Ch. 2.2 we discussed Heidegger's (1929a/1995, §23) description of a man who is in a bored mood as he waits for a train to arrive and so he finds himself unable to act—he opens up a book but discovers that he cannot seem to focus on the text and so puts it down; he repeats empty gestures like checking the train schedule, pacing, and looking at his watch; he walks around the town looking for something to do but feels as though he is being “held in limbo,” as though each thing he encounters were “refusing itself” to him. This breakdown in his capacity to become embedded in a situation leaves him with a sense that it is not the right time or place for any of the activities that are available to him, and nothing that is happening is relevant to what is currently at stake. With this example in mind, we might speculate that a person who had no capacity to experience moods would find himself surrounded by things that matter in various ways, but would be unable to organize this field of experiential presence in a way that enabled him to be become involved in meaningful activity. By establishing the situational character of our experience, moods enable our responsive activity, organizing and marshaling our “psychic resources”—especially our thoughts, perceptions, bodily feelings, and motivational states—toward responding appropriately to the solicitations of the environment.

But while moods dispose us to experience certain bodily feelings and motivational states, they cannot be reduced to these states of felt action readiness. In his irritable mood, for example, José may have a variety of motivational states. He may want nothing more than finish the job and have no desire to do anything else—“I will
put this bookshelf together even if it kills me!” Alternatively, he may desperately want
to quit and attend to other things—“I don’t need this ugly bookshelf anyway!” Either of
these opposing motivational states could reflect his irritable mood equally well. As this
example shows, just as it would be a mistake to try to identify a person’s mood by
looking at the content of her thoughts and perceptions, it would also be a mistake to try
to identify a mood by looking only at the content of a person’s felt action readiness,
rather than trying to discern how this content is structured within a situational context.

§3.3. Moods as enactments of the present situation

From what has been said so far in this chapter, we can see that our moods have
an intrinsic relationship to the present situation and the activity we are currently
involved in. It is not the case, for example, that our moods are merely correlated with the
activity that we are currently involved in, as a result of the fact that this kind of activity
tends to cause a person to have more pleasant or unpleasant thoughts, perceptions, and
feelings. As Heidegger (1929a/1995, p. 67) puts it:

Attunements are the fundamental ways in which we find ourselves disposed in
such and such a way… And yet this ‘one is in such and such a way’ is not—is never—simply a consequence or side-effect of our thinking, doing, and acting. It is—to put it crudely—the presupposition for such things, the ‘medium’ within
which they first happen.

Moods are indeed a “medium” or vehicle that brings forth our thoughts and actions as
elements of a structured whole—namely, as particular elements of our relationship to
the present situation.

But what, exactly, is the nature of the intrinsic relationship that moods have
with the present situation? Why should we not conclude, for example, that moods are
simply a more general kind of emotion—an intentional mental state that is directed
toward the present situation, instead of toward a particular object? The reason this sort of analysis is inherently inadequate is that the present situation is not an object, but a setting within which objects are located. We can and often do have a variety of intentional mental states directed toward the present situation, but these mental states presuppose, and so cannot account for, the way that our experience is organized within the specific temporal, locational, and normative context of the present situation. This is why we are often unresponsive to mental states that are about our present situation. For example, if we are in a bored mood, we may form a judgment that the present situation is one in which we have a many pleasant opportunities, but nonetheless we may find that this judgment fails to correspond with our affective experience—and does little to change it.

When we consider how dramatically our sense of the present situation can change when our mood changes, we may be tempted to conclude that moods simply impose a situational structure upon our experience. We might even suspect that moods can arbitrarily construct any sort of situation out of whatever materials may be on hand. For example, even if we were dying alone in a gutter, if we happen to be in a cheerful mood, we might think, “At least it is not raining,” and experience this fact as being definitive of how things are going, all things considered. But on the other hand, moods are rarely experienced as arbitrarily imposing a certain situational structure onto an inherently unstructured field of experience. On the contrary, moods are experienced as being responsive to the nature of the present situation, indeed, as “tracking” the ways that the present situation develops and changes. How, then, can we reconcile these competing intuitions? Are moods passively receptive to way the present situation is, or do moods actively construct the situational character of our experience? As we will see,
the concept of enactment is particularly helpful for resolving this puzzle. Moods neither passively represent the present situation, nor actively impose a situational structure onto experience—rather, moods enact the present situation.

The concept of enactment (or “enaction”) has emerged out of recent work in the domain of philosophy of mind that seeks to naturalize constructs such as consciousness, meaning, values, and intelligence. Such metaphysical issues are well beyond the scope of my dissertation, but a brief examination of the “enactivist” school of thought will be helpful for understanding the nature of enactment in general. As Weber and Varela (2002) explain, enactivism begins with the insight that all living systems are “autopoietic”—literally, self-making—in the sense that they continuously regenerate the conditions of their own survival. One important way that living systems regenerate the conditions of their own survival is through the process of metabolism. In metabolism, a living system exchanges matter with its environment through a porous border. This porous border, in turn, bounds the living system, constituting it as a unity that is distinct from the surrounding environment. Thus, through the process of metabolism, a relation arises between the living system and its environment.

Proponents of enactivism emphasize the idea that the relation between a living system and its environment is holistic in character, in the sense that the particular elements that are thus related are interdependent and inter-defined. For example, the porous border that bounds the living system, and so constitutes it as a discrete entity, is continually constructed and maintained by the very entity that this border constitutes. Likewise, through metabolism, the living system exchanges material with its environment, but this environment is specifically defined in terms of what the living

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33 Enactivism and the concept of enaction were introduced by Varela, Thompson & Rosch (1991), though this work draws from Maturana & Varela’s (1980) theory of autopoiesis. Enactivists theories of emotion can be found in Colombetti (2010) and Hutto (2012).
system metabolizes. For example, the environments that are encountered by a bacterium that eats sugar may be defined in terms of the presence or absence of sugar. A bacterium could never encounter a computer, for instance, because computers, as such, are not part of its environment, as it has no way to metabolize or otherwise interact with them. As Weber & Varela (2002, p. 117-118) might put it, computers are not part of the bacterium’s “Umwelt.”

The key here is to realize that because there is an individuality that finds itself produced by itself, it is ipso facto a locus of sensation and agency, a living impulse always already in relation with its world. There cannot be an individuality which is isolated and folded into itself. There can only be an individuality that copes, relates and couples with the surroundings, and inescapably provides its own world of sense… By defining itself and thereby creating the domains of self and world, the organism creates a perspective which changes the world from a neutral place to an Umwelt that always means something in relation to the organism.

Thus, while it is true, in a sense, that a living system metabolizes certain things in its environment, this way of articulating the idea—in which we imply that it is the living system that is doing the metabolizing—obscures a deeper truth. Namely, it is the metabolizing process that continually constitutes the living system as the living system it is, just as it is the metabolizing process that continually constitutes the living system’s environment as the environment it is. Neither the living system nor its environment exist or can be understood independently of this metabolizing relationship. For this reason, we can say that both the living system and its environment are enacted through the metabolizing process.

“Enactment” is a fitting term to describe this bootstrapping process of self-making, in which the relation between a living entity and its environment relates into existence both the entity and its environment. The term “enactment” calls to mind actors who are enacting a scene on stage—a context in which this sort of autopoiesis is indeed
commonplace. Consider, for example, a live performance in the genre of “improv comedy,” in which actors collaborate to improvise comedic scenarios simply by following each other’s cues rather than a prepared script. In the way the actors speak and move, for instance, they might imaginatively construct and project a scene in which a king is sitting on a throne, issuing orders and discussing matters of court. In this case, it would be inappropriate to say that one of these actors perceives the king issuing orders and so on, since the king does not exist as such independently of being perceived as the king by the other actors. We might be tempted to say that the actors perceive the king into existence, but the concept of perceptual representation implies that there is an independently existing object to be perceptually represented (or misrepresented). Perception is an inherently receptive concept, whereas the relationship of the actor to the king is more active and constructive. Thus, it is more accurate to say that the king and his court are not perceived but enacted by the actors.\footnote{See Noé’s (2004) enactivist account of visual perception for a detailed discussion of the traditional conception of perception as essentially receptive. If the concept of perception is suitably modified according to enactivist principles, the contrast I am drawing between perception and enaction disappears.}

On the other hand, this way of articulating the point obscures the idea that the actors are themselves enacted by their enactment of the scene. To see this, consider that once an enactment is underway, certain entities and relationships are brought into existence that constrain the possibilities that are open within the enactment. In the improvised scene, for example, there are many ways for the scenario to progress—for instance, the king may suddenly be informed that an angry mob has stormed the palace, or the king may announce that he wants to pursue his singing career. However, only some possible actions and events will make sense within the basic parameters of the scenario. Although the basic parameters of the scenario can be changed by the actors, only some ways of doing so will make sense as being ways of modifying the scenario.
rather than merely *destroying* it and awkwardly starting a new one. Indeed, good improvisers are those who are receptive to the emerging “logic” of the scene itself and refrain from simply imposing their own will onto it. As veteran improvisers Kelly Leonard and Tom Yorton (2015, p. 196) put it,

> Great listening is at the core of great improvisation. As we’ve discovered, in order to build scenes onstage without a script to guide the action, actors need to affirm and build on each other’s ideas... But before you can affirm and build on ideas, you must hear them in the first place. You must listen. If someone starts a scene with, “I never knew scuba gear was so uncomfortable,” and his scene partner responds with “This city is getting overrun with Corgis,” the scene goes nowhere. You know someone wasn’t listening, and you’ll have to strap in for what we sometimes call “badprov.”

Thus, while in one sense the actors may create the scenario, once the scenario is underway, the scenario *itself* establishes the terms in which we can makes sense of a person’s actions as meaningful participation in the enactment. In this sense, it is the scenario itself that determines who counts as being an actor in the scene. In a similar way, although a bacterium “creates” its own environment through the way it relates to what it encounters—by metabolizing sugar but not other things, for example—it does not have the freedom to construct its environment arbitrarily. On the contrary, once the bacterium has developed as an entity that metabolizes sugar, it becomes genuinely *beholden* to the real presence or absence of sugar, even on pain of death. In this way, enactment is also a passive and receptive relationship, and we can say that the environment “creates” the entity that relates to it as much as the entity “creates” its environment. The point, however, is that the enactment relation is one in which these elements are interdependent and inter-defined.

Returning to moods, then, we can say that moods *enact* the present situation. On the one hand, the present situation is not an object that exists independently of our mood. The present situation is a distinctive sort of temporal, locational, and normative
context of significance. This sort of context of significance is not an independently existing object, like a rock, whose properties make no reference to our experience of them and so can be described perfectly well from a scientifically detached perspective. To the contrary, a temporal, locational, and normative context of significance is a structure of sense-making, and so it only exists for those who are able to make sense of things in these terms—and a mood just is this sort of sense-making activity. Thus, in any given case, we can say that if we were in a different mood, we would be embedded within an entirely different situation. After all, there is nothing in events themselves, nor in their location in “clock time,” that determines their temporal structure. Even the most traumatic or joyous events can be experienced as irrelevant to how things are going at the present moment, just as even the most temporally distant events can be experienced as determinative of the present situation. Likewise, there is nothing in objects themselves, nor in their geographic position, that determines their locational structure. In certain moods, objects that are nearby may be experienced as if they were “a million miles away,” or alternatively, an object that we would normally dismiss as being trivial may suddenly command our attention. Thus, even if we could know any number of facts regarding a person’s beliefs and values and the objects she encounters in a certain time and place, we could not predict what sort of mood those facts may inspire, because the overall significance of each of those facts within their situational context depends on the way they are enacted by the mood itself.

But while these considerations may tempt us to conclude that moods arbitrarily impose a situational structure onto our experience, this is not how we experience moods. In general, we experience our moods as largely outside of our direct control, as being passively responsive to the facts regarding how things are going for us. Likewise,
moods do not manifest themselves as randomly fluctuating configurations of mental state and pre-intentional attunements. Instead, our moods are enactments of the present situation—and it is the present situation that bestows on moods their shape, form, and logic. Thus, while knowing any number of facts may not enable us to predict what sort of mood those facts will inspire, once we are embedded in a situation, our mood is beholden to the way the situation presents itself to us. In this way, neither moods nor the situations they track can be understood independently of the other; both are brought into existence through the enactment.

An illustration of the idea that moods are enactments of the present situation can be found in the way that a change in mood often brings about a change in our “body language,” posture, and bearing. When we are in a depressed mood, for example, we might slump our shoulders, as if we could literally feel the weight of an oppressive situation pressing down upon us. In this case, it may be visibly apparent to others that the particular way we are “bodying forth” (Heidegger & Boss 2001, p. 196) into the depressing situation is helping to establish and maintain the depressing situational parameters of our experience. To an observer who does not share the mood, it may appear as though we were actors playing a role in a scene and thereby constructing a sort of make-believe reality for ourselves. Seeing this, a well-intentioned observer may encourage us to “snap out of it” by lifting our chin, standing up straight, smiling, and so on. But while such measures may sometimes alter our mood, in other cases we experience them as merely empty gestures, and we may even find that it is difficult or impossible to continue acting as though we were not in a depressed mood. It may be physically possible, of course, to stand up straight and smile, but when we do so it may become difficult to make sense of our own behavior. Indeed, it can be deeply unsettling
to be unable to respond appropriately to the situation as we find it. Insofar as the present situation is a setting for meaningful responsiveness, an inability to respond appropriately can make us feel as though we were not fully present in the situation, and so not fully present in the world at all. In contrast, it can feel quite relieving to listen to sad music while in a depressed mood, or to participate in other activities in which we are able to enact our sense of the present situation more freely.

Although *enactment* is a kind of relation that is a bit more complex than *representation*, and the holistic and self-referential nature of enactment can seem bizarre or mysterious, this way of analyzing moods is illuminating in several ways. As we have seen, understanding moods as enactments of the present situation sheds light on why moods are both so unpredictable and also so difficult to control. A further insight generated by this approach concerns the comparison I have made between the way that moods enact the present situation and the way that living systems metabolize objects in their environment. Namely, if my analysis is correct, we can say that moods function as a kind of *emotional metabolism*. In other words, our moods are mechanisms for “consuming” the meaning of what we encounter and for “coming to terms” with the things that we experience. From this perspective, we might say that moods enact a kind of “porous border” through which we can relate to the world by actively organizing what we are experiencing within the parameters of a *situation*, and by doing so moods enable us to respond effectively to what matters most here and now. And as we will see in more detail in the following chapter, we are “nourished” by this process of responding to what matters most here and now, insofar as responding in this way allows us to continue to make sense of ourselves as people who care about and respond to the particular things that matter to us. To this extent, moods play an important role in a
kind of *existential auto-poiesis*, insofar as enacting the present situation in this way continually regenerates the conditions for our own self-constitution as the particular people we are. Our moods not only reflect our concerns—they also help to make us who we are.

Now that we have a better understanding of the nature of the relationship between moods and the present situation, we are in position to address a puzzling feature of the experience of moods. If moods are enactments of the present situation, and the objects that we encounter can only become *present* in our experience when they show up *within* the present situation, how is it possible to experience an object as being *present* but *out of place* in the present situation? In other words, how can we explain experiences of emotional disconnection? Why is it that moods do not function as a kind of lens that strictly determines what sort of objects we can encounter and what sort of objects we will overlook or ignore? After all, if the overall significance of the objects we encounter is as sensitive to our moods as I have suggested, then we might expect that we would simply make sense of every object we encounter in terms that fit with our mood, and that any objects that do *not* fit with our mood would simply fail to show up in our experience at all. Why is this not the case? To answer these questions, we will have to examine the concept of “existential depth” and the relationship between *situations, selves*, and *worlds*.

§3.4. Moods, existential depth, and emotional disconnection

As we have seen, the major theories of mood in the literature struggle to account for the emotional disconnection that we commonly experience when we are in mood—such as when we are in a tranquil mood and so do not feel any fearful emotional
response to the perception of a threat. We have also examined some conceptual
resources that can move us closer to understanding this experience. For example, we
have examined the distinction between the occurrence of an evaluative perception and
the emotional accessibility of the evaluative property that is thereby perceived; likewise,
we have distinguished between the occurrence of an evaluative judgment and the
normative grip of this evaluative judgment. However, we have not yet provided a full
account of mood-related experiences of emotional disconnection.

As we turn our attention to this task, we can see that the experience of emotional
disconnection is somewhat puzzling from a Heideggerian perspective as well. As I noted
in Chapter One, Heidegger’s analysis of emotional experience focuses on the generative
and organizing role played by our emotional “attunements.” His great insight into
human emotionality is that our emotional attunements can function at a “pre-
intentional” level, shaping in advance the ways that things will show up as intelligible to
us. This insight helps us to explain how our emotional dispositions can alter the content
and structure of our “experiential world”—for example, how an anxious disposition can
lead us to perceive the objects we encounter as being threatening and find it natural to
think about things in terms of safety and security, while experiencing those anxious
perceptions and thoughts as being more accessible and gripping than they otherwise
would be. By illuminating the generative and organizing role of our emotional
attunements in this way, Heidegger’s analysis is particularly well suited to explaining
the relative consistency and coherence of our experience. By the same token, however,
Heidegger’s analysis does not shed much light on experiences of emotional dissonance
and disconnection.
In many cases, such experiences of emotional dissonance and disconnection arise when there are conflicts between various kinds or “levels” of emotional experiences—that is, conflicts between our desires, emotions, moods, dispositions, traits of temperament and personality, values and commitments, cultural attitudes, and so on. For example, as we have seen, we may find ourselves in an irritable mood despite sincerely desiring to enjoy ourselves, and despite the fact that our mood is leading us to respond in ways that conflict with our deeply held value of being kind to others. Because Heidegger fails to distinguish between emotions, moods, dispositions, and the other kinds of emotional experience that we recognize in everyday life—instead using the single concept of “attunement” to describe all of these kinds of emotional experiences—his analysis fails to shed light on the conflicts that may arise among the various ways we are simultaneously attuned. To be clear, it is not that Heidegger is committed to a position that would have prevented him from analyzing this phenomenon. However, anyone who seeks to provide an analysis of emotional dissonance and disconnection will find that it is difficult to do so while using only the single, undifferentiated concept of attunement. In order to understand experiences of emotional dissonance and disconnection, then, it will be helpful to develop a richer vocabulary and a more nuanced conception of attunement, one that recognizes that different kinds of emotional attunements can structure our experience in different ways.

To illustrate, consider Heidegger’s analysis of a “fearful” attunement, which I discussed in Chapter One. In this example, Heidegger describes a fearful disposition as functioning at a pre-intentional level, shaping in advance how things are intelligible to a person, thus determining what kinds of things can exist and be present in her experiential world. As Heidegger points out, a person without a fearful attunement
would never be able to encounter a threat. That is, if the possibility of being harmed were truly unintelligible to a person, then even if she were locked in a room with a hungry tiger, a threat, as such, could never be present to her. But the situation is quite different in the cases of emotional disconnection that arise in the context of everyday moods. In these cases, what we are emotionally disconnected from is not unintelligible, and it does not suddenly disappear from our experiential world. When we are in a tranquil mood, for example, threats still exist for us—we can encounter threatening objects and make sense of them as being threatening—but often they simply seem as though they were behind a transparent barrier, inaccessible, distant, and unreal. In cases like this, there seems to be a conflict between two ways that we are simultaneously attuned. On the one hand, we continue to have a fearful disposition, in the sense that we care about our safety and security and make sense of threats as mattering to us. On the other hand, our tranquil mood temporarily and partially disables our normal disposition to respond emotionally to threatening objects as we normally would.

To understand what is going in this sort of case, we need conceptual resources that are not fully developed in Heidegger’s work. How, then, might we build upon and supplement Heidegger’s analysis in order to illuminate the experience of emotional disconnection? Rather than examine the other categories of emotional experience that we recognize in everyday life (a task that would require a separate, full-scale investigation of the phenomenology of emotion, disposition, temperament, values, and so on, which is obviously beyond the scope of a dissertation on the phenomenology of mood), I will endeavor to keep this discussion at the “phenomenological register.” I suggest that it will be helpful to investigate the distinctive relationship between the present situation and two other structures of sense-making—self and world. Notice that
these are phenomenological categories, describing structures that constitute conditions for the possibility of sense-making as such. That is, any sense-making entity like human beings will always already find itself in the present situation and in a world, and will make sense of things from its own point of view.

In order to understand experiences of emotional disconnection that arise when we are in a mood, we must understand the sense in which the three structures of sense-making are located at different levels of existential depth. My conception of existential depth is adapted from Ratcliffe’s (2010) discussion of “emotional depth,” and so a brief discussion of Ratcliffe’s work is in order here. In his research into the psychiatric disorder of major depression, Ratcliffe discovered that it is quite common for people suffering from major depression to use the language of “depth” to describe their experiences. For example, people suffering from major depression often describe feeling a “bottomless” sense of sadness—as in Brampton’s (2008, p. 18) memoir, where she says, “there were no words to explain the depths of my despair.” Depression memoirs also tend to be filled with descriptions of an especially “deep” sense of culpability, guilt, and shame, a feeling Steinke (2001, p. 64) describes this way: “I felt like I’d been found incompetent and fired from my life.” Ratcliffe argues that we need not interpret talk of “depth” in these cases as a mere metaphor for intensity. Instead, he suggests that talk of emotional depth refers to the domain of pre-intentional attunements, like the fearful attunement described by Heidegger, wherein certain meaningful possibilities exist or do not exist in our experiential world.

Deeper emotions shape the kinds of significance we are receptive to. They are pre-intentional, by which I mean that they determine what kinds of intentional state it is possible to have. A deep emotion could be presupposed by the possibility of a given type of intentional emotion or, alternatively, render it impossible (Ratcliffe 2010, p. 604).
For example, major depression often leads to the inability to find happiness in anything, not in the sense of “no longer being happy about $p$, $q$ and $r$, but of gradually losing the sense that anything in the world might offer happiness” (p. 609). Likewise, the “deep guilt” that is experienced in major depression is a sense that entire classes of intentional states are impossible. “There is no hope, no practical significance, no pleasure, and there cannot be” (p. 614). The comparison between normal guilt and deep guilt is instructive: “When you feel guilty about something, you can still contemplate feeling otherwise, and you do not feel guilty about plenty of other things. But, in the case of deep guilt, no alternatives to guilt present themselves” (p. 614). In this way, Ratcliffe argues, “deep guilt is a shape that constrains the scope of all possible experience. Everything is experienced through the guilt, and the kinds of emotion that are incompatible with guilt are no longer possible” (p. 613).

Ratcliffe argues that the kind of “impossibility” that is involved in deep emotions—as when deep depression makes all future happiness “impossible”—should not be understood as a mere practical conflict, as when an intense emotion of sadness consumes a person’s attention and psychic resources, so that it becomes practically impossible to experience an intense emotion of happiness at the same time. Instead, he says, the kind of impossibility involved in deep emotions should be understood in terms of a change in what sorts of states are intelligible. Thus, “a token deep emotion rules out a type of shallow emotion. And it does so by rendering it unintelligible rather than simply by conflicting with it” (p. 605). Likewise, he says, “deep guilt involves a loss of the conditions of intelligibility for certain kinds of intentional state, and this is what gives it its depth” (p. 614). These passages are insightful, but the reader may get the impression that on Ratcliffe’s view, an intentional state is either intelligible or
unintelligible, because Ratcliffe does not discuss any sort of middle ground between these two extremes. But things are not always so black-and-white.\textsuperscript{35} For example, an everyday mood of depression is not as deep as major depression, and so a passing experience of “the blues” will not make the possibility of future happiness utterly unintelligible to us, as may occur in severe cases of major depression. Thus, in order to utilize the concept of depth in order to analyze everyday moods, rather than psychiatric conditions like mood disorders, we will need to fill out Ratcliffe’s analysis and examine the full range of “depths” that emotional experiences might have, rather than only the very deep and very shallow extremes.

In my view, our experience is shaped by a variety of structures of sense-making that operate at different levels of “existential depth,” and this is why our affective experiences can have a range of emotional depths. When we compare the sense-making structures of \textit{world}, \textit{self}, and \textit{situation}, we see that each of these structures of sense-making is defined by a distinctive temporal, locational, and normative “scope.” Of the three, \textit{world} is the deepest structure of sense-making, insofar as the world includes all times, all places, and all meaningful possibilities. \textit{Situation} is the shallowest of the three sense-making structures, insofar as it includes only the time and place in which we are solicited to respond to what is currently at stake. I propose that we can use the following formula to determine whether a sense-making structure is existentially deeper than another:

\[
\text{A sense-making structure, } A, \text{ is existentially deeper than another sense-making structure, } B, \text{ if the possibilities within } B \text{ must be understood in terms of the possibilities within } A. 
\]

\textsuperscript{35} My analysis here is informed by Dreyfus’ (2009) argument that Lear’s conception of unintelligibility in \textit{Radical Hope} is overly simplistic and requires distinctions between various kinds of breakdowns in our sense-making practices.
For example, generally speaking, the self is a sense-making structure that is shallower than the world, because the self exists within the world, and our sense of the way the world is enables and constrains what kind of self it makes sense to be.\textsuperscript{36} Likewise, generally speaking, the present situation is a sense-making structure that is shallower than the self, because the present situation is experienced by a self, and while a person will encounter many kinds of situations, our sense of self enables and constrains what kinds of situations we can encounter. Although the present situation is not as deep as the self or the world, it has some degree of existential depth, insofar as our sense of the present situation enables and constrains what kinds of objects and events will make sense as being relevant to what is at stake, here and now. With this general outline in hand, let us examine in more detail these sense-making structures and how they interact.

Although Heidegger did not pursue this particular line of inquiry himself, his work offers important insights into the nature of these sense-making structures that can guide us on our way. For example, Heidegger (1927/1962, p. 119/86) describes the world as “that in terms of which [we have] let entities be encountered beforehand.” As Blattner (2006, p. 63) articulates the idea, the world is “a horizon of understanding, a space of possibilities, on the background of which we understand [ourselves and the things we are involved with].” The world is thus an existentially deep structure of sense-making, because in everyday life we always find ourselves and the things we encounter as being located within this context of significance. When we encounter an

\textsuperscript{36} Here I am using “world” to refer to a person’s sense of reality as a whole, rather than to the sort of “lived world” that makes inherent reference to my self, and might include such things as “the world of my marriage” and the specific network of relationships that I am involved in. Heidegger (1927/1962, §18) argues that world and Dasein are equiprimordial, insofar as Dasein is being-in-the-world. However, when Heidegger makes this point, he is speaking from the perspective of a phenomenologist; I do not believe he would disagree with me that from the perspective of our lived experience, we experience the world as being the condition for the possibility of the self.
object, our sense of the world shapes the way we make sense of what this thing is and how it matters. If something happens to us that alters our sense of the way the world is, this experience can radically transform the way we interpret the nature and significance of everything we encounter.

As a structure of sense-making, the world can be understood as having temporal, locational, and normative aspects. The world includes all times and all places, insofar as everything that happens takes place in the world. Normatively, the world is that in terms of which any state of affairs make sense as being possible, impossible, or necessary. Thus, our sense of how the world is constrains what is intelligible to us in the strongest and most straightforward sense. For example, while we can make sense of many counterfactual scenarios, we cannot make sense of the possibility that the proposition “2+2=4” is false, because our world is simply not like that. This proposition could never be false in any time or place. Thus, the proposition “2+2≠4” is utterly unintelligible. If someone were to assert that “two plus two does not equal four,” we might be able to understand these words, but we will not be able to imagine what sort of reality these words might refer to, and we will find it impossible for us even to project ourselves imaginatively into the subject position of a person who believes this outlandish claim.

Like the world, the self is a sense-making structure that also shapes how we make sense of our experience in profound ways. The self can also be analyzed as having temporal, locational, and normative aspects. The *temporal* and *locational* aspects of the self—sometimes referred to as our “facticity”—include our sense of our life story or biography (which shapes how we experience the significance of *now* in each instance), and our sense of the way that our body (which is often the locus of our sense of *here*)
constrains and enables our possibilities. We typically make sense of the events we experience in terms of how they fit within the structure of our biography, and we make sense of the possibilities we encounter in terms of their relationship to our bodily location and bodily capabilities. The normative aspect of the self involves the things we are committed to and the values that define our sense of who we are. Because of the way that our commitments and values frame our interpretation of the things we encounter, certain objects will show up as being vitally important to us, and certain actions will seem absolutely necessary or impossible for us to perform, while other objects and actions will seem trivial or optional. For example, there are some things we may be physically capable of doing—such as hurting our children for our own material benefit—but which would violate our commitments and values to such an extent that they would destroy our sense of who we are as people. Even if we could be made to see that we would gain in some way by performing them, such actions will not show up to us as possibilities that make sense for us to perform.

37 Heidegger’s work is an invaluable resource for understanding the nature of human facticity, as is the work of several phenomenologists influenced by Heidegger. For example, Heidegger (1927/1962) argues that the temporal structure of a self, a lifetime, is shaped by the more or less imminent limit of death. (For an overview of these issues, see Blattner 1994; Dreyfus 2005; Thomson 2013; and Magid 2016.) The locational structure of a self is—what we might call a life-space, or the space of our lives—is generally structured around the body and its habitats, including the places and practices that are deeply important to us and shape the way we are. (For overviews of these issues, see Aho 2005, 2010; Malpas 1997, 2000.)

38 Heidegger’s work is also an invaluable resource for understanding the nature of these values and commitments. As Blattner (2000) notes, Heidegger recognized that the commitments that define the self typically make reference to the norms or standards that define the social roles that we experience as definitive of who we are. For example, a person might be a son, a husband, a father, a professor, a music lover, and so on. Our commitments to such social roles define the set of possibilities that are intelligible to us. For example, if we are “deeply” committed to one of these roles, we may find it impossible to fail to understand ourselves in terms of the standards that define that role. For example, if being a father is essential to who I am, then even if I abandon my parental duties, I will simply understand myself as being a bad or failed father. This example illustrates the difference between the sort of mental states that constitute what we sometimes call a “commitment”—that is, having a certain set of attitudes toward a social role—and the existential dimension of normative grip, in which things show up to us as intelligible in certain normatively structured terms. A “deadbeat dad,” for instance, may be uncommitted in the former sense—that is, he may not have the kind of attitudes that good fathers are supposed to have—but he may nonetheless be deeply committed in the latter sense—that is, he may find it impossible to avoid understanding himself and the things he encounters in terms of the fact that he is a bad father.
We might be tempted to say that this sort of action—an action that would betray our most cherished values—is “unintelligible” to us. However, on closer inspection, we can see that our sense of self does not constrain what is intelligible to us in exactly the same way that our sense of the world makes it impossible for us to make sense of the proposition, “2+2≠4.” While I literally cannot imagine what sort of reality the proposition “2+2≠4” might refer to, I can imagine the reality of harming those I love for material gain, in some sense. That is, I could be made to see such a scenario in my mind’s eye, as though I were watching a film about an alternative version of myself—even if such an action makes absolutely no sense for me to perform, given my commitments and values. It seems, then, that there is a difference in the “degree of unintelligibility” in these two cases. If our sense of self does not make things utterly unintelligible in the same way that that our sense of the world does, then how might we describe the specific way that the self constrains our sense-making practices?

Borrowing a concept from James, we might say that our sense of self will constrain what shows up to us as a “live hypothesis,” or as we sometimes say, what shows up as a “live option” or “live possibility.” Discussing this idea, James (1979, p. 199) writes,

A live hypothesis is one which appeals as a real possibility to him to whom it is proposed. If I ask you to believe in the Mahdi [the prophesied redeemer of Islam who will rid the world of evil before the Day of Judgment], the notion makes no electric connection with your nature,—it refuses to scintillate with any credibility at all. As an hypothesis it is completely dead. To an Arab, however (even if he be not one of the Mahdi’s followers), the hypothesis is among the mind’s possibilities: it is alive.

As this insightful passage suggests, our sense of self is deeply shaped by the cultures into which we have been socialized. But whether through this sort of socialization or through an entirely personal commitment, what we care about generates and organizes
a field of possibilities that seem “real” to us and make an “electric connection” with our
nature—while also closing us off to other possibilities that are not “live” in this way.
The possibilities that are not live for us will make no sense to us, but they will not be
utterly unintelligible. Presuming that our “worldview” does not make the very notion of
the Mahdi unintelligible, we can empathize with others who believe in the Mahdi, even
if we are not believers ourselves.

This example illustrates the idea the world is an “existentially deeper” structure
of sense-making than the self. In other words, our sense of the world constrains what
sort of self it makes sense to be, but our sense of self does not similarly constrain our
sense of the way the world is. After all, there are many actions that I cannot imagine
doing, objects and events that I cannot imagine encountering, and experiences that I
cannot imagine experiencing, but which I can easily imagine being encountered, done,
or experienced by other people, whose facticity and commitments are different from my
own. The self is relatively limited in its temporal, locational, and normative scope. That
is, I exist only in the limited time and space of my life, which is but a small portion of
the time and space of the world. Likewise, I know that there are things that matter to
others that do not matter to me—and indeed, that there are people who exist in the
world who would harm their children for their own material benefit, even if this action is
not a live possibility for me.

The upshot of this analysis is that it enables us to provide more nuance to the
accounts given by Heidegger and Ratcliffe. For example, once we distinguish between
the sense-making structures of world and self in these ways, we can describe a
phenomenon that arises when there is a mismatch between these two structures of
sense-making, a phenomenon that is a kind of “cousin” to the emotional disconnection
that we are seeking to account for here. Namely, when we encounter an object that has significance in our world but has no relevance to our own values and commitments, we sometimes experience these objects in a kind of “subjunctive” modality. For example, we sometimes can perceive evaluative properties that we would perceive and respond emotionally to if these properties were relevant to our values and commitments. This experience is like seeing a dress in a shop window and recognizing that our friend would find it beautiful, even though we ourselves find it to be ugly. In this case, by imaginatively or “empathetically” projecting ourselves into our friend’s subject position, we can encounter and make sense of a possible evaluative property—the beauty of the dress—but because we do not actually find it beautiful, experiencing the normal sort of emotional response to this evaluative property is not a live possibility for us.

Distinguishing between the sense-making structures of world and self also allows us to recognize that the kind of psychiatric conditions that Ratcliffe analyzes, such as major depression, can occur at two different levels of depth. When major depression alters the sense-making structure of the self, a person may find that although she can still make sense of the possibility of happiness, she cannot make sense of the idea that happiness will ever be possible for her—it is not a live possibility, and the proposition, “I will be happy again,” is not a live hypothesis. An even deeper kind of depression alters the sense-making structure of world, so that the possibility of happiness is truly unintelligible to a person—so much so that she cannot even make sense of other people’s happiness. This is a truly profound sort of alienation from others, in which one has no “empathic access” to basic elements of interpersonal space. With this in mind, we can see that in the former case, a person suffering from depression at the level of the self is likely to have experiences in which she can perceive possible
sources of happiness all around her, but only in a subjunctive mode, so that she remains painfully unresponsive to them. In the latter case, on the other hand, a person whose depression has altered the nature of the world would be unable to encounter any possible happiness whatsoever. She would be like the person that Heidegger describes with no fearful attunement, where an entire class of imports simply does not exist in her experiential world whatsoever.

Most of the everyday moods that I have been examining in this chapter do not alter a person's sense of self or world in these profound ways, however. To understand the experience of moods, then, we must locate them at the proper level of existential depth. I have argued that moods alter the sense-making structure of the present situation. The present situation is a context of significance in which we make sense of things in terms of what is at stake, here and now. It thus constitutes the setting for our meaningful, active responses to the things we encounter. By enacting the situational character of our experience, our moods allow us to become poised to respond appropriately to what we encounter, ready to direct our thoughts, perceptions, bodily feelings, and motivational states towards what is currently at stake. To this extent, moods can alter the content and structure of our experience in some profound ways. But in comparison with the self, the present situation is narrower in its temporal, locational, and normative scope. In other words, the self is an existentially deeper structure of sense-making. After all, in my life I will encounter many situations, and the essential features of my self—the various elements of my facticity, as well as my values and commitments—will constrain and enable the kinds of situations I can encounter. Thus, we can say that moods, like the situations they enact, are located at an intermediate
existential depth—not so deep as to alter our sense of self or world, but deep enough to alter our experience of the objects and events that we encounter.39

The relationship between the self and the present situation is thus parallel to the relationship between world and self, but at one level “up” in existential depth. As we have seen, when the self encounters the wider world, it is possible to experience something as being intelligible but not a live possibility. Likewise, then, when the self encounters the present situation, it is possible to experience something as being a live possibility but not relevant to what is at stake in the present situation—and this is the experience generates the conditions for emotional disconnection. For example, when we are in an anxious mood, we may find that the beauty of a piece of music we love is “out of place” in the stressful situation. Because our mood does not alter the sense-making structures of self and world, we remain able to perceive and make sense of this evaluative property (the music’s beauty). However, because our mood determines how we are poised for an active emotional response, our anxious mood prevents us from making sense of this evaluative property in a way that would bring it into the present time and place, where it would become emotionally accessible to us.

This analysis not only helps us to understand how experiences of emotional disconnection are possible, but it also helps to illuminate the underlying logic that explains why moods give rise to experiences of emotional disconnection in some cases but not others. For example, compare the following two kinds of scenarios. In the first scenario, our mood disposes us to experience an emotional disconnection from an evaluative perception that does not fit our mood. Imagine we are climbing a mountain and are in a profoundly tranquil mood when we suddenly encounter an angry

39 To clarify: the present situation is located at an “intermediate depth” in the sense that it lies between the deeper structures of sense-making of self and world, on the one hand, and the ordinary objects and possibilities that are manifest in our experience, on the other.
bear. In this case, we may perceive the dangerousness of the bear but temporarily feel no fear. This emotional disconnection is explained by the fact we experience the bear as being out of place in this situation. Absorbed in the tranquility and peacefulness of the mountain, the possibility of this encounter does not figure into the temporal, locational, or normative context of significance that we are enacting, and so we are not poised to respond effectively to it. How, then, are we able to perceive and make sense of the dangerousness of the bear at all? Why do we not simply overlook this evaluative property, finding it absent from our experiential world altogether? We are able to perceive the threat in this case because the present situation is not as existentially deep as the self or the world: while bears may be out of place in the situation we are currently enacting, bears continue to exist in our world, and they have a distinctive significance with regard to our deeply held commitment to self-preservation. In this case, then, the threat may be experienced in the mode of being a live possibility (something to which we would normally have an emotional response to, given our values and commitments) that is nonetheless out of place in the present situation. If we were to articulate our experience in this moment, we might say, “That is strange; I am in danger, and I should be very afraid right now, but yet I feel so tranquil.” What is happening in this case is that, in our present mood, our cognitive, perceptual, bodily, and motivational states are not poised to become systematically directed toward the danger in a way that constitutes a fearful emotional response—at least temporally, until we are able to reconfigure our enactment of the present situation in a way that tracks this important environmental solicitation. Thus, as this examples illustrates, moods generate experiences of emotional disconnection because they constrain how we are able to understand and respond to what we encounter—but this constraint is only partial,
because the situations that moods enact are located at an intermediate level of existential depth.

In contrast to this kind of scenario, consider a case in which our mood does not prevent us from responding emotionally to an evaluative property, despite the fact that this evaluative property does not seem to fit with our mood. Imagine that Amanda and her friend enjoy exploring exotic cuisine from around the world, and they regularly seek out “culinary adventures” together. At this week’s chosen restaurant, the friends are sorely disappointed with their meals. Amanda finds the food disgusting, and she is annoyed that the restaurant would charge so much for such terrible food and service. But despite these sincere “negative” emotions, Amanda’s overall mood remains quite “positive.” As she puts a forkful of slimy, bad-tasting food in her mouth, she makes a face of disgust, swallows hard, and shudders—and then she and her friend burst out in merry laughter, enjoying the camaraderie and the humor of this memorable misadventure. In this case, although there is a certain mismatch between her emotions and her mood, they nonetheless seem to coexist easily, so that she does not experience any emotional disconnection; her cheerful mood does not diminish or disable her emotions of disappointment and disgust.

The reason that Amanda does not experience any emotional disconnection in this case is that although certain objects that she encounters have evaluative properties

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40 This example come from a passing comment by Krishnamurthy (2015) in her discussion of making decisions about experiences that may be epistemically or personally transformative. Krishnamurthy argues that if one has never had Indian food, she will not know whether she will like it, and thus may not know whether to eat it. But if she values exploring unfamiliar cuisine or taking risks or having new experiences, then she can confidently eat Indian food, knowing that even if she doesn’t like it—in the moment, from a participant’s perspective—she will be glad she tried it—in retrospect, from an observer’s perspective. My claim here is that she need not adopt these perspectives in temporal succession; she can adopt these perspectives simultaneously, and in this way she could enjoy the experience of not enjoying the food.
with a *different valence* than her overall mood, those objects are not at all *out of place* in the situation. Indeed, the possibility of eating disgusting food is part of what makes these culinary adventures so fun. As such, Amanda is poised to respond appropriately to her evaluative perception of the food, and as a result, she experiences no emotional disconnection. In this case, Amanda’s enactment of the situational context does not alter the content or shape of her emotion of disgust, but it does alter how this emotion figures into her all-things-considered assessment of how she is doing and how things are going. We might say that even though Amanda does not like certain particular objects that she is encountering—namely, the food and the restaurant—she is thoroughly enjoying the situation as a whole. This case is thus similar to a common way people experience horror films and haunted houses. By enacting a basically entertaining situational context—one in which, in this place, and for a short time, we are called upon to have fun by playing with our fears—we can maintain a cheerful mood without becoming emotionally disconnected from our perceptions of threats and unable to experience genuine fear. In fact, our fear might be *more* intense in this setting, precisely because the situational context encourages us to experience this emotion freely. But although the fear retains its basic shape and intensity, in this context the emotion may contribute to a cheerful mood, rather than an anxious mood. Thus, by understanding moods as a distinctive kind of sense-making structure—one that enacts the present situation—and by locating this phenomenon at the proper existential depth—recognizing that while it is deep enough to alter our experience of particular objects, it is less deep than the sense-making structures of self and world—we are able to understand the logic that governs the way that moods give rise to experiences of emotional disconnection in some cases but not others.
This completes our examination of the fundamental nature of moods as a phenomenon. However, we have not yet examined the special kind of moods that I have called thematic moods. This will be the topic of the following chapter.

As we turn to an examination of thematic moods, we are guided by a question regarding the striking difference between tracking moods and thematic moods with respect to the ways these kinds of moods dispose us to experience emotional disconnections. Namely, the emotional disconnections that we experience in thematic moods can last much longer than those we experience in tracking moods. As we will see in the following chapter, when we are in a thematic mood, we become especially responsive to one kind of concern, often to the exclusion of other concerns, and we can remain in this state for several hours or even days at a time. In contrast, as we have seen, when we are in a tracking mood, we remain relatively responsive to all the concerns that define our self—even if we sometimes experience a brief “lag” in our responsive capacities as a result of the way that moods enact the present situation. Thus, while a tranquil tracking mood might lead us to be unresponsive to an unexpected perception of danger for a few moments, a thematic mood of tranquility might lead us to be unresponsive to certain perceptions of danger for hours or even days at a time. How can we understand this difference? What is it about thematic moods that explains how they can dispose us to such long-lasting experiences of emotional disconnection?
Chapter Four: Thematic Moods and Narrative Emplotment

In the previous chapter, I offered an account of the phenomenon of moods, according to which moods are enactments of the present situation. In other words, moods are a structure of sense-making in which we interpret the significance of our ongoing experience in terms of a distinctive kind of temporal, locational, and normative context of significance that defines our sense of what is at stake, here and now. By organizing our experience into the shape of a situation, moods enable us to direct our psychic resources toward responding appropriately to what we encounter. This account of moods as enactments of the present situation is based upon a close examination of the class of moods that I have called “tracking moods,” the ordinary mood states that constantly fluctuate in the background of our experience as we move through our day. However, I have claimed that my account can illuminate the nature of all kinds of moods. Thus, in order to make a persuasive case for this claim in this chapter, I will need to explain how my account applies to the class of moods that I have called “thematic moods,” the kind of mood states that we experience on occasions in which we become unusually responsive to a particular kind of concern for a certain period of time.

But there appears to be a problem here. The distinguishing feature of thematic moods—namely, the way they lead us to remain preoccupied with a certain type of concern, even when this preoccupation seems to be inappropriate to the present situation—appears to be puzzling for my account of moods as enactments of the present situation. For example, when we are in a thematic mood of anxiety, we might be gripped by a vague but intense sense of being threatened. We may be sitting in an idyllic park...
on a summer day, a place where everyone around us is tranquil and cheerful, but find ourselves unable to relax, as though we just knew some sort of catastrophe was impending. We may not be able to say what, exactly, is threatening us. Indeed, we may find that our anxiety seems to float from one “target” to the next—focusing now on a child who might hurt herself on the playground, now on a large dog that looks like it could hurt someone if it were to attack. But soon it becomes clear that our anxiety is not really “about” these objects. For one thing, it is apparent that if were in any other mood these things would not appear so worrisome, and in any case, before long we forget these objects and select other targets for our anxious thoughts. In this anxious state, it is as though we have been transported into an “alternative reality,” and that we are no longer in the same place as the people around us who are enjoying the peacefulness of the park. Indeed, it as though we have lost touch with certain aspects of our identity, and that we have adopted a frame of mind in which we respond to things in ways that conflict with our normal beliefs and values, our ordinary sense of what is real and what matters.

How can it be, then, that thematic moods are enactments of the present situation, when they seem so out of touch with the features of the present situation? This is the central question that guides my investigation in this chapter. Put in more general terms, the guiding question is this: How can we understand the nature of thematic moods? It may be relatively easy to describe thematic moods in negative terms—for example, it is clear that thematic moods do not seem to be about the objects they target; they do not seem to track the features of the present situation; they seem to transport us into an alternative reality of some kind, and so on. But it is not at all obvious how to describe these moods in positive terms—that is, how to describe what
does lend to thematic moods their shape, form, and logic, or how to describe this “alternative reality” in its own terms, rather than merely in contrast to our ordinary reality. Is there a concept or paradigm that can help us to grasp how the various features of thematic moods are unified as a phenomenon? How can we articulate the logic that governs the way that this kind of mood manifests itself in our experience?

The core intuition that is motivating my argument in this section is that if thematic moods do not involve our normal, activity-directed way of making sense of the present situation, then perhaps thematic moods involve some other mode of sense-making. In other words, perhaps entering into a thematic mood is like “flipping a switch” that initiates a distinctive way of interpreting our experience. But what might this alternative mode of sense-making be? Are we familiar with any way of making sense of things in which the overall significance of a situation is defined by something other than the elements of the present situation itself? Are we familiar with any other way of making sense of events that can dramatically change our sense of the meaning of the things we encounter by transporting us into a kind of alternative reality?

In answer to these questions, I argue that thematic moods are modes of emplotment, in which we employ “narrative sense-making” in order to interpret our ongoing experience as having a narrative structure. Like tracking moods, thematic moods establish a distinctive sort of temporal, locational, and normative context of significance, a setting within which we encounter, make sense of, and respond to particular objects. Unlike tracking moods, however, thematic moods enact a context of significance that extends beyond the present situation, in the sense that the present situation itself becomes embedded within a larger context of significance—namely, a storyline in which the present situation is just one part. This storyline has a distinctive
structure in which events make sense as moving from a conflict to a resolution according to a certain kind of narrative logic. As such, we experience the overall significance of the present situation as being defined not merely by the objects and possibilities that are located within the situation itself, but also by the place or role that the situation has within the larger narrative structure.

For this reason, it is illuminating to compare our experience of thematic moods to the way we experience the kind of narratives that we find in traditional novels and films. Indeed, as we will see, the most mysterious features of thematic moods are rather ordinary features of the way we experience such narratives. In the example of being gripped by an anxious mood while sitting in a peaceful park, for instance, we can see that the experience of this mood is similar to the experience of watching a film in the genre of suspense, in which an ominous soundtrack signals to the audience that something terrible is about to happen to disrupt the idyllic scene that is pictured on screen. In this case, although the situation in the park might otherwise appear to be safe, it would nonetheless make perfect sense from a narrative point of view if something terrible were to happen, insofar as such an event would fit the pattern of development from conflict to resolution that seems to be emerging within the film’s narrative.

In order to develop and clarify this line of thought, Section One examines the nature of narratives and “narrative sense-making,” the mode of interpretation that we employ in order to make sense of narratives. In Section Two, I argue that the way we relate to narratives in order to disclose their meaning is strikingly similar to the way we relate to our experience when we are in a thematic mood. That is, when we are in a thematic mood, we find ourselves “reading”—or “reading into”—the things we encounter in such a way as to reveal the narrative structure that seems to imbue the
present situation with its significance. In Section Three, I argue that my account of thematic moods as modes of emplotment can help us to understand why thematic moods often involve prominent and sustained experiences of emotional disconnection. To do so, I examine the phenomenon of “narrative transportation,” in which we “lose ourselves” in a story by suspending our disbelief and adopting the perspective of the narrative—sometimes even finding ourselves “rooting for the bad guy.” I argue that, in a similar way, being swept up into a thematic mood can unsettle us from our normal world and self, temporarily embedding us in the world and framework of the narrative structure that we are enacting—and this is what explains the logic that governs the way thematic moods manifest themselves in our experience.

§4.1. Narratives and narrative sense-making

Rather than investigate the necessary and sufficient conditions of narratives as such—a complex topic whose details are not relevant to my investigation of moods—I will simply analyze the basic elements of what I consider to be paradigmatic examples of narratives. Narratives, paradigmatically, are stories that are intentionally created by authors and communicated to an audience, either verbally or through other mediums, such as text, images, and so on. Familiar examples of narratives might include ghost stories told around the campfire, novels like *The Great Gatsby*, or films like *Star Wars.* Narratives need not be fictional, of course. In everyday life we often tell narratives in which we recount things that happened in the recent and distant past—for example, we might relate what happened at work today, or the time when we were attacked by a dog. With these paradigmatic narratives in mind, we can define a narrative as a representation of a set of objects and events, where these objects and events are
represented as being connected with one another both *causally* and *meaningfully*, and, in particular, where their development over time is organized around *conflicts* and *resolutions*. As such, narratives are a structure of sense-making in which the particular elements of a narrative are appropriately interpreted in terms of their place within a distinctive kind of holistic temporal, locational, and normative context of significance. Let us examine each of these aspects in more detail.

As narrative theorist Gregory Currie (2010, p. 93) notes, narratives function at two levels: the *story* and its *framework*. These two concepts, he says, “correspond to the answers we give to two distinct questions: ‘what happens according to the story?’ and ‘in what ways are we invited to respond to those happenings?’” At the level of the story, a paradigmatic narrative describes a set of objects and events that are causally interconnected. Narratives can thus be distinguished from mere chronicles, which simply list a set of events in chronological order. In E.M. Forster’s (1956) famous example, for instance, “the king died and then the queen died” is a mere chronicle, while “the king died, and then the queen died of grief” is a narrative (or “plot,” in Forster’s terminology), because the latter depicts a causal connection between the two events.

But paradigmatic narratives do not simply describe a causal process in a scientifically detached manner. In a paradigmatic narrative, the objects and events that are depicted are also connected to one another *meaningfully*, in the sense that these events matter in some way and solicit certain emotional responses from the audience. The *framework* of a narrative is the set of norms, concepts, and concerns that constitute the context of significance that unifies the various things that happen in the narrative as parts of a meaningful whole. As Noël Carroll (2003) notes, one way that authors establish the framework of a narrative is by describing things that may not be causally
connected to other events in the story, strictly speaking, but that help to set the “tone” of the narrative. For example, Dickens’ novel *Little Dorrit* begins by depicting Marseilles in a way that evokes a sense of somber oppression, describing the intense heat, blistered boats, “tracts of arid road,” and dust that is “scorched brown.” These objects are not causally connected to the events in the story, but the descriptions help to establish the framework of the narrative by cueing the audience to anticipate and be responsive to the oppressive injustices that occur later in the book. As we will see, thematic moods establish the tone of our ongoing experience in a similar way.

The central organizing principle of a narrative is the movement of the events in the narrative from conflict to resolution. A narrative conflict is generated by the presence of at least two possible ways that a sequence of events can proceed, one of which would meet the audience’s epistemic and/or normative expectations more than the others. Thus, conflicts properly elicit affective responses related to uncertainty about the future—attitudes such as curiosity, doubt, hope, dread, and so on. The simplest sort of conflict arises from the possibility of an unusual or improbable event occurring. Such a possibility implicitly presents the question, “Will this event occur, despite the odds?” In more gripping conflicts, something important is at stake in how events might proceed. For example, if one possible outcome is more desirable than the others, or if one of the possible outcomes would violate an important social or moral norm, then there will be more tension or suspense regarding how the conflict will be resolved. In paradigmatic narratives, conflicts are resolved when one of these possible developments occurs and eliminates the previous uncertainty. As such, resolutions elicit affective responses such as relief, disappointment, gratitude, and so on. The movement of events from conflict to
resolution thus unites the causal and meaningful aspects of narratives, in the sense that a narrative resolution is the meaningful outcome of a meaningful chain of events.

By “emplotting” events in this way—binding them together as parts of a single, internally coherent line of causal and meaningful development that moves from conflict to resolution—narratives acquire a holistic structure. In this holistic structure, the overall significance of any particular event within the narrative will depend on its place within the story (for example, whether it happens at the beginning, middle, or end) and, more generally, on the role the event plays within the “economy of meanings” that develops and evolves as the story unfolds. For example, an event that, on its own, would be of no particular significance—such as a man telling a woman that, frankly, he does not “give a damn” where she goes—may become tremendously meaningful in the context of a narrative like Gone with the Wind, where it can gain layers upon layers of significance through its myriad relationships to the other elements in the narrative. The meaning of a narrative as a whole is thus more than the sum of the meanings of each discrete part of the narrative considered in isolation, because each part of the narrative acquires the meaning that it has within the narrative through its relationships to the other parts of the narrative, in the context of the whole.

When we analyze the holistic structure of a narrative, we can identify temporal, locational, and normative aspects that work together in order to determine the significance of the particular things that take place within the narrative. The central temporal structure of a narrative is defined by the movement of events from conflict to resolution. The time of the narrative is typically a duration-block that begins with an inciting incident that initiates a conflict and ends with an event that resolves that conflict. The various things that happen in the middle are appropriately interpreted in
terms of their role in moving the narrative from a conflict to a resolution, or in terms of the clues they provide about how to interpret the meaning of the story. For this reason, the meaning of anything we encounter in a narrative can be altered retrospectively by what happens later in the narrative, once we learn more about what consequences a certain event has precipitated or how, exactly, a certain object was reflecting the framework of the story. Thus, as Carr (1986) notes, narratives are governed by the grammatical logic of the “future perfect tense”—that is, the grammar of what will have been the case. The overall significance of any particular narrative development may be relatively uncertain and open-ended when we first encounter it, becoming what it will turn out to have been as the narrative is resolved. For example, if a character says, “I’ll be back soon,” we might have to wait to discover whether this will turn out to have been an incidental bit of dialogue or the foreshadowing of disaster.

The locational structure of the narrative is likewise defined by the movement of events from conflict to resolution. In a paradigmatic narrative, no matter what place is being described—a parking lot (a place for parking), an office building (a place for working), and so on—every place is also a narrative setting, a place for the development of the narrative’s story and/or framework. In contrast to the “real world,” where many disparate meaningful systems may be present simultaneously, and countless things are happening that have no place at all within a given narrative, the things that we encounter in a narrative are organized around a specific chain of events and the specific meanings that those events have in the context of the narrative. As such, each particular object and event that is represented in a narrative will communicate clues about how the audience should understand the significance of the narrative as a whole.
The temporal and locational aspects of narratives are closely interrelated with
the narrative’s normative context. As I said, the normative structure of a narrative, the
narrative framework, is the set of norms, concepts, and concerns that unite the events in
the narrative as a meaningful whole. The normative structure of a narrative defines
what matters in the context of the narrative, what events are possible, impossible, or
certain, and what developments are appropriate or inappropriate. Centrally, the
normative structure of a narrative is determined by what sort of conflicts are
established—that is, what sort of concerns are at stake in the narrative—as well as by
what rules or expectations govern the way these conflicts can be appropriately resolved.
As a narrative begins, there is a great deal of latitude regarding the narrative’s
normative structure, but as the narrative unfolds and the logic of the narrative becomes
more developed, what will make sense as a meaningful development of the narrative
becomes increasingly constrained. As Paul Ricoeur (1980) points out, the resolution of a
narrative, like all narrative developments, will tend to be more meaningful and
satisfying when the resolution is coherent within the context of the narrative—hanging
together with other elements in the narrative in a consistent way—but without being
predictable. On one hand, abrupt changes in the story or the framework of the narrative
can make a resolution appear disconnected from previous developments, rather than
“following from” the prior events in an organic way. For example, within the normative
structure that is established in Acts I and II of Romeo and Juliet, it would not make sense
for the couple suddenly to accept their families’ wishes, calling off the passionate
romance and settling down with more suitable and sensible partners. Such an outcome
would be impossible in this narrative, in the sense that it would be utterly incoherent
with the other elements in the narrative. On the other hand, although a satisfying
resolution will not violate the logic of the narrative, if the resolution is entirely predictable then the conflict driving the narrative will turn out not to have been gripping, since it will turn out that there was little uncertainty regarding the outcome.

It is instructive to compare narratives, as I have described them here, to situations, which I examined in Chapter Three. Both narratives and situations establish a temporal, locational, and normative context of significance in terms of which we make sense of the overall significance of the particular objects and events that are located within them. But while situations are entirely defined by this sort of context of significance, narratives are also defined in terms of a chain of events that moves from conflict to resolution. Thus, for example, being late for work and stuck in traffic on Monday morning is a situation, but it is not a narrative, because it does not depict a chain of events that unfolds over time, in which present events are appropriately understood as “following from” past events and “leading to” later events. We might say, however, that situations have a “proto-narrative” structure, because as we have seen, situations are structured around an initiating disturbance that calls for a satisfactory response (even if the “disturbance” is the extraordinary peacefulness of a Saturday afternoon, in our example of a tranquil mood), in a way that is akin to the conflict of a narrative. Likewise the parameters of a situation constrain the sort of objects and events that will make sense as fitting within the situation, in a way that is akin to how a narrative develops an internal logic that determines what sorts of objects and events would be out of place in the narrative. For this reason, situations are natural “building blocks” for narratives. That is, a narrative can provide further elaboration about how a certain situation plays out and connects to other situations. For example, each of the situations I described in Chapter Three could be located within a variety of more elaborate narratives: “So, I was
finally reaching the summit after a morning hike to see the sunrise when…” or “I was relaxing and reading a book at home on Sunday afternoon when…” Thus, while both narratives and situations are settings for responding appropriately to the solicitations of the environment, a narrative is a structure of sense-making that often weaves together many situations within a single temporal, spatial, and normative context of significance. A situation is typically more open-ended than a narrative, with a greater range of events that will make sense as being a meaningful development, while a narrative has a more defined internal structure. Thus, the same basic situation might appear in either a comedic or tragic narrative—for example, the courtship of an otherwise well-matched couple is being undermined by miscommunication—but once the situation is embedded within a particular kind of narrative, the range of events that will make sense as being a meaningful development will be constricted.

As with situations, narratives occur within a world—a set of standing conditions that constrain and enable what can take place. However, unlike the kind of situations that we have analyzed in the previous chapter, narratives often construct their own world, a “narrative world,” in the process of telling the story. This narrative world may be more or less vaguely described in any particular story, and often the features of this world are merely implied by the features of the narrative itself, but the existence of such a world is a necessary condition for the possibilities described by the narrative. A narrative world can thus be defined as the larger temporal, locational, and normative context within which the narrative takes place. The temporal context of a narrative world is sometimes called a “backstory,” and it includes things that have happened before the events that constitute the narrative’s story. Likewise, the places that are described in a narrative are nested within other places, implicitly expanding beyond
what is explicitly described in the narrative. And as in any world, what is possible in a narrative world, and what sorts of things make sense to do within it, is implicitly and explicitly governed by a set of norms and rules. Indeed, even if we discover that a narrative world is chaotic and random, this randomness will itself become a feature of the normative structure of this narrative world.

Now that the central elements of narratives are in view, we are in a position to clarify the nature of narrative sense-making, the distinctive form of interpretation that we employ in order to make sense of something as a narrative. When we are trying to make sense of a story that is being told by a speaker, for example, or when we sit down to read a novel or watch a film, we employ narrative sense-making by implicitly or explicitly seeking out each of the basic elements of a narrative in what we are interpreting. We look for the ways that particular events may be causally connected to other events within a developing storyline; we seek to discern a narrative framework by finding clues about how we are being invited to respond to these events; we develop an understanding of what conflicts are driving the narrative forward and what is at stake in these conflicts; and we watch out for events that may resolve the conflict and conclude the narrative in satisfying ways.

Furthermore, when we employ narrative sense-making, we interpret the significance of each particular event we encounter in the narrative on the basis of our interpretive expectations about how the story might proceed. As Ricoeur (1980, p. 174) puts it,

Following a story...is understanding the successive actions, thoughts, and feelings in question insofar as they present a certain directedness. By this I mean that we are pushed ahead by this development and that we reply to its impetus with expectations concerning the outcome and the completion of the entire process. In this sense, the story's conclusion is the pole of attraction of the entire development.
In other words, when we employ narrative sense-making, we respond not simply to the events in the story (considered in isolation), but to the meaning that we expect the events will turn out to have had, viewing them from the projected perspective of the completed story. For example, our reaction to an event that would otherwise be joyful—such as Oedipus defeating the Sphinx—might be altered by our expectation that the event is going to precipitate a catastrophe. In a sense, then, the resolution of the narrative is present for us at each moment as we follow the narrative’s development. Because narratives are inherently structured as a movement toward resolution, our expectations about how the narrative will be resolved influences how we make sense of the meaning of each object and event that we encounter as the narrative unfolds.

The interpretive expectations that drive the process of narrative sense-making are often relatively vague at first. We may simultaneously entertain several competing hypotheses about how the narrative will proceed, revising and refining these hypotheses as the narrative unfolds and we acquire new information. This process of revising our interpretations takes place within what is known as the “hermeneutic circle,” in which we interpret a holistic system by moving from its parts to the whole and back again, continually refining our understanding of each on the basis of the other. As we begin to go around the hermeneutic circle, our interpretive expectations about how the narrative will proceed may be relatively open-ended, revisable, and dynamically evolving, so that our understanding of the whole is very sensitive to the particular objects and events that we encounter. But over time, our understanding of the structure of the narrative as a whole becomes more definite, so that our understanding of the particular objects and events we encounter is increasingly constrained by our expectation that future narrative developments will cohere with previous developments and conform to the logic.
governing how the story is moving from conflict to resolution that has emerged within the narrative. This is not to say that the logic of a narrative will be entirely definite. To the contrary, Ricoeur (1980, p. 174) argues,

...[A] narrative conclusion can be neither deduced nor predicted. There is no story if our attention is not moved along by a thousand contingencies. This is why a story has to be followed to its conclusion. So rather than being predictable, a conclusion must be acceptable. Looking back from the conclusion to the episodes leading up to it, we have to be able to say that this ending required these sorts of events and this chain of actions. But this backward look is made possible by the teleological movement directed by our expectations when we follow the story. This is the paradox of contingency, judged “acceptable after all,” that characterizes the comprehension of any story told.

Thus, when we employ narrative sense-making, the set of intelligible possibilities becomes increasingly constrained as the story nears its resolution, but until the resolution comes, surprising developments are always possible.

Because narrative sense-making involves interpreting the significance of the individual parts of a narrative on the basis of a more or less explicit and well-defined understanding of their place within the narrative as a whole—and because, at the same time, our understanding of the narrative as a whole is informed by our interpretation of the individual parts of the narrative, which together comprise that whole—narrative sense-making always involves a significant amount of interpretive risk, the chance of falling into misunderstanding. The danger comes from the fact that our interpretive expectations are largely self-justifying, in the sense that our interpretive expectations shape and organize the “evidence” that would support the validity of those expectations. For example, if we are watching a film that we expect to be dark and suspenseful, we may interpret the events we encounter in this light—even events that would otherwise appear to be neutral or positive. If a character says, “I’ll be back soon,” for instance, we might interpret this statement as a kind of sinister foreshadowing. Interpreted this way,
this bit of dialogue could then be seen as evidence supporting the expectation that the film will be dark and suspenseful.

Thus, our interpretive expectations can be remarkably recalcitrant in the face of what appears to be counter-evidence. For example, if we expect that a film will be dark and suspenseful, we might interpret an opening scene in which the characters are happy and things seem to be peaceful as a mere prelude to an impending disaster. If the narrative continues in this fashion, with no signs of disaster, we might interpret this as merely an exceptionally long prelude to the impending disaster. If still no disaster develops, we might simply conclude that this is a rather boring suspense film, without considering that our interpretive expectations have been inaccurate. However, when counter-evidence continues to mount in this way, we are often forced to revise our interpretive expectations in order to satisfy the requirement for the narrative to remain coherent. When we do so, we may experience a sudden gestalt shift as we reinterpret previous events in the light of this new understanding of the narrative structure as a whole. In this way, the process of making sense of a narrative tends to exhibit a kind of punctuated equilibrium, in which an interpretive paradigm remains relatively stable, even in the face of challenge, until pressures on this paradigm become too great, at which time an alternative interpretive paradigm is adopted and stabilized relatively quickly.

In the cases of understanding a traditional novel or film, narrative sense-making is a process of simply conforming our interpretive activity to the structure of the narrative itself. However, we sometimes employ narrative sense-making in other contexts as well, interpreting something that is not a traditional narrative as having a narrative structure. For example, if we were to go to an art gallery and enter a room
with a dozen paintings displayed on four walls, it would be possible for us to simply appreciate each piece individually, rather than interpreting them as being elements in a larger storyline. But it would also be possible for us to interpret the collection of paintings in the room as having a narrative structure. This narrative structure could be present to a lesser or greater degree, depending on how many of the basic elements of narratives we discern in the collection. Interpreting the collection as having only a slight degree of “narrativity,” we might see that the series of paintings shows a kind of development, progressing linearly as we walk around the display. Perhaps, for example, a certain painting technique is being explored and perfected, implicitly addressing the question, “What more can this technique allow a painter to do?” At an even higher degree of narrativity, we might discover a distinct conflict that organizes the linear development. For example, we might interpret the paintings as conducting a sort of conversation about some topic, such as the nature of romantic love. In this case, we could interpret each piece as “responding” to the pieces that came “before,” amplifying or criticizing the “views” they expressed, and we might look for a painting at the end of the series that resolves the conflict by settling the “dispute” in some way. Interpreted in this way, the collection may depict a narrative in which European cultures have made progress toward an epiphany about the nature of romantic love, or alternatively, fell into a misapprehension of its true nature.

We can also employ narrative sense-making to interpret our own ongoing experience, making sense of ourselves as protagonists in a developing storyline. For example, imagine that Ana is a college athlete who is jogging in a park on a Wednesday afternoon in preparation for an important competition. We might imagine that Ana employs narrative sense-making to interpret her experience. For instance, we might
imagine that Ana sees herself as a long-suffering victim of endless injustices who has never been afforded the recognition and respect she deserves, and that she is determined to overcome these obstacles. In this context, she interprets the upcoming competition as an important opportunity to show the world, once and for all, that she is more than people have given her credit for. As she implicitly anticipates how sweet this possible triumph would be against the backdrop of the years of injustice that she has endured, she experiences the afternoon jog differently from the way she otherwise would. She notices the excellent weather and the smiles of the strangers she passes, and it seems as though the universe itself were encouraging her to succeed. But then she discovers that her shoelace has become untied, and as she stops to tie it, she thinks about how typical it is for something like this to undermine her efforts. In this way, she makes sense of each thing she encounters in terms of what it will turn out to have meant from the perspective of the completed story, in which she will either have won the respect she deserves or suffered another bitter injustice.

With this example in mind, we can see that narrative sense-making is more complex and elaborate than the sort of “situational sense-making” that I described in Chapter Three, in which we make sense of the things we encounter in terms of their place within the present situation. When we become attuned to the nature of the present situation, we make sense of things in terms of the situation’s temporal, locational, and normative parameters. These parameters constitute the setting in which a range of events might take place, but the events that take place may or may not constitute a cohesive narrative. For example, if Ana is embedded in the situation of jogging in a park on a Wednesday afternoon in preparation for an important competition, she might anticipate that a range of things could happen—she might struggle or excel in her preparations,
she might encounter various things at the park, such as children playing and people walking their dogs, and so on. But because situations are inherently open-ended, she will remain relatively responsive to all the elements of the situation. Even if her all-things-considered assessment of the situation is largely determined by how she is doing with regard to preparing for the competition, she may continue to perceive and respond to the ways that the things she encounters are relevant to her other concerns. In contrast, when we employ narrative sense-making to interpret the present situation, we tend to “read into” the details around us, interpreting them as clues about the narrative structure, and to look beyond what is present in order to discern the underlying narrative context that is structuring the overall significance of the present situation and the things we encounter there. Thus, if Ana encounters good weather and the smiles of strangers, she may experience these objects as not simply background elements of the situation, but as an indication of how the story will proceed. Likewise, if she experiences some setbacks while jogging, she may interpret these setbacks as not simply reflective of a frustrating situation, but as reflective of a larger storyline concerning her life-long struggle for respect.

As this example illustrates, when we employ narrative sense-making to interpret our experiences in everyday life, we often fall victim to what theorists call “over-coherent thinking” (Currie & Jureidini 2004). When we engage in over-coherent thinking, we find patterns and reasons where there are none. This often takes the form of positing non-existent agents whose choices and actions explain random or natural events, as when people claim that a turn in the weather was caused by the intentional behavior of a deity. The reason we tend to fall into over-coherent thinking when we employ narrative sense-making is that in paradigmatic narratives, things happen for a
reason—if only because the author chose to describe something in order to develop the narrative’s story or framework. As Currie and Jureidini (2004, p. 419) put it,

If we read in the story that something happened, we do not take this as we would the deliverances of casual observation: something unlikely to be of any significance to us or to things that concern us. We know that this happens in the story for a purpose, though it may not be clear yet what the purpose is, or that this purpose connects this event with much else the story contains. The gun on the wall at the beginning of the tale is there for a purpose: to be used at the end—or, if not to be used, to create the possibility of its use, or perhaps simply to frustrate our expectations.

Thus, when we interpret our own experience as though it were embedded within a developing narrative, our thoughts and perceptions often reflect the implicit or explicit assumption that there is some deeper meaning to whatever we encounter, such that even disparate and random events seem to be “adding up to something.” These narrative-based thoughts and perceptions can motivate our behavior, either by entering into standard belief-desire relationships, or through less rational means, such as what Gendler (2003) calls “contagion,” in which narrative-based thoughts and perceptions affect our motivations in ways that bypass our rational assessment. For example, after seeing the film, *Jaws*, we may be less inclined to swim in the ocean, not because we have any evidence that a shark attack is likely, but simply because the film has led us to imagine such an attack, and this vivid imagining comes to play a belief-like role in our mental economy.

In the following section, I develop this idea in more detail and show its relevance to thematic moods. As we will see, when we are in a thematic mood, we employ narrative sense-making in order to interpret our own, ongoing experience as having a narrative structure, and so each of the features of narrative sense-making that we have identified in this section is present in our experience of thematic moods.
§4.2. Thematic moods as modes of emplotment

The previous section’s discussion of narratives and narrative sense-making can help to shed light on the phenomenon of thematic moods. When we are in a thematic mood, we engage in narrative sense-making in order to interpret our own, ongoing experience, thereby enacting a temporal, locational, and normative context of significance that has a distinctively narratological structure. As such, thematic moods determine how we make sense of the present situation, as well as how we interpret the overall significance of the individual objects we encounter. As we will see, understanding thematic moods as modes of emplotment illuminates the logic that governs the way that these moods manifest themselves in our experience. It sheds light on why thematic moods dispose us to think, perceive, feel, and act in certain characteristic ways, even while they also tend to persist despite the occurrence of particular mental states that do not fit our mood.

To begin, it will be helpful to say a word about what I mean by the phrase “mode of emplotment.” In its traditional usage, “emplotment”—the state of being “emplotted” or organized into a narrative structure—refers to the outcome of the practice of storytelling, in which representations of various objects and events become woven together into the sort of holistic structure that I described in the previous section. Once emplotted, the overall significance of particular representations are determined by their place within the narrative’s internally coherent logic of development from conflict to resolution. When we enter into a thematic mood, our experience is emplotted, or organized within a narrative structure, in a similar fashion. Thematic moods are modes of emplotment, in the sense that each kind of thematic mood emplots us into a storyline with a distinctive theme and structure. Anxiety is one mode of emplotment, irritability
is another mode, and so on. Further, it turns out that many paradigmatic types of thematic moods can be compared to paradigmatic literary genres. For example, an anxious mood structures our experience in ways that can be compared to a novel or film in the genre of suspense. Suspense narratives typically center on a grave threat to the protagonist, where the threat is often of a mysterious nature, such as a vast conspiracy that is slowly revealed. Likewise, when we are in an anxious mood, our experience of the things we encounter is shaped by a background sense that a grave threat is impending. In this state, we might not know exactly what the threat is, but we find “clues” in the particular objects we encounter, and as we interpret these objects from the perspective of the roles they might turn out to have played in the narrative as whole, we are disposed to imagine the grudges that other people might hold against us and the ways that minor harms might snowball into catastrophes. A depressed mood, on the other hand, might be compared to a narrative in the genre of tragedy, in which the protagonist is fated by destiny, curse, or a flaw in her character to experience great suffering and failure. Likewise, when we are in a depressed mood, we become preoccupied with concerns about the closing of possibilities—loss, hopelessness, and meaninglessness—and the sense that our efforts will ultimately be futile.

Understanding thematic moods as modes of emplotment in this way can shed light on how moods tend to dispose us to have certain thoughts, perceptions, bodily feelings, and motivational states. Let us begin with an examination of the changes in our thoughts and reasoning that we experience when we enter into a thematic mood. In Chapter Two, I identified three characteristic kinds of changes in cognition that are associated with thematic moods. First, thematic moods dispose us to experience a variety of “cognitive distortions,” including overgeneralization, fortune-telling, jumping
to conclusions, and personalization. In these cases, our judgments tend to outstrip the available evidence, and our mood may also lead us to construe neutral or irrelevant things as though they were evidence supporting the appropriateness of our mood. But as I argued in Chapter Two, while it might appear to us that these judgments are the reason why we are in a certain mood, we find that our moods often persist even when we are forced to acknowledge that the judgments that supposedly motivate them are false. Second, thematic moods also dispose us to engage in certain kinds of imagination-based thought, in which we become especially gripped by the possibility that something might or could be the case. Again, however, the normative grip of such judgments cannot be explained with reference to the content of the judgments alone, because in any other mood, such a judgment would not generate the same sort of emotional response. Finally, we have seen that moods tend to direct our evaluative judgments toward a series of “targets,” despite the fact that our mood is not really “about” the objects that we are responding to with such emotional intensity. Thus, our mood-based thought tends to “float” from one target to another.

If I am correct that thematic moods employ narrative sense-making, this allows us to explain all three kinds of alterations in our cognition that are characteristic of being in a thematic mood. First, the cognitive distortions associated with thematic moods—generalization, fortune-telling, jumping to conclusions, personalization, and so on—can each be understood as instances of over-coherent thinking, because in each case they involve finding patterns, reasons, and even agency where there are none. For example, when we are in a depressed mood and encounter some unfortunate events or people who are acting rudely, we may fall prey to personalization, thinking that these things are happening because of something we did, or because of some defect in our
personality or character, when in fact they have nothing to do with us. As we saw in the previous section, over-coherent thinking is a central feature of narrative sense-making, because in narratives the events that occur “happen for a reason.” Thus, if I am correct that thematic moods employ narrative sense-making, we would expect for these moods to dispose us to just these sorts of cognitive distortions.

Moreover, the kind of over-coherent thinking that is generated by narrative sense-making has other features that are associated with thematic moods as well. In both cases, the judgments we form are often insensitive to counter-evidence and do not link up with our other beliefs in the ways that other judgments usually do. For example, if a person truly believed that “the universe” is capable of “punishing” her, we might expect her to be committed to an entire set of quasi-religious metaphysical and empirical beliefs regarding the workings of the universe, and to be disposed to treat challenges to the implications of her belief as a challenge to the belief itself. But in many cases, we can form generalizing judgments about general objects—objects such as ourselves, our lives, people in general, the world, and the universe—without modifying our web of belief to any significant degree, if at all, and without feeling committed to defend or provide evidence for the apparent implications of these beliefs.

These considerations suggest that although the generalizing judgments that are associated with thematic moods may have the “surface grammar” of standard beliefs—and so they appear in the guise of being reasons why we are in our present mood—they are better understood as mere expressions of the mood. That is, these statements are our best attempts to articulate or communicate what it is like to experience the alteration in the temporal, locational, and normative structure of experience that occurs when we enter into a thematic mood. We might call such judgments “feels-as-if judgments.” For
example, when we are in an anxious mood, it feels as if there were a grave threat impending, or as if “my life is falling apart.”\textsuperscript{41} Because this sort of feels-as-if judgment is a mere expression of the experience of being in a mood, rather than an explanation or justification of it, it is unsurprising that the mood would persist even when the judgment is repudiated. Indeed, we would expect that when we are forced to abandon a feels-as-if judgment, we might form a new feels-as-if judgment to take its place: “Well, you’re right, my life is not exactly falling apart, but I guess [it feels as if] other people just cannot be trusted.” Alternatively, we might simply continue to experience the mood without being able to explain why.

Narrative sense-making tends to generate these kinds of feels-as-if judgments whenever we try to articulate why certain events seem necessary or impossible within a narrative, or why certain elements of the narrative carry such intense emotional weight. For example, we might say that a certain story shows that, “everyone is basically good, deep down,” or that, “a kiss of true love can produce miracles.” When we extract these propositions from their narrative context and treat them like standard beliefs, we arrive at a misleading understanding of their nature and function. The reason why the narrative is gripping is not because we believe in the truth of these propositions—that is, it is not because we believe in their truth in the abstract, outside of the narrative context. In fact, the order of explanation is reversed: it is because the narrative is gripping that these propositions seem to be “true,” in the sense of being a fitting

\textsuperscript{41} My analysis here finds a rough parallel in so-called “expressivist” views in metaethics, which hold that our moral judgments are best understood as expressions of our emotions or attitudes about behavior, rather than empirical beliefs that are apt for truth and falsity. From this perspective, although a statement like, “Killing for pleasure is wrong,” has the “surface grammar” of a statement of fact (such as, “Skiing all day is physically taxing”), moral judgments should be interpreted as reports about a person’s own attitudes: “Killing for pleasure makes me angry,” or “I disapprove of it,” or even, “Boo for killing for pleasure!” For overviews of the variety of expressivist positions in metaethics, see Schroeder (2008) and Gibbard (2003).
expression of the experience of being gripped by the narrative, that is, the experience of being embedded in the narrative’s temporal, locational, and normative context of significance. Currie and Jureidini (204, p. 417) argue that religious beliefs are feels-as-if judgments of this kind. On their view, in many cases the belief systems and doctrines associated with religions are merely feels-as-if judgments that serve to articulate or communicate the experience of being gripped by a certain religious narrative. As such, these beliefs and doctrines do not actually function to explain or justify a person’s religiosity.

Attempts to understand religious and magical beings as theoretically defined entities, with powers and relations stateable in general terms, lead to serious misunderstanding of the cognitive and other practices of believing communities. It is narrative, rather than either perception or systematic theory, which gives these things their staying power and such motivating force as they enjoy.

If this analysis is correct, we would expect that when a certain religious doctrine is challenged, we would see the same pattern that we see when the generalizing judgments associated with a mood are challenged. Namely, we would expect that a “believer,” like a person in a thematic mood, would simply reach for another feels-as-if judgment to try to articulate the experience, or may conclude that she just cannot explain it. As this example illustrates, by understanding thematic moods as modes of emplotment, we can understand why these moods dispose us to form certain generalizing judgments, why these judgments tend to have certain, non-standard relationships to evidence and to our other beliefs, and why our mood often persists despite our acknowledgement that the associated judgment is false.

My view that thematic moods are structured by narrative sense-making also allows us to understand why thematic moods dispose us to the kind of imagination-based thought in which we become gripped by possibilities that we would otherwise
dismiss, and why our moods tend to target one object after another. As we have seen, narratives are structured by narrative conflicts, which establish a certain possibility space in which events seem to be leading to a certain important outcome, with a possibility that things may turn out otherwise. Thus, when we are in a thematic mood, we can expect that we would “read into” the things we encounter and overreact to what would otherwise be trivial details, as we interpret the meaning of these things from the perspective of the role they may turn out to have played in the narrative as a whole. For example, we might respond to the way that a certain event could initiate or be part of a larger chain of events. Alternatively, we might read into the things we encounter, looking for any indication that they may give us about how things are likely to go—just as if an author had intentionally placed these items in order to communicate certain important messages to the audience.

When we are in an anxious mood, for instance, we may be gripped by a vague sense of being threatened, and so we may look to the particular things we encounter in order to discern more information about how, exactly, we are being threatened. In this state, our anxious thoughts will float from object to object, as each successive object seems to reveal and confirm the larger pattern of threat. As such, a state of affairs that would otherwise be trivial, such as running late to work, may be interpreted from the perspective of a possible chain of events in which tardiness leads to being fired, which leads to other, increasingly vague and disastrous outcomes. In this case, the possibility that our tardiness will result in losing our job may be utterly gripping, while in another mood, the risk would be easy to cope with. This is because once we are emplotted into the narrative structure of anxiety, we feel the growing inevitability of something terrible happening, as present events seem to be leading toward just this sort of
resolution, and any other kind of outcome seems to make less and less sense within the
logic of this narrative context. Thus, a series of particular objects will gain frightening
significance, as we make sense of the overall significance of these objects in terms of
what role they might turn out to have played in the narrative’s suspenseful
development. Alternatively, even events that obviously have no causal impact on our
lives—such as the sound of a siren in the distance, or the sight of a stranger accidentally
dropping the contents of her bag onto the street—may be intensely anxiety-provoking
if we interpret them as being part of the framework of a developing narrative, cueing us
to be responsive to signs of threat and thereby confirming our expectation that a crisis
is impending.

As these examples illustrate, when we are in a thematic mood, we tend to engage
in a kind of motivated reasoning in the way we relate to the particular objects we
encounter. Namely, when we are in a thematic mood we often attempt to marshal
evidence in support of the feels-as-if judgments that are associated with our moods,
rather than trying to adjudicate the evidence in a rationally detached way. This sort of
motivated reasoning is similar to the way that we tend to think when we are swept up
into a good novel or film and encounter something that is confusing or can be
interpreted in a variety of ways. When we are gripped by a narrative, we seek to
understand how the elements of the narrative make sense within the world of the
narrative, rather than extracting these elements from their narrative context and
submitting them to rationally detached scrutiny. This is because narrative sense-making
requires us to engage in the hermeneutic circle of interpretation, in which we aim to
understand how the parts of a narrative fit coherently within the context of the whole.
When we are in a thematic mood, we engage in this same kind of hermeneutic circle,
taking the basic narrative structure as a given and seeking out coherence among the particular objects we encounter and the feels-as-if judgments that would “explain” them. In these ways, then, understanding thematic moods as modes of emplotment allows us to understand the myriad alterations in our thinking and reasoning that are associated with entering into a thematic mood.

My account of thematic moods as modes of emplotment can also help us to understand the logic that governs the way these moods alter our perceptual dispositions. In Chapter Two, I identified three kinds of changes in perceptual disposition that are associated with entering into a thematic mood. First, as the perceptualist theory correctly describes, entering into a thematic mood often disposes us to become more perceptually sensitive to evaluative properties that fit our mood, and for this reason, it can sometimes lead us to become less perceptually sensitive to mood-incongruent evaluative properties. However, we have seen that in other cases, we may continue to perceive evaluative properties that do not fit our mood and experience the associated mood-incongruent emotions, even while our mood remains stable. Finally, in cases of genuine emotional disconnection, we perceive mood-incongruent evaluative properties but do not experience the thoughts, bodily feelings, and motivational states that are usually triggered by such perceptions. I will discuss the topic of emotional disconnection in more detail in the following section. Here, however, we can briefly examine how my account can shed light on the three kinds of changes in perceptual disposition that are associated with thematic moods.

First, because thematic moods enact a narratively structured context of significance—a context of significance which functions as a setting in which we are called upon to respond appropriately to the solicitations of our environment—when we
are in a thematic mood, we will be disposed to construe the objects we encounter in
terms of their relevance to the narrative structure we are enacting. Thus, in very
general terms, we can expect that when we are in an irritable mood, we will be poised to
perceive objects as unjust and offensive, and when we are in a cheerful mood, we will be
poised to perceive objects as good, beautiful, and worthy, and so on—exactly as the
perceptualist theory would predict. However, just as there are many different novels
within the same literary genre, so, too, particular instances of a certain kind of mood
may share the same basic narrative structure but have different narrative content. For
example, in two instances in which we experience an anxious mood, our anxiety might
lead us to dwell on different fears, worries, and concerns. In one case, our anxious mood
may involve worries about finances, say, while in the other case we may dwell on our
fear of death. As such, the specific content of the narrative that is enacted in our
thematic mood may influence our experience in complex ways that the perceptualist
theory cannot account for. For example, if we are in an anxious mood and have been
emplotted in a narrative that is focused on worries about finances, we may find
ourselves worrying about losing our home and straining our familial relationships. In
this context, we might be disposed to perceive and respond to mood-incongruent
evaluative properties that nonetheless fit with the content of the narrative that we are
enacting. Thus, we might perceive the beauty and the excellent craftsmanship of our
home, for instance, and we may feel the warm emotion of appreciation that such
perceptions tend to trigger—even while we remain in an anxious mood. In fact, our
anxious sense that a worsening financial condition might lead us to lose our home may
only sharpen our appreciation of its beauty, while this appreciation of its beauty may, in
turn, intensify our anxious mood. As this example illustrates, when we are in a thematic
mood, we are poised to respond to things that fit the particular narrative structure that we are enacting, even if these things have a different valence than our mood.

By the same token, then, when we encounter objects that are wholly irrelevant to the narrative structure we are enacting, we may be emotionally unresponsive to perceptions of their evaluative properties. For example, when we are anxious and worried about finances, we may perceive the tragic nature of the humanitarian crisis that is currently being reported on the news, but find that we are unable to feel the emotion of sadness that such a perception would typically generate. In this case, the sad event is irrelevant to the particular narrative in which we are embedded, and so we are not poised to respond to it. Likewise, we can see that, surprisingly, being embedded in a certain narrative structure may sometimes lead us to be emotionally unresponsive even to evaluative perceptions that would seem to fit our mood. For example, when we are in an anxious mood, we may be unusually unresponsive to certain perceptions of threats—namely, when these threats are irrelevant to the particular content of the narrative we are enacting. If we are anxious and worried about finances, for instance, we may not be poised to respond to other kinds of threats, such as certain reminders of our mortality, which are normally quite frightening to us. In this state, we may encounter these reminders of our mortality and perceive their frightening evaluative properties, but find that we are unable to experience any emotional response to these perceptions. Such cases directly contradict the perceptualist theory, but they make sense once we understand thematic moods as modes of emplotment. From this perspective, we can see that although anxious moods tend to make us “read into” the things we encounter and overreact to minor threats, not all details will be equally relevant to the particular narrative we are enacting, and not all kinds of threats will be ones that we are equally
poised to respond to. The perceptualist view that moods are like “colored lenses”
suggests a relatively uniform alteration in our perceptual dispositions, but thematic
moods alter our perceptual dispositions in more complex ways—and these complexities
are illuminated by an appreciation of the finely articulated structure of the narratives
that we enact when we are in a thematic mood.

In a similar fashion, understanding thematic moods as modes of emplotment can
help to illuminate the complex ways these moods affect our bodily feelings and
motivational states. As we have seen, our bodily feelings and motivational states are
organized by the present situation—because the present situation is the setting in which
we are called upon to respond appropriately to what we encounter—and, ordinarily, the
nature of the present situation is determined by the way that the particular things that
are present in the situation impinge upon our concerns and values. When we are in a
thematic mood, however, the nature of the present situation is determined by its place
within the larger narrative structure that we are enacting. For this reason, when we
enter into a thematic mood, our bodily feelings and motivational states will be
organized by the way we are called upon to respond to what is at stake in the narrative,
which may or may not reflect the ways that the particular things that we encounter
relate to our values and concerns.

This way of analyzing the phenomenon can help us to understand why thematic
moods often dispose us to react in ways that do not seem appropriate to the present
situation. For example, when we are in an anxious mood, we might predict that putting
ourselves into a blissfully tranquil situation—such as watching the ocean from the
comfort of a hammock on a beautiful beach—would relieve our anxiety. But when we
are emplotted in a narrative of developing threat, we may interpret this sort of tranquil
situation in any number of ways that prevent it from having a calming effect. For
example, we may interpret the situation as a mere *intermission* in the story, rather than
an indication that the threat has been resolved. In this case, we may find that we are
emotionally disconnected from the objects we encounter on the beach and feel numb to
their evaluative properties. In fact, lying in a hammock on a beach when we are in an
anxious mood might even make our anxiety *more* intense, as we find ourselves waiting
impatiently for the plot to start moving forward again with new threats and new
information about how the underlying conflict can be resolved. In this state, we may
begin to pace or fidget, as though the movement of our body could urge the story to
move forward. Although relaxing in the hammock might feel pleasant, this pleasure
may itself be unpleasant—that is, unpleasantly disconnected from what seems to be at
stake at the present moment. In contrast, when we are in an anxious mood,
encountering a tangible threat that we can contend with may feel *relieving*, because at
least we are able to take action and respond to something that matters in the narrative
context that we are enacting.

In this way, thematic moods throw us into an ongoing plot line that we must try
to navigate as best we can—trying to discern from the particular things we encounter
what sort of larger pattern we are involved in and what we need to do in order to move
the plot toward resolution within the logic of narrative. The way that thematic moods
engage our *agency* in this manner is perhaps clearest in the case of irritable moods,
which tend to be very active and volatile. An irritable mood revolves around concerns
about injustice and offense, and the uncertain possibility of regaining a sense of being
respected and secured within the fabric of a “moral community” in which people are
treated fairly. This kind of mood might be compared to so-called *quest narratives*, such as
The Odyssey or The Labyrinth, in which the protagonist’s mission is constantly undermined by frustrating setbacks. In these stories, the protagonist’s quest takes her away from the protection of the community, so that she finds herself painfully exposed to the contingency and absurdity of the cosmos, wherein her personal concerns are minuscule and insignificant. Incidentally, narratives in the genre of comedy often depict stories with a similar structure, though in an ironic way, in the sense that the audience’s perspective on these frustrating setbacks is at odds with the perspective of the protagonists. That is, the framework of a comedic narrative will typically highlight the humorous aspects of the protagonist’s struggles, even though the protagonist herself would not find these struggles to be humorous. In an irritable mood, then, we interpret our experience as though we were the protagonist in this sort of comedy or quest narrative, and our experience of the things we encounter is shaped by the implicit, background sense of having been ejected from the protective embrace of the moral community and exposed to countless injustices, small and large—every delay and every distracting noise a further confirmation of the coldness and cruelty of the world. From this perspective, we can see that the various ways that we express our irritability—from muttering under our breath to slamming doors—are essentially efforts to fight against injustice and find our way back to a place where we are respected.

Because we are typically much less active when we are in a depressed mood, we may be tempted to describe depression as a “mode of dis-emption”—a way of experiencing things as though the present narrative were already over, all conflicts having been resolved, with nothing more to be done and no more narrative tension remaining to confer vibrancy to events. In my view, however, this may be a more accurate description of the experience of major depression, the psychiatric disorder. At
its worst, major depression is experienced as a bottomless well of suffering, in which the possibility of joy is truly unintelligible, so that it is impossible to engage our agency in navigating toward alternative resolutions. But the thematic moods of depression that we experience in everyday life are not nearly so bleak. When we are in a depressed thematic mood, we may experience things as developing toward complete hopelessness, and we may even have the sense that we will probably find ourselves, sooner or later, having to face this ultimate loss of hope and meaning and forced to give up on the possibility of redemption. Nevertheless, in a depressed mood, the possibility of regaining hope and meaning remains, and so our experience is animated with a narrative tension that may be absent in the worst cases of major depression. When we are in a depressed mood, we may experience the things we encounter as a seemingly endless series of disappointments. Nonetheless, like the protagonists in a tragedy, our agency is engaged with trying to respond appropriately to the narrative structure in which we are embedded. For example, our agency may be engaged in seeking out ways to turn things around and find a positive resolution to the narrative structure, or simply in holding out hope that we may encounter something that indicates that things are finally starting to change. Alternatively, our agency may be engaged in an attempt to accommodate ourselves to the world as we find it by abandoning certain expectations that we have held and have contributed to our disappointment. Thus, each kind of thematic mood, even the mood of depression, organizes our experience into the shape of a narratively structured setting that engages our agency by calling upon us to respond in certain ways.

One limitation of the comparison between thematic moods and literary genres is that “positive” thematic moods, such cheerful and tranquil moods, do not have an
obvious literary counterpart. In these positive moods, we experience the present moment as part of a general context in which things are going well. This pleasant sort of context may be enjoyable to experience, but it does not tend to inspire successful novels and films. Nonetheless, we can understand positive thematic moods in terms of narrative emplotment. In a cheerful mood, for example, the “conflict” that organizes the narrative structure of our experience may be expressed in a question like, “How much better can things get?” or “What else might I discover that is pleasant?” Here, as in other moods, our agency is engaged and directed as we find ourselves thrown into a journey of discovery, pushing ahead into an open horizon of possibilities of a certain kind. This horizon is implicitly shaped by an uncertainty about how the journey might be resolved. For example, while it seems like this journey is developing toward an epiphany or breakthrough of some kind, there is a possibility that it might end with a disappointing “reality check,” in which we discover that things are not quite as pleasant as they had seemed.

Although thematic moods are structured as a movement toward narrative resolution, the actual end of the experience of a thematic mood may or may not coincide with the experience of resolution. An irritable mood, for example, may dissipate because of a change in a person’s underlying physiological state, or the sudden arising of a different mood. In such cases, a person’s irritable mood may end without her experiencing any reconciliation with the unjust forces she has been contending with, or any definitive return to the protective embrace of the moral community. In some cases, though, the end of the mood does coincide with the experience of a resolution. For example, when we are in an irritable mood and experience ourselves as contending with a thousand petty obstacles, we may experience a sudden bit of luck—like an unexpected break in
the traffic, or a stranger’s small act of kindness—as though it were a signal that the
universe has called a “truce” and that our concerns will now be given the respect they
deserve. In such cases, we might be tempted to claim that the irritable mood ended
because of the positive event. It is important to keep mind, however, that the sort of
phenomenological analysis I am offering here would not provide support for any claim
about the cause of the mood’s arising or dissipating. As I explained in Chapter One,
phenomenology is not in a position to make any claims about the causes of phenomena,
but only about the way we experience those phenomena. Although it may appear that an
irritable mood had ended because the underlying conflict had been resolved—although
it may appear, for example, that our mood improved because the traffic jam suddenly
dissipated—this may be a mere illusion, perhaps even an illusion generated by
underlying physiological changes. After all, it is easy to think of cases in which similar
events would not alter our mood and would not be experienced as a resolution to the
conflict.

Thus, while my account of thematic moods as modes of emplotment may not
explain why we enter into a certain mood at a certain time, the account does illuminate
the logic governing how these moods manifest themselves in our experience. Indeed, as
we have seen, by appreciating the way that thematic moods enact narratively structured
temporal, locational, and normative contexts of significance, we are able to understand
many complexities in the way that thematic moods affect the content and structure of
our experience, complexities that alternative accounts in the literature either ignore or
struggle to deal with in an adequate way. One aspect of the phenomenon requires
special consideration, however—namely, the way that thematic moods tend to generate
experiences of emotional disconnection. As we have seen, tracking moods can also
generate this kind of experience, but in thematic moods, experiences of emotional disconnection can be more pronounced and sustained. How, then, can appreciating the narratological nature of thematic moods help us to understand this difference?

§4.3. Narrative transportation and emotional disconnection

How do thematic moods generate experiences of emotional disconnection? To begin to answer this question, it may help to review the results of Ch. 3.4, where I examined how experiences of emotional disconnection arise when we are in a tracking mood. I argued that when tracking moods generate experiences of emotional disconnection, they do so because of the distinctive role that tracking moods play in our sense-making practices. By organizing our experience into the shape of a situation, tracking moods enable and constrain our sense-making activities so that we can coordinate and direct our “psychic resources”—especially our evaluative thoughts, evaluative perceptions, bodily feelings, and motivational states—toward responding to what is at stake, here and now. When we encounter an object that is out of place in the present situation, then, we may find ourselves unprepared to respond to it appropriately. Nevertheless, because the present situation is typically not as “existentially deep” as the sense-making structures of the self and the world, we usually remain capable of making sense of things that are located outside of the situational context, and in some cases, we are able to perceive how these things impact our values and concerns, even if we cannot mount a coordinated emotional response to them. When this happens, we encounter objects that we would normally respond to emotionally, but find that there is an absence of the normal integration among our thoughts, perceptions, bodily feelings, and motivational states in response to these objects. The experiences of emotional
disconnection that are generated in this way tend to be short-lived, however, because in most cases we will fairly quickly adjust the way that we are enacting the present situation in response to what we are encountering.

In this chapter, I have argued that when we are in a thematic mood, we enact the present situation in a particular kind of way—namely, in a thematic mood, the overall significance of the present situation is shaped by a larger, narratively structured context of significance. Despite this difference, however, thematic moods are like tracking moods in that each kind of mood enacts a setting for our responsive activity, establishing the basic parameters of the temporal, locational, and normative context we are called upon to navigate. Thus, like tracking moods, thematic moods function to coordinate and direct our psychic resources toward responding to what we encounter in an appropriate way. As such, we can expect that when we are in a thematic mood, experiences of emotional disconnection will arise in much the same way as they arise when we are in tracking moods. That is, we can expect that when we are in a thematic mood and encounter an object that is out of place in the narrative that we are currently enacting, we may find ourselves unprepared to direct our psychic resources to it in a coordinated fashion, so that we fail to respond to this object as we ordinarily would.

The central difference between these cases, however, is that when we are in a thematic mood, our experiences of emotional disconnection are often much more prominent and sustained than when we are in a tracking mood. Indeed, when we are in a thematic mood, our emotional responses can be utterly out of sync with the objects we are encountering, and our mood can remain stubbornly fixed in this way for an alarming period of time. The question that we must answer here, then, is this: What accounts for the fact that thematic moods often generate experiences of emotional disconnection that
are so much more prominent and sustained than those generated by tracking moods? In my view, the answer to this question will be found by examining some key differences between situations and narratives.

As we have seen, while situations are relatively open-ended and can fit within a variety of narratives, narratives tend to be much more elaborately developed and larger in scope, weaving together a number of situations within a single temporal, locational, and normative context of significance. Moreover, we have seen that in the course of telling a story, a narrative will implicitly or explicitly establish a “narrative framework” to guide the audience’s emotional responses to the events in the narrative, just as it will implicitly or explicitly construct a more or less elaborate “narrative world” in which the narrative takes place. And on closer examination, we can see that the constructs of narrative framework and narrative world serve similar functions as the sense-making structures of the self and the world. That is, the self and a narrative framework can both shape what will show up to us as being a live hypothesis or live possibility, and likewise, the world and a narrative world can both provide large-scale constraints on what is intelligible and unintelligible, possible and impossible, necessary and contingent. When a narrative is highly elaborated, it can establish a narrative framework and a narrative world that are quite detailed, rich, and compelling—indeed, so much so that these constructs can begin to approximate the interpretive function of the self and the world. In other words, when we are absorbed in the narrative of a highly elaborated novel or film, we may find that any questions of interpretation that arise for us—questions about how we should feel about certain events, or questions about what is possible, impossible, and necessary—can all be answered with reference to the narrative framework and the narrative world that are established by the narrative, without any need to refer to
perspectives or facts that lie outside of the narrative context. To the extent a narrative framework and narrative world replace the structures of the self and the world in our sense-making practices, we experience the phenomenon of “narrative transportation.”

Psychologists have described narrative transportation—or “transportation into a narrative world”—as “a convergent process, where all mental systems and capacities become focused on events occurring in the narrative” (Green & Brock 2000, p. 701). In other words, when we are engrossed in a novel or film, to the extent that we experience narrative transportation our attention becomes entirely absorbed in the narrative, and we experience the visual and/or mental imagery that the narrative elicits. Likewise, we become emotionally involved in the narrative’s characters and events, and we experience the emotional responses that are elicited by the narrative. Gerrig (1993, p. 10-11) compares the experience of narrative transportation to a journey:

Someone ("the traveler") is transported, by some means of transportation, as a result of performing certain actions. The traveler goes some distance from his or her world of origin, which makes some aspects of the world of origin inaccessible. The traveler returns to the world of origin, somewhat changed by the journey.

As this passage notes, the relative “inaccessibility” of the traveler’s “world of origin” is central to the experience of narrative transportation. To the extent that we are transported into a narrative world, we become oblivious to the events and circumstances that are external to the narrative world. When we are absorbed in a good book, for example, we may forget to eat or fail to notice a nearby commotion, as we allow our attention to be directed entirely by the framework of the narrative itself, noticing all and only what is important within the context of this narrative—as though the only reality that exists for us is the “reality” of the narrative world. In this state, we may find ourselves accepting the norms and rules of the narrative world, taking them
for granted and feeling quite familiar with them, despite their dissimilarity to the norms and rules of the “real world.”

But the experience of being “lost in a story” (Nell 1988) involves more than merely entering into the narrative world. Narrative transportation also involves an alteration in every aspect of our emotional responsiveness—not only in our perceptual attention, but also in our thoughts, feelings, and motivational states. To the extent that we are transported into a narrative world, we will “suspend” any beliefs and concerns that conflict with those suggested by the narrative, and we will adopt the perspectives elicited by the narrative. For this reason, when we become absorbed in a story and gripped by a plot, we sometimes react emotionally in ways that are out of character, as our characteristic beliefs and concerns become temporarily “inaccessible.” For example, when we are reading a novel or watching a film, we sometimes find ourselves “rooting for the bad guy.” For most of us, if we were to hear a news story about a mob boss who has killed police officers and his own relatives, we would want this criminal to be apprehended and punished; yet when we watched *The Godfather*, “many of us wanted Michael Corleone (played by Al Pacino) to do what he deemed necessary” (Keen et al. 2002, p. 29). The experience of being led by a narrative to react in ways that are out of character can indeed leave a person “somewhat changed by the journey,” as Gerrig puts it—for better or worse. Although it is disturbing to find oneself rooting for violence, the phenomenon of narrative transportation may also help to explain recent experimental evidence suggesting that reading fiction can improve a person’s empathy (Kidd & Castano 2013).

There are many things that we can do in order to facilitate the experience of narrative transportation. Indeed, most of us are highly skilled in the practices associated
with narrative sense-making, having been trained in the arts of story-making and story-listening from childhood. For example, in order to be transported by a film, we must prepare the environment in certain ways; sit still and pay attention in certain ways; “suspend our disbelief” by refraining from critically detached reflection and allowing ourselves to become immersed in “make-believe”; persuade people who are distracting us to quiet down, and so on. And, of course, as we have seen in this chapter, we must also be able to recognize and respond to the film’s cues, remember the previous events, anticipate the possibilities that are implied by the narrative conflict, and weave the representations we encounter into a holistic narrative structure in just the right way.

But although we are quite active in the process of narrative sense-making, when narrative transportation occurs, it cannot be fully understood in terms of the choices and intentional actions of agents who are fully in control of the process. Like falling asleep or falling in love, the experience of being narratively transported renders a person relatively passive and receptive. Indeed, we often ignore or forget our role in the process, performing the relevant actions by habit and without being aware of doing so.

In this way, we experience being transported into a narrative world as though the narrative itself were acting upon us, on its own power.

The experience of being transported into a narrative world exhibits many important parallels to the experience of being transported into a thematic mood. When we are swept up into a mood, we are rendered relatively passive in the face of the mood as we temporary lose access, to a greater or lesser degree, to our normal way of making sense of things. Our attention becomes directed toward what is relevant within the context of the mood, and the beliefs and concerns that would be incongruent with the mood are suspended. For this reason, we often react to things in ways that are out of
character, and this experience sometimes reveals surprising facts about what kind of thoughts, emotions, and actions we are capable of. In this way, it is possible that we may return from being transported into a mood “somewhat changed by the journey.”

We have already examined several ways in which entering into a thematic mood can lead us to “lose access” to ways of making sense of things that do not fit with our mood. Being in a thematic mood disposes us to experience certain kinds of perceptions, thoughts, bodily feelings, and motivational states. Because our psychic resources are finite, by being disposed in these ways we are, by default, disposed not to experience perceptions, thoughts, bodily feelings, and motivational states that are incongruent with our mood. But as we have seen, even when we do experience such mood-incongruent mental states, these mental states may not have the kind of emotional impact that they normally might have. For example, we might find that a certain mood-incongruent evaluative judgment has little normative grip, or that we experience a mood-incongruent evaluative perception as being emotionally inaccessible. Another example of the way that we lose access to what lies outside of the narrative context that we are enacting in a thematic mood can be found in what psychologists call “mood-congruent recall.” As we saw in Chapter Two, a number of studies have shown that our “mood” (core affect) disposes us to remember past events with the same emotional valence, while making it more difficult for us to recall past events with a different valence. So, for example, when we are in a depressed mood, it becomes relatively easy to remember the tragedies and disappointments we have experienced, while it is relatively difficult to remember moments of joy and contentment. Here we might add that from what we have discovered in Chapter Two, we can see that it is likely that the “existential dimension” of moods compounds the effect of mood-congruent recall. For example, even if we do
remember a certain positive event in the past when we are in a depressed mood, we may not retain it in our experience of the present moment, and likewise, judgments that the memory might otherwise inspire—such as, “My life has been full of good moments”—may fail to be normatively gripping.

Insofar as entering into a thematic mood can make us lose access to mood-incongruent ways of making sense of the things we encounter, the perspectives we do have access to in the mood can become relatively totalizing. Once we enter into a thematic mood, the evaluative perceptions and judgments that reflect this mood are not easily counter-balanced, and we have diminished access to the memories and ideas that would moderate the one-sided picture of reality that is suggested by our mood. As we press into the mood over time, this process only further entrenches itself, insofar as the things we encounter seem to confirm the validity of the mood. In this way, when we are in a thematic mood, a particular interpretive framework begins to perpetuate itself, become more and more internally coherent and self-justifying over time. In this state, we find certain generalizing propositions—for example, statements suggesting that the way things currently seem to be are the way they are in every place and every time and necessarily—to be fitting expressions of our experience. As we continue to refer questions of interpretation to the sense-making structure enacted by our mood, we become increasingly transported into a kind of alternative reality.

In particular, because thematic moods are modes of emplotment, each kind of thematic mood tends to enact a distinctive sort of narrative framework and narrative world into which we become increasingly transported over time. This is why we tend to take on a distinctive sort of personality and worldview when we enter in a thematic mood. For example, in an irritable mood, we might take on the persona of an embittered
comedian—full of sarcasm, biting wit, and nihilistic jokes. In this mood, our reactions to the things we encounter might be guided by a sense of disgust with people’s hypocrisy and exasperation about the absurdity of the things that people take so seriously. The corresponding worldview, in this case, might be one in which people in general are dangerously self-deluded and childish, and in which certain “hard” facts about the world—such as the fact that we will all die someday soon, and that the universe is vast and does not care about our petty dramas, and so on—stand out as being the most important things to remember about the fundamental nature of things. In a tranquil mood, in contrast, we might adopt the persona and worldview of a New Age guru, detached from material concerns, compassionate, and deeply impressed by the connectedness of all things. I do not mean to imply that these particular personalities and worldviews are always associated with irritable and tranquil moods. In an irritable mood, we might take on any number of personas and worldviews, such as, for example, that of an impatient CEO who rages against incompetence, or a mistreated human rights activist who is full of righteous indignation about how cruel people can be. We might tend to adopt just one of these personas and worldviews whenever we are in a particular kind of thematic mood, or alternatively, we may rotate between a number of personas and worldviews that fit with that kind of mood, depending on the content of the particular narrative that we are enacting in that instance.

Again, I am not claiming that any particular thematic mood comes “ready-made” with any particular narrative content. Rather, we develop such narrative content over time—both as we press into a given mood over the course of a few hours or days, and as we enter repeatedly into that same kind of mood over the course of our lifetime. We might begin to develop the content of a certain narrative structure though sheer
improvisation, by simply finding what sort of attitudes and ideas seem to be the most appropriate responses to particular things we encounter when we are in a given mood. Alternatively, and in addition, we might draw on ideas and perspectives we have been exposed to—for example, by imitating a person we have met or a character we have encountered in a certain text or film. In this way, it is possible that narrative texts and films can function as a kind of “emotional scaffolding” that facilitates our capacity to enact narrative frameworks and narrative worlds that are highly elaborated, richly detailed, and compelling (Maiese 2016). And as in any practice, we can become more skilled in our capacity to enact a given narrative structure within a thematic mood. Indeed, we may find that after some time, returning to a certain persona and worldview within a certain kind of thematic mood begins to feel more natural and familiar, like putting on an item of clothing that we had stored for the winter and being pleasantly surprised to find how well it still fits.

It is important to keep in mind here that narrative transportation is a phenomenon that admits of degrees. In any given case, we might be only somewhat transported—still having a significant degree of access to our “world of origin”—or we might find ourselves completely “lost” in a story. Drawing on the concept of “existential depth” that I developed in Ch. 3.4, we might say that an experience of narrative transportation might be more or less “deep.” In general, a narrative is a sense-making structure that is existentially deeper than the present situation, insofar as a narrative will enable and constrain the kinds of situations that will make sense as occurring within that narrative. On the other hand, in most cases a narrative will not be as existentially deep as the sense-making structures of the self and the world; that is, narratives will be things that we encounter within our lives and that exist within the world, and the
structure of the self and the world will constrain and enable the way we are able to make sense of a given narrative. For this reason, we will find it difficult or impossible to become absorbed in the narratives of certain texts and films—for example, if the characters are driven by concerns that we truly cannot empathize with, or if the narrative world is defined by possibilities that are not intelligible to us. But to the extent that a narrative is structured by possibilities that are live possibilities for us, we may find that becoming absorbed in the narrative generates experiences of emotional disconnection. For example, if we are absorbed in Jane Austen’s novel, *Emma*, we may see that Emma’s relationship with Mr. Knightley reflects a number of sexist attitudes and ideas about gender relations and the role and status of women in society. Nonetheless, we may find that as we become gripped by the novel and swept up by its romance, we are unable to feel the emotional responses that would normally accompany evaluative perceptions of this kind. In this case, we are able to perceive the negative evaluative properties of Emma’s attitudes and actions, because of the way these evaluative properties relate to our own values and worldview. But because these evaluative properties are out of place in the narrative structure in which we are engaged, we are emotionally unresponsive to them.

In a similar way, then, we may find that when we enter into a thematic mood, we remain capable of perceiving mood-incongruent evaluative properties that reflect our values and worldview, but that we are emotionally unresponsive to these evaluative perceptions. For example, if we are in a cheerful thematic mood, we may perceive any number of injustices, threats, and losses, but find that these evaluative properties do not seem to be relevant to what is at stake in the narratively structured situation that we are currently navigating. And to the extent that this sort of narrative structure is
existentially deeper than the present situation, we may find ourselves experiencing emotional disconnections for a relatively sustained period of time, as we interpret each object and each new situation that we encounter in terms of their relevance to the narrative that we are enacting in our mood. In other words, because narratives typically weave together many situations into a single context of significance, we may find that we are able to continue enacting a certain narrative structure despite encountering any number of situations that do not seem to fit with the narrative. In these cases, we may have the sense that these situations are merely temporary deviations from the basic trajectory of the plot, and that it would make perfect sense from a narrative point of view for the situation to suddenly change in ways that fit the logic of the narrative once again. In sum, then, thematic moods can generate more sustained experiences of emotional disconnection than tracking moods, because while tracking moods enact the present situation, thematic moods are modes of emplotment, and the narrative structures that are enacted in a thematic mood may weave together many situations. Our sense of the basic parameters of the present situation can remain stable despite encountering any number of objects that seem out of place in the present situation. But narratives are more complex and wider in scope than situations, when we are enacting a narrative, our sense of the narrative context of our experience can remain stable despite encountering any number of situations that seem out of place in the narrative structure.

This completes my account of the logic that governs how moods manifest themselves in our experience. I have shown why moods—both tracking and thematic moods—tend to generate certain mental states, and why they also tend to generate experiences of emotional disconnection. One issue that I have not yet addressed, however, is the question of how to understand the moods that are experienced by
groups of people. This is an important issue; after all, many of the moods we experience in everyday life are moods that we share with others. In these cases, it seems plausible to think our experience would be shaped by the fact that the mood is shared in this way, and thus that collective moods would be different, somehow, than moods that we do not share with others. As we will see, my account of moods is particularly well positioned to fill some gaps in the literature on collective emotional experiences. This literature has tended to focus on collective emotions, rather than collective moods, and accounts of collective emotions typically aim to explain how groups of people can acquire certain kinds of shared mental states. My account of moods suggests an altogether novel approach. On my view, collective moods arise when a group of people collectively enacts a shared temporal, locational, and normative context of significance, within which they interpret the meaning of the objects they encounter. But how, exactly, is such a collective enactment possible?
Chapter Five:
Collective Moods and Group Practices

Collective moods—moods that are shared by a group of people—are incredibly powerful forces in our lives, both at an individual level and in a society as a whole. If a society becomes gripped by an anxious mood, for example, it may become vulnerable to exaggerated fears about terrorism and immigration that lead to actions that betray its cherished values. If an oppressed community falls into a depressed mood, the capacity for any individual in that community to resist oppression will be greatly diminished. Alternatively, if we are swept up into the cheerful mood of a party, we might find that before long the irritable mood we had been in all day has dissipated, and we are suddenly able to access the best parts of ourselves and others. As these examples illustrate, many of the moods we may experience over the course of a day are jointly experienced with others, and when a group of people gets swept up into a shared mood this way, the conditions arise for a profound transformation of the space of possibilities in which they are located. It is thus crucial that we gain a deeper understanding of the nature of collective moods. In this chapter, I investigate how the account of moods I have offered in Chapters Three and Four might help us to begin to understand this phenomenon.

Unfortunately, although the topic of collective emotional experiences has recently begun to attract more scholarly attention, this field of scholarship remains in a nascent state (von Scheve & Salmela 2014, p. xv). One conspicuous sign of this lack of theoretical development, in my view, is the failure to distinguish between collective moods and collective emotions, and the tendency to group all cases of shared emotional
experiences into the category of “collective emotions.” As such, no theorist has yet provided an adequate account of collective moods in their particularity. In order to begin filling this gap in the literature, this essay investigates the nature of collective moods, how they ought to be distinguished from collective emotions, and how, exactly, a mood can come to be jointly experienced by a group of people.

In Section One, I situate my discussion of collective moods within the literature on collective emotions, using established concepts and distinctions in order to describe the phenomenon of collective moods as precisely as possible. Then, in Section Two, I articulate a novel approach to the analysis of collective moods based on the assumption that collective moods are collective enactments of the situational context in which present events are taking place. This approach draws on resources in sociology and the work of the Mexican phenomenologist Jorge Portilla, whose texts contains crucial insights into how we can identify the means by which a group of people can enact this sort of shared interpretation of the situational context—namely, by examining the ways that collective moods can break down, such as when the disruptive behavior of a relajiento “kills the mood” that sustained a group practice. This method reveals that collective moods arise when groups are able to establish and maintain what I call the “background rules” protecting their shared sense of the temporal, locational, and normative parameters of the present situation. Thus, although this chapter will only begin the work of coming to understand the content of these rules, it establishes a promising framework and method for the analysis of collective moods and clarifies the enormous stakes of this analysis—for as we will see, virtually every group practice that we engage in will fail if the participants are not able to maintain the right kind of collective mood.
§5.1. Defining the phenomenon of collective moods

In Chapter One I identified some paradigmatic examples of moods, including anxiety, irritability, depression, boredom, cheerfulness, and tranquility. We can easily think of instances in which a group of people might share the experience of any one of these moods with others, so that they experience the mood as a group. For example, a group of students in a classroom might be in a shared mood of anxiety as they await the beginning of the final exam; a group of prison inmates might find themselves in a collective mood of irritability after their food rations are cut; a group of senior citizens at a nursing home might be in a depressed mood for a few days after one of their neighbors dies; the guests at a dinner party might discover a shared mood of boredom hidden behind the polite conversation and false cheer; beachgoers might delight in the collective cheerfulness of the crowded beach on a sunny day; the people at a meditation retreat might consciously create a collective mood of tranquility during their stay. These examples exhibit three features of collective moods that I would like to highlight here: collective moods are shared emotional experiences; they are occurrent emotional experiences, rather than mere dispositions to respond in certain ways; and they are non-specifically directed—that is, they are not “about” any specific object—even if they are elicited by a specific event and dispose people to direct their emotional responses toward any number of specific “targets.” Let us examine each of these features in more detail.

Collective moods are a kind of experience that is shared, in some sense, by a group of people. Now, the possibility of a genuinely shared emotional experience is something that strikes some theorists as dubious. Skeptics might argue, for example, that an emotional experience is necessarily a “private” experience that occurs “within” an individual. As Merleau-Ponty (1964, p. 114) points out, this assumption of
“individualism” was widespread among “psychologists of the classical period,” according to whom,

the psyche, or the psychic, is what is given to only one person…. I alone am able to grasp my psyche—for example, my sensations of green or of red. You will never know them as I know them; you will never experience them in my place. A consequence of this idea is that the psyche of another appears to me as radically inaccessible…. I cannot reach other lives, other thought processes, since by hypothesis they are open only to introspection by a single individual: the one who owns them.

Instead of challenging this intuition that emotional experiences are necessarily individualistic in nature, some theorists focus their investigations of collective emotions on emotional experiences that are shared in only a very weak or even metaphorical sense. For example, psychologists often define “collective emotions” as instances in which a number of individuals experience a similar kind of affective state at the same time. For example, von Scheve & Ismer (2013, p. 406) define collective emotions as “the synchronous convergence in affective responding across individuals towards a specific event or object.” According to this way of conceptualizing the phenomenon, to count as a collective emotion, it would be sufficient for a number of people simply to happen to experience a similar affective state at the same time, as though by coincidence. Although theorists might identify some underlying causal mechanisms that explain the “synchronous convergence” of individuals’ affective responses, from the perspective of any particular individual, there would not necessarily be any qualitative difference between a collective emotion and a non-collective emotion. In this way, the assumption of individualism remains unchallenged, as the “group” that shares the emotion is a mere aggregate—nothing more than the sum of its parts, and with no independent reality of its own. We might say that such a group is “a mere abstract concept by means of which the observer draws the realities, which are individual human beings, into a whole, as one
calls trees and brooks, houses and meadows, a ‘landscape,’” as Simmel (1949, p. 254) puts it.

A more sophisticated version of this same basic approach to the analysis of shared emotional experiences focuses on ways in which our affective states can gain distinctive qualities or properties when we are embedded in social relationships (Pettit 1996; Wilson 2001). For example, some theorists who research collective emotions focus on the “group-based attitudes” of individuals, such as the attitudes that a person might have about or on behalf of a group that she identifies with—as when we experience pride about being a member of a successful team, or experience shame on behalf of our nation when our elected officials fail in some important and conspicuous way (Ray et al. 2014). In these cases, the synchronous convergence of a group’s emotions is obviously not a mere coincidence but, rather, a result of the attitudes that are widely and conspicuously endorsed by group members. Although the emotions that are embedded in these sorts of highly relational systems can be distinguished from other kinds of emotions in a number of interesting ways, the assumption of individualism remains unchallenged, insofar as the emotional experience is still located at the level of the individuals in the group, rather than the group as a whole.

These phenomena are interesting and worthy of investigation, but the kind of collective moods that I am interested in here involve emotional experiences that are shared in a more robust sense. Namely, genuinely collectiveterm collective moods are experienced by the group as a whole, so that the group is properly understood as a kind of “plural subject” (Gilbert 2002). This is the most “straightforward” sense in which an emotional experience can be shared, in which the “sharing is not a matter of type, or of qualitative identity (i.e., of having different things that are somehow similar), but a matter of token,
or numerical identity” (Schmid 2009, p. 69). From this perspective, a collective mood is understood as a group-level emotional experience that stands over and above the particular affective states of the individuals involved.

There are a number of metaphysical questions regarding whether apparent cases of group-level emotional experiences can be ontologically reduced to individual-level emotions. These metaphysical questions, however, are beyond the scope of this dissertation. When we examine the issue from a phenomenological perspective, we find reason to think that we do sometimes encounter genuinely collective emotional experiences that are irreducible to the experiences of individuals. As Schmid (2014, p. 7) points out, when we interact with other people in everyday life, there sometimes arises a “sense of ‘us,’” a sense of a “shared point of view” or “we-perspective” that is a kind of “plural pre-reflective self-awareness.” On the basis of this sort of “communal feeling,” it is possible to take part in the experience of a collective emotional response when events occur that impinge upon this shared point of view. Scheler (1912/1954, p. 12) famously offers the following example of a genuinely shared emotional response.

Two parents stand beside the dead body of a beloved child. They feel in common the “same” sorrow, the “same” anguish. It is not that A feels this sorrow and B feels it also, and moreover that they both know they are feeling it. No, it is a feeling-in-common. A’s sorrow is in no way an “external” matter for B here, as it is, e.g., for their friend C, who joins them, and commiserates “with them” or “upon their sorrow”. On the contrary, they feel it together, in the sense that they feel and experience in common, not only the self-same value-situation, but also the same emotional impulse in regard to it. The sorrow, as value-content, and the grief, as characterizing the functional relation thereto, are here one and identical.

As Salmela (2012, p. 38) points out, not every case of a collective emotional experience is shared to this degree. With this in mind, we might think of Scheler’s example as located on the far end of a spectrum that ranges over cases exhibiting various degrees to which an emotional experience may be shared. Toward the middle of this spectrum
might be cases in which a group experiences a shared emotional response, but there are some differences in the ways that particular members of the group respond. For example, Schmid (2009, p. 79) argues that the collective joy about the symphony’s first successful performance might be experienced by the conductor as an exuberant exultation, while the man at the triangle experiences only a silent contentment, and in this manner the other members of the group experience their own particular versions of the collective joy.

It is not clear how far in this direction we can go before a group no longer counts as having a genuinely shared emotional experience. However, I suggest that the phenomenon of collective emotional experiences does not include cases where we can discern a group-level response that is merely functionally equivalent to an emotional response, but in which the members of the group do not experience the corresponding emotional states at the individual level. For example, Huebner (2011, p. 110) describes an example in which the crew of the *USS Palau* reacts to a threat in a way that is functionally equivalent to the collective emotion of *fear*—namely, processing the information about the dangerous nature of the threat and taking practical steps to avoid it—while each of the crew members remains perfectly calm, simply performing the routines necessary to evade the threat to the ship. Again, such cases are interesting and worthy of investigation, but I will reserve my usage of the term “collective mood” for cases in which group members share the emotional experience, even if they do not share it in exactly the same way.

In addition to being a shared emotional experience, a collective mood is also an occurrent experience, rather than merely a disposition to respond in certain ways. In Chapter One I argued that, at the individual level, moods only exist so long as they are
consciously experienced. In this way, moods can be distinguished from emotional dispositions, such as Scrooge’s trait of irascibility, which continues to exist even when Scrooge is temporarily in a cheerful mood. So, too, at the group level, collective moods can be distinguished from what de Rivera (1992) calls “emotional climates” and “emotional cultures.” An emotional climate is a more enduring emotional disposition of a group to experience certain kinds of emotional responses. For example, during the 17 years of Pinochet’s dictatorship, the people of Chile endured a pervasive climate of fear. During this time, of course, there were many moments in which people experienced joy and tranquility, both individually and collectively. Nonetheless, the climate of fear persisted in these moments, insofar as the people of Chile were disposed to respond with fear and anxiety more frequently and more intensely than the people of nations which enjoyed an emotional climate of security. Likewise, an emotional culture—that is, a set of shared practices and norms regarding the experience and expression of emotions—is not directly experienced at any point in time, although such a culture may shape and precipitate the collective moods and other emotional experiences of a group. Although both emotional climates and emotional cultures would likely be included in the Heideggerian concepts of Befindlichkeit and Stimmung, I will restrict my usage of the term “collective mood” to describe shared emotional responses that are presently occurrent and consciously experienced by the group.

Finally, in contrast to collective emotions, collective moods are non-specifically directed—that is, they are not “about” any particular object. Instead, they seem to be directed toward everything and nothing in particular. A collective mood is thus more “general” than a collective emotion, in the sense that while a collective emotion reflects a group’s attitude toward some particular event or object, a collective mood reflects the
group’s sense of *how things are going in general* and *how we are doing in general*. Recall that in Chapter One I argued that, on an individual level, a mood might be elicited by a particular event or directed toward a particular “target” but still not be *about* anything in particular. For example, an irritable mood might be caused by lack of sleep, and it might be directed toward any number of objects that would ordinarily not be so irritating—but the irritable mood is not *about* any of these objects or events. So, too, on a group level, a shared mood might be elicited by a particular event, and this mood might be directed toward any number of targets, but unlike a collective emotion, a collective mood is a kind of general frame of mind, rather than an intentional state directed toward a specific object.

It is at this point that the literature on collective emotions fails to provide much guidance in understanding collective moods. However, it is possible to speculate about how accounts of collective emotions might be employed in order to build corresponding accounts of collective moods. Because theorists tend to assume that emotions are grounded in mental states of one kind or another, accounts of collective emotions tend to focus on the challenge of explaining how a group can come to acquire certain kinds of shared mental states. Thus, proponents of the theories of moods that we examined in Chapter Two—such as cognitivism, perceptualism, and attitudinalism, which also hold that moods are grounded in mental states of a certain kind—might build upon these accounts of collective emotions by arguing that, in the case of collective moods, the relevant kind of shared mental state is non-specifically directed. For example, as we have seen, cognitivism suggests that emotions essentially involve evaluative cognitions or judgments regarding how an object is impacting a person’s concerns, and that moods essentially involve generalizing evaluative cognitions or judgments about very general
objects, such as oneself, life, or the world as a whole. Several theorists have proposed mechanisms by which groups can acquire shared evaluative cognitions of this kind. Salmela (2012, p. 42) argues, for instance, that collective emotions arise when members of a group share “overlapping” personal and group-based concerns, and there are institutional mechanisms that enable the members to “synchronize” their responses to particular objects, for example, by deliberating together and developing a “collective consensus.” Huebner (2011, p. 108) argues that a group can exhibit the functional equivalent of judgments, concerns, and desires when the members of the group are situated in such a way that they exhibit a degree of “informational integration” and “computational complexity” that is comparable to that of an individual mind, as in the case of the crew of the USS Palau. Based on these suggestions, a cognitivist account of collective moods might simply argue that collective moods arise when these same mechanisms are employed in order to generate shared evaluative cognitions about very general objects, instead of specific objects. Thus, we might imagine that after a period of collective information-processing and deliberation, a group forms an evaluative judgment regarding the state of the world in general. We might even imagine a formal declaration: “We, the members of this department, have concluded that when we consider the world in general, things are in a dire state” or “…things are showing signs of significant improvement.” If a group can develop group-level, generalizing evaluative judgments in this manner, cognitivism suggests that the group will experience a shared mood of anxiety or cheerfulness, depending on the content of its evaluation.

In a similar way, we might speculate regarding what a perceptualist account of collective moods might look like. As we saw in Chapter Two, perceptualism holds that emotional responses are triggered by evaluative perceptions—that is, instances in which
a person construes an object as having an evaluative property that is relevant to her concerns—and that a mood is a state in which a person is disposed to construe an indefinite series of objects as having a certain kind of evaluative property. Several theorists have proposed mechanisms by which a group can acquire shared evaluative perceptions. For example, Merleau-Ponty (1964, p. 119) argues that because of the dynamic “coupling” that occurs between an infant and her mother, the infant-caregiver unit can come to jointly own certain perceptual and emotional experiences, so that, to this extent, “there is not one individual over against another, but rather an anonymous collectivity, an undifferentiated group life.” Marshaling contemporary scientific resources to support Merleau-Ponty’s analysis, Kreuger (2013a, p. 514) argues that an infant’s capacity for regulating and directing its perceptual attention, as well as its capacity to regulate its affective state, is often heavily dependent upon the caregiver (cf. Sherman 1999).

Along similar lines, theorists have argued that groups of adults can develop a variety of mechanism for regulating and directing the perceptual attention of group members (Kelly et al. 2014) as well as for regulating the emotions of group members (Reeck et al. 2016). For example, as Kreuger (2014, p. 166) notes,

The wedding context is bursting with emotional technologies designed to facilitate the appropriate feelings: special music and singing; codes of dress and behavior; ritualized aspects of the ceremony and celebration; features of the setting such as decorations, food, and the building or location itself (e.g., a church, temple, or specific natural locale).

Knottnerus (2014, p. 315) adds that in weddings and other ritualized group practices, such as political rallies, “[p]hysical arrangements, the orchestration of the event, and use of technology can also influence the extent to which group members are focused on the collective occasion and particular aspects of it,” and to the extent that a group can
jointly direct its attention toward specific objects in this way, “the more intense the collective emotions experienced by actors in the collective experience.” With these points in mind, we can imagine that a perceptualist account of collective moods would hold that groups enter into a collective mood to the extent that group members become disposed, through these means, to collectively perceive certain kinds of evaluative properties in the objects they encounter.

The non-cognitivist and attitudinalist accounts of emotions and moods view these emotional experiences as grounded in bodily feelings and motivational states. On these views, each kind of emotion or mood essentially involves a certain kind of felt action readiness. In the collective emotions literature, there is a long tradition of investigating the mechanisms by which members of a group can influence each others’ bodily feelings and motivational states, particularly when those people interact closely in face-to-face settings. An early example of this explanatory strategy is found in Le Bon’s (1895) research on crowds, in which he argued that emotions and behaviors can be contagious in a way that is analogous to a disease. Likewise, Durkheim (1912/1947, p. 209) explored the means by which, “[i]n the midst of an assembly animated by a common passion, we become susceptible of acts and sentiments of which we were incapable when reduced to our own forces.” As Park (1967, p. 257) articulates the idea, it appears that when a group of people are focused on some exciting object or event,

the excitement of every individual is intensified by the response each unconsciously makes to the manifest interest of every other individual. The crowd assumes under these circumstances the character of a closed circuit, each individual responding to his own excitement as he sees it reflected via the attitudes and emotions of his neighbor...until the crowd is a collective unit.

When this sort of “closed circuit” is generated, it is as though the group has become a single organism with a single, collective body, in which particular feelings and
motivational states pass fluidly through the members of the group. Building on this basic idea, psychologists have identified a number of mechanisms by which such a “closed circuit” can be created among people who are closely cooperating, including “neural mirroring,” “facial mimicry,” and other means of “entrainment” (Hatfield et al. 2014). With these points in mind, we might imagine an account of collective moods according to which a group can enter into a collective mood when the members become entrained in such a way that they experience a shared felt action readiness that is not directed toward a specific object but toward things in general, as when a mob collectively feels ready to destroy any object it encounters in an indiscriminate fashion. In this case, one might argue that the mob is in an intense collective mood of irritability, rather than a collective emotion of anger directed at a particular object.

In my view, the research on collective emotions that I have reviewed in this section generally offers important insights into the nature of shared emotional experiences. It is quite likely that various means of collectively processing information and directing attention, as well as various means of collective entrainment, all play important roles in making collective moods possible. With that said, I would argue that the phenomenon of collective moods cannot be adequately accounted for in terms of shared mental states alone. In the previous chapters, I have offered arguments against each of these accounts of moods at the individual level. Namely, I have argued that the way moods dispose us to experience evaluative cognitions, evaluative perceptions, bodily feelings, and motivational states presupposes, and so cannot account for, the existential dimension of moods, including the way that moods alter our experience of the temporal structure of the present moment, the emotional accessibility of present

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For discussion of the role of entrainment and proprioception that can arise among ballet dancers during a performance, see Montero 2010.
objects, and the normative structure of what is presently at stake. Rather than repeat these arguments in the context of collective moods, then, let us turn our attention to an examination of collective moods based on the account of moods that I have offered in Chapters Three and Four. How might a group of people collectively enact the temporal, locational, and normative parameters of the present situation? And what role might such enactments play in the functioning of group practices?

§5.2. Collective enactments of the present situation

On my view, moods are enactments of the present situation. This account of moods provides a relatively straightforward way to understand collective moods, insofar as it is intuitively easier to understand how people can share a situation than it is to understand how they could acquire genuinely shared mental states. When we think of encountering situations like *finally reaching the summit after an early morning hike to see the sunrise*, or *being late for work and stuck in a traffic jam on Monday morning*, we can easily imagine companions who experience this same situation together with us, without our prompting or any obvious and effortful coordination. Heidegger’s analysis of “being-with” (*Mit-sein*) provides a framework for understanding why we so often find it natural to experience a shared sense of the present situation with others. Heidegger (1927/1962) argues that in everyday life we usually do not self-consciously distinguish ourselves from other people but, rather, experience ourselves as merely one person among many like us. As he puts it, “[b]y ‘Others’ we do not mean everyone else but me—those over against whom the ‘I’ stands out. They are rather those from whom, for the most part, one does not distinguish oneself—those among whom one is too” (p. 154/118). For this reason, we tend not to experience our perceptions and responses to
things as reflective of our unique identity but, rather, as the perceptions and responses that *anyone* might have in the same circumstances. That is, for the most part, we experience ourselves as simply doing what “one” does. “We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as *one* takes pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as *one* sees and judges; likewise we shrink back from the ‘great mass’ as *one* shrinks back; we find shocking what *one* finds shocking” (p. 164/126f).\(^{13}\)

As Heidegger points out, the perspective of other people is *built into* most of the objects we encounter in everyday life, just as it is an inherent feature of the social roles that define our own identity. Heidegger argues that most of the objects that we encounter in everyday life are “ready-to-hand”—that is, their significance is defined primarily by their purpose, use, and practical meaning in our lives, in the way that the hammer is *for* one to pound nails, the chair is *for* one to sit on, and so on. As such, these objects implicitly “refer” to other people, in the sense that their meaning is “intrinsically shaped by the fact that they belong to a world we share in common with other beings like ourselves,” as Wrathall (2005, p. 51) puts it. In this way, a hammer “refers” to anyone who might use it, as well as to the people who made it and sold it, to the people whose labor allows us to transform the natural world into inhabitable shelters, and to the people who take shelter in built dwellings. In this vein, Heidegger (1925/1992, p. 239) argues,

> The tool I am using is bought by someone, the book is a gift from… the umbrella is forgotten by someone. The dining-table at home is not a round top on a stand but a piece of furniture in a particular place, which itself has its particular place at which particular others are seated everyday.

Furthermore, Heidegger argues that just as the existence and perspective of other people are built into the meaning of the objects we encounter, the social roles that define

\(^{13}\) I have altered the translation in order to render Heidegger’s term *das Man* as “one” rather than “they.”
our identities—for example, *father, professor, music-lover*, and so on—are constituted by
publically available and socially constructed norms that apply to others who also inhabit
those social roles (Blattner 2000). Thus, because the world we inhabit is fundamentally
a world in which we are constantly engaged in practical, norm-governed activities, the
world we inhabit is always already a “with-world.”

Heidegger’s existential-hermeneutic-communitarian-pragmatist framework—in
which the sense-making frameworks that give meaning to our lives are grounded in and
shaped by our cooperative practical engagements with the world—provides crucial
guidance as we seek to understand the nature of moods and collective moods. In
Chapter Three I argued that moods typically arise in the context of our practical
activity, because moods typically “track” our sense of *how things are going in general* and
*how we are doing in general* as we go about our day. Likewise, I argue here that collective
moods typically arise in the context of “group practices.” A *group practice* is a norm-
governed activity in which individuals cooperate for some purpose. When we participate
in a group practice, we understand our actions as being appropriate or inappropriate
with respect to the norms of the practice. As the sociologist Erving Goffman (1964, p.
135) puts it: “Cultural rules establish how individuals are to conduct themselves by
virtue of being in a gathering, and these rules for commingling, when adhered to,
socially organize the behavior of those in the situation.” For example, when we are
attending a wedding, we have the sense that certain actions would be appropriate or
inappropriate, relative to the norms that govern the practice. And as the Mexican
phenomenologist Jorge Portilla (1966/2012) points out, such group practices tend to
generate collective moods, the way that weddings tend to generate a shared mood of
*cheerfulness*. These collective moods are not mere *by-products* of the group practice. To
the contrary, the creation of a collective mood is typically essential to the success of a group practice, and may even be its primary purpose. As Portilla (1966/2012, p. 146) puts it, the *fiesta* or party is a group practice in which the primary aim is to create a shared mood of cheerfulness—its “sense is to make joy real, the joy to communicate precisely in joy and rejoicing.”

In everyday life we often do not notice the fact that when we are engaged in a group practice, we are cooperating closely with other people within a shared, norm-governed activity. For example, as we dress in the morning, drive to work, and make small talk with our colleagues, we may have the sense that we are simply acting in ways that correspond to our own personal beliefs and desires—that we chose the clothes we are wearing simply because we like them, that we are driving or talking simply in the ways that seem best to us, and so on. In these cases, we have “internalized” the norms of the group practices to such an extent, and the skills involved have become so habitual, that we typically do not notice the fact that we, together with others, are jointly navigating a very complex set of informal and implicit rules that govern our collective behavior. Likewise, we tend not to notice that by doing so, we create the conditions for certain collective moods to arise. Often these shared moods are subtle and remain in the background of our awareness, like “mood music” playing softly in a restaurant. For example, when things are going well, and traffic is moving easily, there is a kind of tranquility that arises in the collective commute. When we are with our colleagues in the lounge, getting coffee and preparing for work, and we are all dressed in appropriate ways and chatting pleasantly, a subtle mood of cheerfulness might arise within the group.
We often take these processes for granted until we encounter a *breakdown*, such as an instance in which the rules of the group practice are conspicuously violated, so that the collective mood is disrupted. For example, as Portilla (1966/2012, p. 146) points out, even though we tend to think of parties as occasions where we can finally “let loose” and be uninhibited by rules and social norms, when someone acts inappropriately—committing what is sometimes called a “party foul”—we quickly realize that there are in fact, many informal and implicit rules that govern even the group practice of partying. In many cases, the inappropriate behavior is inappropriate precisely because it is counterproductive to the creation of the collective mood that is associated with the group practice.

In order for there to really be joy at the fiesta, it is necessary for the participants to maintain a behavior regulated by that vital value [*joy*]. It is necessary that no one adopt a behavior that will turn him into an *aguafiestas*, a killjoy. In this sense, the fiesta is something of a ceremony…. [Granted] that in the fiesta, regulation is freer and spontaneity finds a wider margin and greater freedom, it is no less true that it is, as in the ceremony, subject to certain rules, the violation of which implies a failure of the fiesta as such.

As this example illustrates, we can often gain insight into the conditions for the possibility of phenomena like collective moods by examining instances of breakdown, in which a collective mood is “killed” or fails to arise in the way we would otherwise expect.

With this in mind, Portilla’s long-form essay, “The Phenomenology of *Relajo*” provides an excellent resource for understanding how collective moods arise in the context of group practices. The essay focuses on the phenomenon of *relajo*, a term that might be roughly translated as “mess” or “chaotic situation,” and refers to a specific way that any group practice can break down and cease to function. Portilla is particularly interested in instances of *relajo* that are intentionally brought about by people who act
like class clowns or spoilsports, individuals who repeatedly disrupt a group practice and
distract the participants. *Relajo* occurs when this kind of disruptive behavior actually
ruins the event or practice for anyone who was trying to “take it seriously,” thus
bringing about a “suspension of seriousness” (p. 128). Portilla offers the following
example of *relajo*:

> During a screening of the film version of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, in the scene
in which Cassius falls pierced by his own sword, the expectant silence in the
movie theater was broken by a long groan that invincibly provoked laughter
among the audience (p. 137).

Now, a single well-timed joke is not sufficient to constitute the suspension of
seriousness that is characteristic of *relajo*. In order to generate *relajo*, Portilla says, the
disruption must be repeated (p. 133). In some cultures, perhaps, such repetition would
be unlikely. But in Portilla’s view, this kind of class-clown behavior had become
something of a cultural habit in Mexico, so that people tend to anticipate such
disruptions and play along with them. Thus, it is entirely possible that, in this scenario,
other people in the audience would have joined in the disruption, making jokes and
mocking the film. If this had happened, then “between the mocking attitude of some and
the indignation of others, disorder and confusion could have proliferated, putting an end
to the aesthetic situation” (p. 137). The film would be ruined for anyone trying to take it
seriously—and this full-scale breakdown of the group activity would be a *relajo*.

Thus, as Portilla’s essay shows, we find an excellent guide to the inner workings
of collective moods in the figure of the “*relajiento*”—that is, the person who intentionally
tries to disrupt group practices and “kill the mood” by acting like a class clown or
spoilsport, and indeed, who may even take up such activity as a *way of life*. In order to be
successful in disrupting these collective moods, the *relajiento* must have an excellent
understanding of how group practices work, even if he himself could not (or would not)
articulate the principles that underlie his disruptive skills. One thing that becomes immediately apparent when we examine the “suspension of seriousness” that occurs in a relajo, for example, is that taking a practice “seriously” does not necessarily involve adopting a “serious” or grave affective state. For instance, a party might be disrupted by one of the participants acting like an apretado or “tightwad,” refusing to enjoy the festivities and being uptight about perceived injustices and offenses, and reminding people of obligations they have not met, losses they have suffered, and threats they are facing (p. 190). If taking a group practice “seriously” does not necessarily involve adopting a grave affective state, then what kind of attitudes and actions do allow a group practice to generate the collective mood that enables the practice to function?

According to the account I have defended, moods establish a distinctive sort of temporal, locational, and normative context of significance within which we interpret the things we encounter. With this in mind, I argue here that when we examine how the relajiento disrupts a group practice and kills the shared mood of the group, it becomes clear that among all of the informal and implicit rules that govern a practices, the most foundational rules are those that allow a group to establish and maintain the temporal, locational, and normative context that is proper to the practice. We can thus distinguish between actions that are a bit out of place or done at the wrong time, and actions that may actually disrupt the entire temporal and locational parameters of the practice. Likewise, it is one thing to do something inappropriate, but quite another to perform actions that undermine the entire normative structure that enables the practice to function. With this in mind, let us examine in more detail how a group can establish and maintain these “existential” aspects of collective moods, beginning with a look at how the relajiento might undermine the normative context of a practice.
In Portilla’s view, when a group practice commences, certain actions by the participants allow a shared normative context gradually to emerge into existence, within which the participants feel called upon to respond to the concerns that are at stake in the practice and respond emotionally to the evaluative properties (or “values,” in Portilla’s vocabulary) that the practice is designed to generate. For example, a ballet performance is a group practice in which the “participants” include not only the dancers and musicians and so on, but also the audience, whose actions are also crucial conditions for the possibility of the gracefulness of the dance to emerge into existence. From a naïve perspective, we might assume that a dancer’s gracefulness is an inherent property of the dancer, something that resides in her skill and technique. But Portilla points out that, in fact, it is the *group practice* of the ballet performance that allows this gracefulness to emerge in its most developed form, insofar as this practice establishes the normative context wherein this gracefulness is best able to call upon us to respond to it with the appropriate appreciation. To this extent, then, the dancer’s gracefulness is actually a *relational* property that depends in part on the appropriate recognition of the audience, and therefore, depends on their participation in the group practice of the ballet performance.

Gracefulness, undoubtedly, rests on the dance technique—learned laboriously by the performer—but also on recognition by the spectator. In a certain sense, it is a collective endeavor directed from within by a tacit agreement between performer and audience. It emerges, precarious and vulnerable, like a burgeoning that lays root in the field of harmony among dancers, musicians, and spectators, and it survives as something definitive, perfect, and stimulating in the memory of all these groups. This gracefulness cannot attain the stability and solidity of the “thing-value.” Its evanescent reality has required the support of multiple generosities, and it rests on this support (p. 145).

We tend not to notice the important role that the audience plays in this group practice. Indeed, we tend to assume that that the audience is merely a passive witness, and that
whatever “work” is necessary in order for the dance to become graceful is done by the performers, musicians, stage technicians, and so on. However, when we begin to examine instances of breakdown, moments in which there is some problem in the smooth functioning of the group practice, we can gain insight into the complex, norm-governed behavior that is required of the audience in order for the ballet performance to succeed in generating the normative context within which gracefulness will be able to acquire normative grip.

For example, if audience members failed to dress appropriately—wearing beachwear to the theater instead of the usual finery—this might undermine the group’s capacity to establish the normative context in which they are maximally receptive to the graceful elegance of the dance. But this disruption would probably be relatively minor in comparison with the kind of disruption that would be initiated by a relajiento. Imagine, for instance, that just as the tranquil mood of the ballet is beginning to take hold, and the gracefulness of the dancer is beginning to mesmerize the audience, someone begins to make noises mimicking flatulence every time the dancer leaps into the air. This action would be more than merely distracting. It would reframe the entire performance as something ridiculous, absurd, and comical. Regardless of how skillful the dancer is, when each of her leaps is accompanied by the sound of flatulence, there is no way for gracefulness to emerge into existence and call upon the participants with any normative grip. As Portilla would put it, by profoundly disrupting the normative context of the practice in this way, the actions of the relajiento would make it impossible for anyone to take the practice “seriously.” In this way, he says,

Relajo kills action in its crib. It negates the only thing that gives an act sense; it impedes the light of value from illuminating those ends and means through which its realization could be conducted. It is a paradoxical inactive action which makes the call of value sterile (p. 188).
Thus, *relajo* utterly destroys the normative context within which participants of a group practice can experience themselves as being *called upon* to respond in the ways they otherwise would be.

Portilla’s insight here can be illustrated by comparing the *relajiento*’s action in this imagined scenario with the action of *booing* the performance. If an audience member began to shout, “boo!” during the ballet performance, it might very well ruin the show. However, booing is an established and recognized means by which audience members can express their disapproval of the performance. Indeed, generally speaking, booing reflects the audience’s commitment to the high standards of the practice, and as such, it is a way of taking the practice seriously. Thus, we could imagine that if a dancer were to get booed off the stage in this way, she might go home in tears, but with renewed resolve to apply herself even more diligently to her craft and come back next year to show her critics what she is capable of. But if a dancer’s performance were to be ruined by the *relajiento*’s mockery, this sort of failure would not inspire further commitment in this way. No matter how skilled the dancer became, her techniques would be useless against the *relajiento*’s capacity to render “the call of value sterile” by destroying the normative context that enables the dance to bring forth a gripping experience of gracefulness. Although dancers may need courage to face harsh critics, they are often inspired by this challenge—yet who could feel called to “effective action in the realization of values” when the mood of the group is dominated by the mockery of the *relajiento*?

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44 Of course, some forms of art, such as certain kinds of “postmodern” dance, aims to disrupt the norms that typically govern that art form. But in this case, there is nonetheless a way to take this art seriously—for example, by participating in the playfulness or being outraged at the violations of norms. Thus, even this kind of art would be vulnerable to the sarcasm, mockery, and distracting disruptions of a *relajiento*. 

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These considerations provide support for my claim that collective moods arise when groups cooperate within group practices in order to enact a certain normative context of significance. The particular means of doing so will vary from practice to practice, but in each case, the enactment will require group members to avoid doing the sort of things that will disrupt this normative structure, and to monitor and police other group members’ behavior so that they do not disrupt the normative structure of the practice, either. More insight into these processes can be gained by examining the other aspects of collective moods. As I argued in Chapter Three, the normative structure of a situation is intimately tied to its temporal and locational structure—and so, too, with collective moods. Establishing the normative structure of a shared situation requires that groups collectively interpret the present time and place in a certain way—namely, as being the time and place for responding to the concerns that are at stake in the situation—and thus to set aside other concerns that may be important, generally speaking, but which are not what matters most here and now.

There are a wide variety of techniques that groups can use to enact the locational structure that is appropriate to the group practice—that is, to establish the present place as a place in which certain kinds of evaluative properties become emotionally accessible. However, it is difficult to overstate the important contributions that the environment itself makes to the process of establishing the locational structure of a group practice. The particular physical configuration of a space can generate a distinctive “emotional atmosphere” that can enable or prevent a group practice from generating a collective mood (Anderson 2009). Just as natural environments can make certain kinds of experiences more easily accessible, as when the features of a mountaintop facilitates our appreciation of the natural beauty of a certain vista, a built
environment can also function as a kind of “emotional niche” or “affective scaffolding” in
which the particular qualities of the objects that are present facilitate the accessibility of
certain evaluative properties (Maiese 2016). As Slaby (2014, p. 44) puts the idea,

> Emotional atmospheres are affective qualities in public space—qualities realized in
a distributed manner by several elements spread across a scenery, making up
dynamic situational gestalts. They are experientially manifest as wholes, and
their separate elements, if distinguishable at all, might be explicited only after
the holistic impression has been received. As qualitative figurations of
interpersonal space that are often purposefully arranged, atmospheres are the
counterpart, on the side of phenomenal experience, of…“cognitive props and
aids”…not tools for thinking, but tools for feeling…. In this way, an atmosphere
might provide some, or most of the emotional quality and dynamics in a given
situation, while also leaving room for the agent’s idiosyncratic contribution.

One example of how built environments can facilitate the establishment of a collective
mood can be found in the way that the stonework and high ceilings of a cathedral will
make even the quietest sounds echo throughout the building, thereby leading the visitor
almost automatically to lower her voice, thereby helping to establish a mood in which
she will be more receptive to certain kinds of religious or aesthetic experiences.

For these reasons, a group’s capacity to construct and utilize space within a
group practice is an important precondition for the emergence of a collective mood. By
the same token, there are things that individuals can do within the space that may
enhance or disrupt the locational structure of the shared situation. For example, the
walls of the theater where a ballet performance is being conducted can help a group to
“wall off” the concerns that are external to the practice, but if people are allowed to read
a newspaper or check social media on their mobile devices during a performance—
thereby bringing these external concerns into the space—a group’s sense of the
locational structure of the present place may be disturbed. Likewise, if, during the
screening of a film, a person opens the theater door to the outside world, this may ruin
the ability of the audience to become transported into the narrative world—not merely
because of the distraction this would cause, but also because of the way that seeing the world outside will implicitly structure the experience of present place, making the audience self-consciously aware of the fact that they are at the cinema, rather than simply being absorbed in the world of the film. These points help us to understand why certain conversational topics are “out of place” in certain settings. For example, it may be impolite to discuss business at a funeral, to discuss politics at the dinner table, or to discuss worries and resentments at a celebration, and so on. By refraining from such activities, and monitoring and policing others’ behavior accordingly, group members help to enact the locational structure of the situation, thereby facilitating the emergence of a collective mood.

It is equally important for group members to establish and maintain the proper temporal structure if a practice is going to function successfully and generate the relevant sort of collective mood. In some group practices, such as ceremonies, a speaker might deliberately remind the participants of certain past events and future possibilities in order to establish the temporal context of significance within which they are to interpret their present experience. For example, a speaker might establish a certain interpretive frame by recalling an event in ancient history that is important to the group, or alternatively, by reminding participants of a hoped for or feared possibility in the future, such as the success of their team project or the threat of environmental collapse due to global warming.

Furthermore, within any group practice, there is typically a certain rhythm that is appropriate to the practice. Indeed, Collins (2004) argues that the “interaction ritual chains” that constitute a group practice are often designed to elicit the sort of “rhythmic entrainment” that enables the interaction rituals to function. The concept of interaction
*rituals* was first developed by Durkheim (1912/1947) in his analysis of the “fusion of feeling” and “collective effervescence” that can occur in religious and political practices, but Goffman (1967/2005) famously applied the concept to the smaller rituals of everyday life. In any such ritualized, rule-governed practice, there is a proper rhythm to the call-and-response interactions of participants—something we tend to notice only when the practice is disrupted by the participants’ failure to enact this rhythm. For example, there is a certain *choreography* in the sort of “small talk” we might make with our colleagues in the lounge before work, a rhythmic coordination that might become apparent only when our interlocutor speaks too slowly or too quickly, pauses for too long, or begins to drone on and on. Along these lines, there is a wealth of fascinating research in the fields of sociology and psychology on the phenomenon of entrainment that occurs in group practices. For example, Allan (1998) has analyzed the role that “interactional pace” and “rhythmic movement” in group practices plays in the generation of shared emotional experiences (see also McNeill 1995 and Ehrenreich 2006). One study examined the effects of a ritual in Belgium in which participants march together for a period of three days, finding that afterward participants often reported experiencing a profound collective emotional experience—saying, for example, “I bathed in an emotion shared by the entire group,” “I felt a kind of complicity between us,” “I lost consciousness of myself,” “I felt like I was transported out of myself and became a part of the group,” and “I had the feeling of being supported by other members of the group” (Páez et al. 2015). Other researchers have found that just as there is a kind of “music” that can be discerned within the orderly patterns of exchanges in any collective endeavor, actual music can be profoundly effective in establishing a shared temporal context within which a group of people will interpret their own ongoing
experience (DeNora 2000; Kreuger 2013b; Malloch & Trevarthen 2009). In fact, according to Bispham’s (2006, p. 131) analysis of the evolutionary roots of music, “MRB [musical rhythmic behavior] is primarily rooted in providing a temporal framework, collective emotionality, a feeling of shared experience, and cohesiveness to group activities and ritualistic ceremonies.”

Although these considerations have only just begun to examine the means by which groups enact the normative, locational, and temporal parameters of a shared situation, they should be sufficient to point toward fruitful areas for future research. Furthermore, I would suggest that my account of collective moods as collective enactments of the present situation can provide an important framework for the investigations of collective emotional experiences in philosophy, psychology, and sociology—allowing us to bring together disparate insights into a richer understanding of collective moods in their particularity, as distinct from collective emotions. One further line of inquiry that is suggested by my account relates to the phenomenon of “thematic moods,” which, unlike “tracking moods,” do not fluctuate fluidly in response to the solicitations of the environment but, rather, remain stubbornly fixed in a preoccupation with a certain kind of concern, even when such preoccupation seems to be inappropriate in the present situation. At the group level, we can sometimes discern a kind of collective thematic mood, in which a group of people remains in a mood despite this mood being inappropriate to the group practice they are engaged in, or even despite not being engaged in any group practice whatsoever.

In Chapter Four, I argued that the phenomenon of thematic moods is best understood by viewing thematic moods as modes of emplotment. When we enter a thematic mood, we begin to interpret our ongoing experience within the framework of a
narrative structure, as though we had been transported into an ongoing storyline. In this way, present events seem to “follow from” certain past events, and they likewise seem to be “leading to” certain future possibilities, in accordance with the narrative logic that governs the way that the conflict underlying the story may be resolved. Thus, when we are in a thematic mood, we come to interpret the objects we encounter in terms of their place within this larger narrative, rather than merely in terms of their place within the present situation. In a similar manner, I would argue, collective thematic moods can be understood as collective modes of emplotment. When a group enters into a collective thematic mood, they collectively enact a narrative structure within which they interpret their ongoing experience. This larger narrative structure determines the way they respond emotionally to the objects they encounter, even when such responses seem inappropriate to their present situation.

The sociologist Arlie Hochschild (2016) offers an illustration of this sort of collective thematic mood in her analysis of the collective emotional experience of US Americans on the political right in the run-up to the 2016 election. After living with and befriending political conservatives in Louisiana for a period of five years, Hochschild discovered that the shared emotional atmosphere of right-wing, “red-state America” is one that is governed by the logic of a particular narrative, which she calls a “deep story.” As she explains,

A deep story is a feels-as-if story—it’s the story feelings tell, in the language of symbols. It removes judgment. It removes fact. It tells us how things feel. Such a story permits those on both sides of the political spectrum to stand back and explore the subjective prism through which the party on the other side sees the world (p. 135).
On her view, the deep story that structures the “subjective prism” of many contemporary US Americans on the political right is a story of injustice (p. 136-145). In summary, it goes like this:

You are waiting in a long line that goes up a hill, on the other side of which is the American Dream. You have suffered many setbacks, but you find honor in the fact that you continue to persevere in pursuit of this dream. But lately the line seems to have slowed to crawl, and it may even be going backwards, and you are confused and concerned. You try not to complain, but you are starting to feel stuck. Then, suddenly, you see people cutting in line ahead of you. Instead of getting ahead by following the rules, as you have, these line-cutters—blacks, women, immigrants, refugees, public sector workers, and so on—are unfairly advantaged through affirmative action and other “sympathetic” efforts by the government to help these “poor people.” Even some lowly bird or fish seems to be getting millions of dollars of support while you remain stuck. You’re a compassionate person, but you begin to feel “sympathy fatigue” as you are constantly asked to feel sympathy for these other groups, even while being mistreated yourself—called “crazy redneck” and “white trash,” and viewed as monstrously callous for daring to question the situation. In fact, you see that the people who are supposed to be keeping the line orderly, the officials in your government, are betraying you, and that even the president, Barack Obama (a line-cutter himself) is waving at the line-cutters and turning a blind eye as they make their way to the front, while you are left behind.

In my vocabulary, we might say that the collective mood that is enacted within this mode of emplotment is a kind of collective irritability, in which this group becomes stubbornly preoccupied with injustices and offenses, even when such attitudes do not seem appropriate to the present situation. This mood may find its fullest expression in group practices where it is appropriate—in Fox News and talk radio broadcasts, political rallies, and so on. But people who are in the grip of this deep story may find that this shared mood of irritability persists in other settings as well. In this way, members of the so-called “Tea Party” might find that they remain in this shared mood even when they are not physically with one another, or when they are engaged in other group practices where this kind of irritability does not seem appropriate.
In the literature from sociology and psychology, there has been relatively little research into the ways that a group can collectively enact a shared narrative structure. However, some work on this topic has been done in the domain of industrial-organizational psychology (Downing 1997; Czarniawska 1997, 2004; Gabriel 2000; Boje 2001, 2008; Sonenshein 2010; Vaara & Tenari 2011). For example, Downing (1997, p. 35) notes that when there is a major change in an organization, such as a merger or downsizing within a company, this change represents a “breach in norms,” and as such, it “precipitates a social drama.” On Downing’s view, the way that stakeholders understand this event will depend in large part on how it is emplotted. Downing (p. 37) describes four basic plotlines that can be used as a framework for interpreting the significance of the change. These four plotlines are: the quest, rooted in the traditional literary genre of “romance,” in which a hero challenges the status quo, faces setbacks, but ultimately succeeds; the downfall, rooted in the genre of tragedy, in which a hero is thrown from success to failure and humiliation, largely as a result of fate; the contest, rooted in the genre of melodrama, in which a struggle between good and evil leads to a climactic battle; and the scam, rooted in the genre of “irony,” in which a hero is exposed as corrupt and incompetent. Once an event is emplotted into one of these frameworks, Downing argues, it can become difficult or impossible to reverse the resulting “emotional momentum” in order to persuade stakeholders to alter their interpretations. Thus, with so much at stake, stakeholders tend to expend significant effort toward establishing the framework that serves their interests. They do so through explicit and implicit means—explicitly, by describing the change in terms of the relevant narrative structure, and implicitly, by employing verbal and non-verbal cues to activate processes of narrative sense-making in others, for example, by associating various individuals with
the characters in myths and other well-known narratives in the culture. By doing so, Downing (p. 34) says, “actors express emotional keys socially, as they draw on emotional capital, in the form of micro and macro stocks of knowledge or interpretive schemas.”

As this example illustrates, the field of industrial-organizational psychology offers a wealth of resources for understanding how groups can enact narrative structures. However, this research tends to focus on understanding an organization’s reaction to a specific event—something that would likely be categorized as a group emotion—and understanding the longer-term emotional culture of an organization. Thus, more work would need to be done here to show how similar processes of real-world, collective narrative construction can establish the sort of “deep stories” that Hochschild describes, which can transport a group of people into a distinctive sort of collective mood, which group members will take with them into all kinds of situations, even when they are not directly engaging with others in a group practice in which this sort of mood would be appropriate. If my analysis is correct, then we can be confident that this sort of investigation is likely to be a fruitful avenue for future research into the phenomenon of collective thematic moods.

As this research unfolds, it will be important to keep in mind the distinctions between the sense-making structure of narratives, selves, and worlds. Because narratives are not as existentially deep as selves and worlds, when a group of people enters a thematic mood and thereby experiences a kind of collective narrative transportation, the diminished access to their ordinary perspectives is likely to be partial and temporary, thus generating moments of emotional dissonance and disconnection that bring instability to the narrative structure. However, as a group’s deep story becomes
increasingly established and entrenched—further displacing other sense-making structures as the mood deepens—it may be possible at some point that the group is no longer properly described as merely being in a *shared mood* but, rather, should be described as inhabiting a *world of their own*. This possibility opens the door to a variety of socio-political concerns regarding the role of collective moods in public life. Just as it can be difficult to reason with an individual who is swept up into a mood, so, too, we can imagine that it would be equally difficult to engage in fruitful democratic deliberation with a group of people who are in the grip of a collective mood, and who may even find themselves confined within a problematic sense-making framework in a more permanent way. Moreover, as Sunstein (2017) notes, communication technology continues to exacerbate such divisions in our societies, as the “echo chambers” that arise through social media and partisan news services further entrench the worldviews of each political camp. Thus, today more than ever, we have reason to worry about a nation divided by moods.
Conclusion: Implications for Moral Psychology

In this concluding section, I will briefly summarize some of the main ideas from the preceding chapters and then explore some implications these ideas may have in the domain of moral psychology. I began by defining moods as global and non-specifically directed emotional experiences, and I distinguished between two common types of moods—“tracking moods,” which fluctuate fluidly over the course of the day, and “thematic moods,” which remain stubbornly preoccupied with a certain kind of concern for hours or days at a time. I argued that if this conception of moods were adopted, it could bring needed clarity to the literature on moods in empirical psychology, mainstream Anglo-American philosophy, and phenomenology, where moods are defined in incompatible and generally unsatisfying ways.

With this definition of moods in hand, I turned to the guiding question of the dissertation: What is the logic that governs the way that moods manifest themselves in our experience? I argued that the most prominent theories of moods in the philosophical literature fail to provide an adequate account of the phenomenon. Each of these views holds that our experience of moods is explained by the occurrence of a certain kind of mental state that commonly arises when we are in a mood. This strategy is misguided, however, because the contents of our mental states cannot explain the “existential dimension” of moods—that is, the way moods operate on a “pre-intentional” level to alter how things show up and make sense to us in the first place, even before we adopt any particular attitude toward them. For example, the content of our evaluative perception of an object—seeing that an object is threatening, unjust, or beautiful, for
example—cannot explain the experience of this object being “emotionally accessible” to us, rather than seeming distant, foreign, unfamiliar, or unreal. Likewise, the content of an evaluative cognition—judging that we have been successful in our lives, for example, and that we ought to feel more cheerful—cannot explain the experience of being “normatively gripped” by that cognition. In this way, each of the major theories of mood in the literature presupposes, and so fails to account for, the way moods alter our experience of the temporal structure of the present moment, the emotional accessibility of the objects around us, and the normative grip of the thoughts we entertain. In fact, it is only when we appreciate the existential dimension moods that we can explain why moods dispose us to experience certain mental states, while also giving rise to occasional experiences of “emotional disconnection,” in which we encounter an object that matters to us, but we fail to respond emotionally to it as we normally would.

These considerations pointed the way toward my own, novel account of the logic that governs how moods manifest themselves in our experience. On my view, moods are “enactments of the present situation”—that is, moods organize our experience in terms of a holistic interpretation of what is at stake in general, here and now. By thus establishing our sense of the temporal, locational, and normative context of our ongoing experience, moods enable us to direct our “psychic resources”—our thoughts, perceptions, bodily feelings, and motivational states—in a coordinated way toward responding appropriately to what we encounter. Moods thus give rise to experiences of emotional disconnection when we encounter an object that matters to us, generally speaking, but seems out of place in the present situation, irrelevant to what is at stake, here and now. In such cases, we may experience certain thoughts, perceptions, feelings, or motivations in response to those objects, but we find ourselves unprepared to direct
our psychic resources in a coordinated fashion in order to respond emotionally to those objects as we normally would.

In the case of thematic moods, we experience the present situation as being part of a larger narrative structure. That is, when we are in a thematic mood, we “read” our own, ongoing experience as though we were characters in a novel or film, interpreting what we encounter in terms of the patterns of development that we expect to play out as the narrative moves from conflict to resolution. By thus understanding thematic moods as “modes of emplotment,” we can explain why these moods give rise to relatively prominent and sustained experiences of emotional disconnection. Because narratives often weave together many situations into a single temporal, locational, and normative context of significance, our interpretation of the narrative structure of our experience can remain stable even when we encounter any number of situations that do not seem to fit with our mood. In these cases, we may have the sense that although our mood may not appear to be appropriate to what is happening at the present moment, it would nonetheless make perfect sense—from the perspective of the storyline in which we are embedded—if events were to develop in a way that fits with our mood. Thus, by drawing on concepts in phenomenology and the philosophy of narrative, and developing a number of new concepts, and applying these concepts to moods in their particularity, my situational and narratological account of moods breaks new ground in the philosophical inquiry into moods and makes a significant contribution to both phenomenology and mainstream Anglo-American philosophy.

In the final chapter, I explored some ways that my account of mood might be applied to the topic of collective moods, and I touched on some political implications that arise from this analysis. By way of conclusion, then, I will briefly discuss some
implications my account of moods may have in the domain of moral psychology. In particular, I will focus on three questions surrounding the issue of mood management. First, how do moods impact our capacity to live well? Second, to what extent are we capable of influencing our moods? And third, if we can and should manage our moods, then which sort of moods should we aim to cultivate? Of course, these questions deserve more careful consideration than space will allow here, but we can perhaps gesture toward the direction that such a line of inquiry may proceed.

There are several ways that moods might affect our capacity to live well, depending on how we understand the concept of “living well.” Most obviously, if living well implies living happily—that is, with a sense of subjective wellbeing—then our moods impact our capacity to live well in a rather straightforward manner, depending on whether our moods are pleasant or unpleasant. But if living well also implies acting in ways that are appropriately responsive to the ethically significant features of our reality, then our moods play a more complex role. As we have seen, moods organize our experience into the shape of a situation, and by establishing our sense of what is at stake, here and now, moods function to reduce the complexity with which we must contend when responding to what we encounter. When we consider this organizing function of moods in an ethical context, we can see that moods may enable us to cope effectively with morally complex situations, but that they will also constrain our capacity to appreciate the full moral complexity of reality in any given case. When we encounter an instance of wrongdoing, for example, we often have to weigh competing considerations—some reasons to evaluate the action more harshly, and some mitigating factors that provide reasons to be more lenient in our assessment. For instance, imagine that our friend lied to us about a matter of great importance, but she was motivated by a
sincere desire to protect our feelings, and she later confessed and promised to make amends. Even if we feel confident in our moral assessment of each element of the situation considered in isolation, when we decide how to respond to our friend, we will be guided by an all-things-considered assessment of her actions. Is this a situation that has some redeeming features, but is basically unjust and offensive? Or is it a situation that, despite the wrongdoing, is basically characterized by our friend’s good intentions? In addition, any action can be evaluated with respect to the actions that were not performed with the time, energy, and other resources that the action required. For example, if we are gripped by the urgency of combatting climate change, we might criticize our friend for using her time and energy to lie and then confess, instead of taking action to address this urgent issue.

As these examples illustrate, whenever we assess the moral status of an action, we must first establish a holistic sense of what is at stake, here and now, because only by doing so can we determine which aspects of the action are most definitive of the situation as a whole, and whether there are any glaring omissions that may alter the moral status of the action. And if I am correct that it is our moods that establish our sense of what is at stake, here and now, then we can conclude that our moods do indeed play a vital role in our efforts to live well, because they enable us to form the all-things-considered assessments that guide our moral discernment in each case. In an anxious mood, for example, we may find that our more lenient perceptions and judgments fail to reach us or grip us with much immediacy or force, so that our overall assessment is defined by the way that our friend’s actions seems to reveal her deeply flawed character. In a tranquil mood, on the other hand, we may find that our critical perceptions and judgments do not reach us or grip us as they normally would, and so it is quite easy to
be persuaded to forgive. Thus, in each case, our moods lead us to experience certain aspects of reality as being definitive of the present situation and other aspects as being more or less irrelevant to what is at stake, here and now. By organizing our experience in this way, our moods make it possible for us to respond effectively to the situations we encounter, but at the same time, they also constrain our capacity to appreciate the full moral complexity at hand. Indeed, when we look back in retrospect, after our mood has passed, it is always possible that we may regret our response, finding that our mood had distorted our all-things-considered assessment of the situation.

In light of this important ethical role that moods play in our lives, the question of whether and how we can influence our moods becomes all the more pressing. One potentially promising line of thought here holds that we can influence our moods indirectly and gradually by cultivating certain values, commitments, and worldviews. As Sherman (1999) notes, Aristotle defends a similar view with regard to the emotions, which, like moods, we are generally unable to “start or stop immediately, at will” (300). Nonetheless, Sherman argues, we have both “retrospective and prospective” responsibility for our emotions, because from infancy we have developed the skills and habits that define our character, and we continue to develop our “emotional agency” throughout our lives (299). For example, if we are slighted in some way and let our anger get the better of us, we “can take steps in the future” that make it more likely that we will react with more kindness the next time we are slighted (299). This line of thought resonates with my argument in Chapter Three that our moods typically reflect our basic values, commitments, and worldviews. As we saw, we typically understand the possibilities in the present situation in terms of the possibilities that make sense within the “existentially deep” sense-making structures of the self and the world. In this way, the
sense-making structures of self and world shape what sort of moods we tend to experience on a regular basis—and so if we could change these structures of self and world gradually over time, we could indirectly influence our moods.

But how might we be able to alter the sense-making structures of self and world? Although I can do no more than suggest the outline of an answer to this question here, there is perhaps some reason to think that moods will play a primary and essential role in any transformation of these basic structures of sense-making. As we have seen, the structures of self and world function at a pre-intentional level to organize our experience, even before we take up intentional attitudes toward what we are experiencing. As such, it is difficult to see how we could ever extricate ourselves from these sense-making structures in order to choose how we would rather make sense of our experience, or to get the sort of “leverage” required to work toward changing them. However, in Chapter Four we saw that it is possible to experience thematic moods that are existentially deep, in the sense that the structures of sense-making that characterize this mood—namely, the “framework” and “world” of the narrative that we are enacting in this mood—can displace our ordinary sense-making structures of self and world. Just as we can find ourselves “rooting for the bad guy” when watching *The Godfather*, despite our normal aversion to violence, when we are swept up into a deep thematic mood, we have a unique opportunity to transcend the limitations imposed by the sense-making structures of self and world.

For example, imagine that Julia is regularly in an anxious mood, because the situations she encounters are informed by a sense of self that is grounded in striving, achievement, and being busy, and by a sense of the world that revolves around the necessity of competing with hostile forces for scarce resources. If Julia were to enter
into a mood of profound tranquility, perhaps on a hike in the woods or during a mediation retreat, she may experience this mood as something of a revelation. We might imagine that in this tranquil mood, she experiences herself as being embedded in a narrative in which the universe is conspiring to save her from self-destruction by sending her the message that all the love and security that she needs is available to her at every moment, if only she can learn to accept it. As she begins to interpret her ongoing experience in terms of the framework and world of this narrative, she experiences a kind of “narrative transportation” in which her ordinary sense of self and world become relatively inaccessible to her. This unique, first-hand experience with a different way of being in the world may awaken a hunger for change, giving her the foundation from which to work toward adopting this tranquil way frame of mind on a more permanent basis.

Of course, this sort of lasting change in the sense-making structures of self and world is unlikely to happen immediately. Even if a person were to fully embrace the framework and world of a certain narrative, she is likely to encounter a number of obstacles to her ability to sustain the desired mood. This is because the sense-making structures of self and world are more than mere attitudes that we adopt; instead, these sense-making structures are also embedded in a material reality, and this material reality mitigates the extent to which thematic moods can be disruptive to our lives. For example, even Julia is fully immersed in a mood of tranquility, she may not have the financial means and social network that would be required to support her tranquility indefinitely, and likewise, she may not have the skills and bio-psycho-social capacities that would enable her to continue to adopt this frame of mind in the many kinds of anxiety-provoking circumstances she might face in the future. Although she may lament
these material constraints on the impact of her tranquil mood, in many cases these constraints protect us. For example, even if our commitment to a marriage or to a certain profession defines our sense of self, we can expect that we will not always be in the kind of mood that will allow us to experience the emotions that sustain this commitment. We will not always feel the passionate love for our spouse that motivated us to get married, for instance, just as there will be times in which we are simply not in the mood to work and cannot experience the interest in our job that inspired us to pursue this particular career. Fortunately, however, these self-defining commitments are more than mere attitudes, insofar as becoming committed requires us to “put our money where our mouth is” and actually build a life that materially supports this way of being in the world. Because these practical and logistical realities of our commitments are relatively difficult to alter, we usually find that our commitments can withstand temporary alterations in our moods, even when these moods are quite deep.

Although a mood is thus unlikely to bring about changes in the structures of self and world immediately, a profound mood may catalyze a more gradual process of personal transformation by giving a person access to a space of possibilities that inspires, informs, and protects this process of transformation. For example, when Julia is in a tranquil mood, she may discover that are a number of things she is doing that allow her to sustain and deepen her sense of tranquility—ways of preparing her environment, such as turning off her phone; ways of carrying her body, such as relaxing her shoulders and breathing deeply; and ways of directing her perceptual attention and thoughts in order to more firmly embed herself in the narrative structure of her tranquility. If she is able to enter into tranquil moods on a more regular basis, she may be able to continue developing the skills involved in pressing into this mood, and to
further elaborate upon this narrative structure. In this way, she may begin to bring about a lasting change in her values, commitments, and worldview. After all, although her current sense of self and world may seem to be an immutable fact about who she is, we know that she developed these sense-making structures over time through the very same sort of processes—that is, she learned how to set up the environments she inhabits, how to comport her body, and how to direct her attention and thoughts in ways that deepen and sustain her insecure, striving, and stressed out way of being in the world. By the same logic, then, to the extent that her experience of tranquil moods can provide opportunities to cultivate more tranquil *habits, habitats*, and *habitus*, we have reason to think that she can indeed develop a more consistently tranquil way of being.

However, while this sort of transformation certainly seems possible, my work suggests that neither moods nor the transformative processes they initiate are the kind of thing that we can *control*, however indirectly or gradually. Even if we are capable of deliberately generating certain mental states, these efforts are never guaranteed to bring about the desired mood. If Julia seeks a tranquil mood, for example, she may find that so long as she remains in a mood of anxiety, irritability, or depression, her efforts can do little to alter the existential dimensions of her experience. She may successfully direct her attention toward certain objects, but nevertheless she may find that, in her present mood, those objects remain emotionally inaccessible to her. She may manage to think the “right” thoughts, but find that those thoughts are simply not gripping. She may experience powerful, embodied desires to relate to her past and future in the ways that she did when we was in a tranquil mood, but she may find that all of this fails to alter her basic sense of the temporal structure of the present moment. Thus, if Julia’s efforts to cultivate a mood of tranquility are successful, her success is best understood as
being a *gift*—something bestowed upon her, rather than produced by her own agency, and indeed, something that, given the limitations of her agency, she has no right to demand or expect.

The notion that our moods are “gifts” resonates with Heidegger’s insight that at any given moment we find ourselves *in medias res*, always already employing our sense-making structures in order to navigate the world that those same structures make intelligible to us. As such, we always encounter our moods as a “given”—not in the sense of being immutable, but in the sense of being part of the texture of our reality from the start, functioning to *make present* whatever is present to us, including our awareness of our mood and our desire to change it. Because our “thrownness” is unavoidable, and we can never step back from our moods in order to choose from a mood-neutral perspective how we ought to relate to the world, a measure of humility is appropriate here. We may invite a certain mood, and prepare ourselves for it, and, if the mood should come, we may press into it in various ways, but ultimately we cannot *control* our moods, nor can we use them like tools at our disposal to remodel our basic way of being in the world. As Heidegger might put it, we do not “have” moods—if anything, our moods have us.

But assuming that we *were* given the opportunity to experience certain kinds of moods that could help us to cultivate a different way of being in the world, what sort of moods ought we to choose? This question takes us into what is perhaps unsettling territory. If we simply take a certain ethical system for granted, and begin with a pre-established idea about what sort of attitudes we ought to have, we may be able to discern how various kinds of moods could facilitate or thwart our ability to adopt and sustain those attitudes. For example, Thomson (2005, p. 55f) draws on Heidegger’s later
work to critique the paradigm of “enframing” that is said to characterize our current, late-modern way of relating to things—a paradigm in which we increasingly relate to all things, even ourselves, as inherently meaningless resources to be efficiently exploited and “optimized.” On this view, in order to resist enframing, we need to cultivate a paradigm in which we see ourselves instead as humble “guardians” or “shepherds of Being,” creatively responsive to the meaningful intelligibility we find in the world (Heidegger 1972, p. 143-169). From this perspective, he argues, we ought to cultivate moods that facilitate our capacity for what Heidegger calls “dwelling,” in which “we come to understand and experience entities as being richer in meaning than we are capable of doing justice to conceptually, rather than taking them as intrinsically meaningless resources awaiting optimization”—moods like tranquility, and perhaps other moods as well, such as moods of gratitude and wonder, which can help us to approach the things we encounter “with care, humility, patience, gratitude, even awe” (Thomson 2005, p. 164). Thomson’s hope is that the experiences we have while in these moods “can become microcosms of, as well as inspiration for, the revolution beyond our underlying ontotheology that Heidegger argues we need in order to transcend enframing and begin to set our world aright” (p. 42).

However, if we take the phenomenology of moods seriously, we can see some reasons to be suspicious of taking a pre-established moral system for granted and privileging certain moods on that basis. As we have seen, each kind of mood enables us to respond appropriately to certain kinds of evaluative properties in the world, and different situations are defined by different evaluative properties. Thus, tranquility certainly has its value, but if a concerned citizen is meeting with her political

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45 It is worth noting while Thomson focuses on relatively pleasant moods, Heidegger himself seems to embrace a Romantic appreciation for the transformative potential of moods that are much less pleasant, such as anxiety (Heidegger 1929a/1995) and boredom (Heidegger 1929b/1998).
representative, a mood of irritability may best facilitate her ability to resist the
politician’s charms, evasions, and excuses, and to respond appropriately to the injustices
being perpetrated upon her community. With this in mind, when we step back from our
preferred moral systems, and put aside our assumptions about which moods we ought to
cultivate and which we ought to avoid, we ought to be puzzled. The fact is that the
world is teeming with every kind of evaluative property, and so at any moment there is
more than enough injustice to warrant a mood of irritability, just as there is more than
enough tragedy to warrant a mood of depression, and more than enough beauty to
warrant a mood of cheerfulness, and so on. Our assessment of which sort of mood is
most appropriate, then, will always depend on our sense of what is at stake, here and
now—and this depends on our mood.

It can be unsettling to realize the degree to which our moods are creative,
enactive, and “autopoietic”—that is, to accept the idea that while our moods may help us
to cope with our world, when they do so, it will be a world that our moods themselves
have shaped. We have no choice but to rely upon our moods to navigate the situations
we encounter, but when our mood changes, we may find that we have misjudged the
situation, and that the map we have been using to navigate it was distorted by our mood
as well. Thus, as creatures who are always already thrown into moods, there is no
simple navigation of a world so complex, but only improvising without guarantee,
discovering what seems to work as we try to find our way. In the end, we can only hope
that the things we encounter in the dim and flickering lamplight of our moods turn out
to have been more than mere shadows.
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