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On enthusiasm in history and elsewhere (enthusiastic comments on Elster*)

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ABSTRACT

This paper engages in a discussion about a select few of the crucial questions raised by Jon Elster's paper on Enthusiasm and Anger in History. It focusses on enthusiasm and engages in particular with Elster's questions and arguments about whether enthusiasm is an emotion or not. In doing so, I am led to ask some general questions about current theories of emotions in the discipline of psychology and their relationship to common sense psychological notions of emotional types. I argue that we need common sense psychological notions in historical explanations, as shown by Elster's examples, and suggest ways of handling a possible mismatch between common sense psychology and more theoretical approaches in psychology that develop somewhat different classifications of emotions and emotional types. The problem of whether enthusiasm really is an emotion can in this way be dissolved, and we are free to explain the historical events employing the common-sense notions as Elster indeed does.

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Jon Elster has written an extremely fascinating and also challenging paper on enthusiasm and anger in history. Elster was my teacher long ago, and in the present piece, as in very much else, he remains so. I admire his article and continue to learn from him. Whether I have something of real value to add to his insights and points of view is for others to judge; I will in this comment engage in a discussion about a select few of the crucial questions his paper raises, focussing on enthusiasm and engaging with

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Elster's arguments about whether enthusiasm is an emotion or not. In doing so, I am led to ask some general questions about current theories of emotions and their relationship to common sense psychological notions of emotional types. I shall on the whole disregard issues about anger.

Elster discusses both what emotions are, whether enthusiasm is an emotion, and the role enthusiasm played in three major historical events in political history; the American war of Independence, the French Revolution, and the making of the Norwegian Constitution in 1814. There are, therefore, at least three main areas to explore: There are conceptual/theoretical issues about theories of emotions and in particular the case of enthusiasm, there are historical issues about the significant role of enthusiasm in some rather special historical events, and there are issues about the how to conceive of the relations between these topics, about how the conception of emotions and of enthusiasm we work with can or should help us in understanding historical processes, and vice versa, whether the historical cases generate refinements concerning how to think about emotions. The last question is to a large extent a question about how various disciplines ought to be related to each other. In fact, they are, to some extent at least, growing apart as the discipline of psychology gradually moves towards neuroscience and away from the folk psychology which still is crucial for the discipline of history.

The challenging question 'Is enthusiasm an emotion?' is a question that in some sense remains unanswered in Elster's paper. He identifies problems for the view that it is, and notes that psychologists have not discussed the emotion of enthusiasm very much, in fact hardly at all. There is surely no question mark needed in the parallel case of anger.

The current note shall focus on this remaining question. It will connect albeit in a limited way with the very interesting fact that the historical examples are all cases where groups or collectives are in the grip of enthusiasm. That raises further issues about collectives and groups, i.e. group agents, and in what sense and on what grounds, we can ascribe emotional states to a group and members of a group, and how groups or its members get into being in such a state. I shall not go into these complex questions – and focus on individuals and their emotions.

On emotions (in general)

This question of whether enthusiasm is an emotion is hard and the literature on emotions and on emotional reality is both very messy and very

large. It is, furthermore, not often articulated with any precision what is taken to hang on something being an emotion or not, or on what theoretical grounds we should draw the lines between emotion, feelings, and other affective states that have various close relations to emotions but which should not be classified as emotions.

In answering the question of whether enthusiasm is an emotion, we should thus both address the theoretical point of classifying something as an emotion, and also what we want to say specifically about this putative emotion, i.e. enthusiasm. It might surely be, as Elster is perfectly aware of, that we can say most of the same things about *the role of enthusiasm in the historical events under discussion* even if we at the end of the day want to say that enthusiasm is not an emotion, or perhaps not always an emotion, but, in some cases at least, an affective mental state akin to emotions. The question raised about the role of enthusiasm in historical events may thus to some extent be independent of exactly how we draw the line between emotions and other affective mental states that may be very important in given historical situations.

Elster, when theorising about emotions in this paper and in earlier writings, draws clear connections to Aristotle, and in particular Aristotle's view on the required cognitive antecedent of the specific emotions.¹ He also notes the connection to action tendencies, to be played out variously in the context, and further effects from emotions back to belief formation. I accept this Aristotelian view, and it seems to work well for the central cases of emotion; for fear, anger, pride and others, and seems to hold for moral emotions like shame and guilt. The cognitive antecedents for emotions provide grounds to distinguish among them, in several ways. First, the specific requirement of cognitive antecedents helps differentiating between emotions and other affective states like for instance feelings (pain, pleasure and many others). Secondly, the different cognitive antecedents differentiate the specific emotions from one another and play a clear

¹There are various ways of conceiving of this cognitive antecedent and its contribution. The contribution is causal, but the causation is basically rational causation or cause by a reason. The reason can be seen as a judgement relative to goals one has, and this would be natural if one is starting from reasons as belief-desire pairs. But there may be differences here. Reasons would on some views only depend on facts, including evaluative facts, and invoke a rational assessment of any goal. This was, I think, Aristotle's view. The other approach can be seen as a Humean type view, reason as a belief-desire pair, which today is mainstream in social science. The opposition between these views will not be discussed but should be noted for the sake of clarity. For a sophisticated approach within the Humean tradition on this point, see Miceli and Castelfranchi (2015) work on anticipatory emotions. Parfit (2011) represents a modern version of the Aristotelian view when it comes to the relationship between reasons, evaluations and aims. Very valuable further discussions of emotions and cognitive antecedents are found in Elster (1999a, 1999b), Elster (2015) and in Taylor (1985).

role in accounting for the action tendencies an emotion gives rise to. In turn, the action tendencies of the specific emotions also play a role in differentiating between the emotions.

The fact that antecedent judgements and cognitions are subject to rationality requirements spill over on the emotion itself and ties it to the situation that gives rise to the required cognitive antecedent. The judgements making up the antecedents are typically couched in 'thick' descriptions, like 'This snake is dangerous' etc. In moral emotions like shame and guilt, the required judgements would themselves typically employ moral terms, often 'thick' moral terms, and require situational sensitivity. These 'thick' descriptions contribute to make the emotional reaction intelligible and also have a bearing on whether some emotional reaction is appropriate, right or reasonable. This last dimension connects with theories of virtue, but that brings on a host of issues Elster does not go into and I cannot go into here.²

If the judgement an actual emotion is tied up with is an irrational judgement one way or other, we can, from an external perspective, also see the emotion simply as irrational. There may also be, as already suggested, further internal reasonableness or rightness condition on the emotional reaction in question: The emotional reaction should match the content of a correct judgement in the right way or in a reasonable way; a judgement that something (i.e. a snake) is dangerous should match the generated fear of that creature and contribute to the role of that fear in action or when choices are made in the context. Emotions are in this 'internal way' seen as reasonable or right reaction to the judgement they are grounded in, as the strength and role of the emotion may have rightness conditions relative to the judgement. There is, furthermore, a quite specific type of unreasonableness being exhibited when we judge that a snake is *not* dangerous at all, but we are nevertheless very afraid of it. This fear can in some cases be a hardwired emotional reaction that exhibits parallels to perceptual illusions, quite like, for instance, the Müller-Lyer illusion.

²Elster typically focusses on explanatory issues and not primarily on the further normative ones that arise within the Aristotelian picture. Example: He notes that there is 'a clear difference between the role of beliefs in 'I became angry because I learned that my best friend had an affair with my wife', and 'My craving for cigarettes was triggered when I learned that there were some in the house', I do not know how to nail it down conceptually' (7–8). I suggest that these explananda work differently because the first reaction is subject to reasonableness considerations of a specific normative sort (connected with virtue) that are not present in the last case, even if the explananda are very similar. (Compare the cases of reactions to danger from the cowardly to the courageous to the foolhardy/reckless. Good or virtuous is the admirable middle ground; this is built into the Aristotelian view, but applied in different ways, and does not apply across to board to all virtues (for example not to intellectual virtues).)

Aristotle and also Elster stress the importance of causal routes back to belief formation from being in the grip of a particular emotion. One dimension to this is a causal push towards making the cognitive antecedent fit the actual emotional state one is in – being very angry might influence or change the antecedent belief in the direction of being a belief that makes being very angry quite reasonable. Being very angry in the light of a very small offence is not very comfortable, as it is quite unreasonable, and this may be recognized by the person. Such modification of belief may be pretty common and may clearly be quite irrational since beliefs should be grounded in evidence in support of them and nothing else, especially not the well-being of the believer. Note how this mechanism presupposes an Aristotelian reasonableness condition upon particular emotional reactions, working backwards to make the belief appropriate in the light of the strength of emotion.

A further characteristic of emotions stressed by Elster is that they typically have a short half-life. Moods can, in contrast, last much longer, and moods can fluctuate and rise and fall, as in the case of being sad or depressed. Note also that being sad or depressed does not need to have a cognitive antecedent like a judgement about some concrete event or situation. Moods are not in general subject to cognitive antecedents and their corresponding rationality constraints are not like the constraints on emotions, but moods do of course have causes, and sometimes the cause of a good or a bad mood is some happy or sad piece of news. Still, moods interact differently with the rational and may not give rise to specific action tendencies.

Enthusiasm

Being enthusiastic is surely an affective state and seems to require some sort of judgement about the goodness or greatness of what one is enthusiastic about. The open question is whether this means that enthusiasm is or is always an emotion. One may question its full status as an emotion on the grounds that it seems somewhat unclear whether the actual cognitive antecedent must be of the sort required for emotions. One background for this is some claims of Kant's about some actual cases enthusiasm, where Elster suggests the antecedent is not a proper factual judgement as generally required for emotion. This forms part of the background for the Elster's explorative question of whether enthusiasm is an emotion.³

³I actually think somewhat differently from Elster about Kant's case – the judgement may not be about a concrete situation but is still about something factual as I see things, and, I think, also as Kant sees things.

We should note that Elster works with the OED definition of enthusiasm, 'Rapturous intensity of feeling in favor of a person, principle, cause, etc.; passionate eagerness in any pursuit, proceeding from an intense conviction of the worthiness of the object' (Elster, 2020, 15). He also notes in the same place that a German definition speaks of 'eine gesteigerte Freude an bestimmten Themen oder Handlungen, ein extremes Engagement für eine Sache', a French definition of 'Emotion intense qui pousse à l'action dans la joie'.

It seems to me, however, that all three definitions capture things of great importance for understanding enthusiasm, and I want to keep all three in the running within an open and generous conception of enthusiasm. When Elster chooses to work the OED for the phenomena he explores, and focus on the first part of it, i.e. not on the passionate pursuit part, he limits the object of enthusiasm away from being enthusiastic about the pursuit itself. I take due note of that. The French and German definitions include the pursuit. It seems to me that they are both highly relevant for the historical cases Elster discusses, not least when the collective aspect in the historical situation is taken into full consideration. I would also suggest that 'the object' of great worth the OED speaks about also can be the worthiness of being engaging in a specific pursuit or type of action towards an aim of high value. The OED is as I read it is thus not fully specific on whether the object of enthusiasm must be some principle or cause, or whether the pursuit of a good cause in itself may be the object of enthusiasm. The basic thing seems to me to be that there is some judgement amounting to endorsing one or the other of these. This leaves me with a more open situation when it comes to actual cases than on Elster's view.

On this wider conception of enthusiasm, it may be unclear whether the antecedent in some cases of enthusiasm can distinguish enthusiasm from closely related emotional reactions, like great joy in taking part in some pursuit or action (compare the French definition). Maybe enthusiasm in some cases just is an especially strong type of joy about an idea or principle, or a strong joy in the pursuit of something.⁴ If so, it may be that enthusiasm is less directly tied to standard types of cognitive antecedents than several central emotions clearly are. Enthusiasm is in that case an

⁴Jon Elster points out that joy is caused by the belief that something good has happened, enthusiasm on the belief that something good will happen. I disagree that this is the whole picture. It seems to me that there is also joy generated from the belief that something good *is happening*, and enthusiasm generated from believing that one is taking part in some pursuit that *is happening*.

affective state that may be a further development of an emotion like joy (or it may be a type of joy).

In general, if we for various theoretical purposes tighten up constraints on what it takes to be an emotion, for instance by requiring very clear cognitive antecedents and action tendencies the individuate the emotion, then we may also, as a consequence, be landed with a range of affective states that are somewhat akin to emotions but are not emotions in the full sense of our theory. The theoretical gain would be to provide a tighter account of what it takes to be an emotion. The loss may be that some affective states we normally classify as emotions get sorted into a different classification or somehow even lost from view.

One approach to the classification of emotions that explicitly deals with enthusiasm as an emotion, and the only I have found (and not a central contribution), is within the tradition of prototype-theoretical approaches to classification/categorization, developed in particular by Eleanor Rosch at Berkeley,⁵ and the psychologist Robert Plutchik's view of eight basic emotions (where Paul Ekman counted six and approached the matter differently). On the Rosch/Plutchik type of view enthusiasm comes out as belonging to the basic emotion category of joy, 'basic' here meaning something like the 'central' member of an emotion prototype. Enthusiasm is then seen as a special type of joy, typically displayed in the engagement of an activity or pursuit of a goal. I shall not here go further into this and problems with it, or the question of whether joy is a central emotion or a prototype. However, such an approach promises a fairly natural way of depicting enthusiasm as an emotion, by relaxing the requirement of a particular cognitive antecedent for each emotional state, as the antecedents may be most appropriate for the basic or central case, i.e. the prototype. When distinct emotional states share a cognitive antecedent, the latter would not be what distinguishes between the emotional states that share it, as a richer array of features would be in play in distinguishing between these particular emotions.

A different possible view would be a view which sees some cases of enthusiasm (but not necessarily all cases) as more akin to a mood and thus less connected with cognitive antecedents and judgements than standard emotions. Such a view would be correspondingly more relaxed about the general connection to cognitive antecedents in the case of enthusiasm. It might of course be that the less an affective state requires

⁵Anderson and Guerrero (1998), see especially page 20 in the essay 'Communication and Emotion, Basic Concepts and Approaches', by Laura Guerrero, Peter Anderson, and Melanie Trost, 3–28. This handbook is produced by people in Communication Studies, where Rosch is a big name.

of such connections, the easier it might be for the state to be socially contagious and spread across a group, as this would be by a causal mechanism that definitely does not require the corresponding spreading of some specific belief or some specific judgement as antecedent. Some moods may be socially contagious in a significant and interesting way, as laughter often is when we laugh without really knowing why.⁶

Any claim about the social contagiousness of moods, must of course be balanced and nuanced with findings on mechanisms for emotional contagiousness. It does seem that the physiological expression of some emotions may be contagious, and by spreading this physiological reaction directly to others, gives rise to the same emotion in them. This could be a parallel to or even the same mechanism as in the case of laughter mentioned above. Still there might be a difference between the spreading of emotion and the spreading of moods, in that there would still be some need for causal paths back to belief formation to do their work in the case of emotion, as emotions require cognitive antecedents, while moods do not. Spreading might thus be easier in the case of moods, since they require much less in terms of cognitive antecedents. And there might be differences between the emotions, as the antecedent beliefs may be harder to bring about in some cases than in others (think of guilt, where a mechanism like wishful thinking would be implausible). These issues are simply questions for further empirical investigation.

The main point in this is that there may be theoretical choices in an approach to classification of affective states that will lead to seeing enthusiasm as an emotion or not an emotion, or perhaps not always an emotion, depending on whether certain cases are seen as cases of enthusiasm or not. I shall take no official stand whether those choices are or could be well motivated, but I want to indicate that seeing enthusiasm as an emotion seems very obvious to me.⁷ Seeing cases of it as a expressing a mood may also seem possible, at least in theory, as long as many of the properties of emotions are kept for this type of mood.

⁶The contagiousness of emotions is dealt with empirically in Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson (1994), and here some empirical mechanisms (basically from physiological expression to physiological expression) are specified and explored. My text mainly speculates about further surrounding empirical matters on more or less a priori grounds, and real empirical work on possible differences between emotions and moods and particular emotions and particular moods is surely needed and may, of course, prove my speculations wrong.

⁷This attitude seems to me to be clearly in line with George Ainslie's commentary ([this issue](#)) on this same target article.

Enthusiasm as an emotion

I shall move on to the main aspect of Elster's work. I have nothing like his expertise on the three main historical examples he discusses, and I shall take his presentation of these cases for granted. I shall be interested in mainly one point, and that is whether these cases exhibit enthusiasm as *an emotion* that contribute to important historical outcomes. I will try to cut right to the crucial question at the bottom of Elster's doubt as to whether enthusiasm as seen in these cases is an emotion or not.

Elster concludes his discussion of enthusiasm with answering positively on a number of criteria for emotions, namely arousal, short half-life, action tendencies, types of impact on beliefs and preferences etc. The historical cases also seem to confirm Kant's idea that enthusiasm brings along a type of 'blindness' in action, and also confirm Kant's idea that enthusiasm brings about great things in history. I agree with very much of Elster's reasoning and find it very illuminating.

The first question about enthusiasm concerns the cognitive antecedents of this putative emotion, and the second concerns what type of action tendencies would be required for it to be an emotion. Elster discusses critically a current Kantian view to the effect that reverence for an ideal and reverence for the Kantian conception of freedom in particular can give rise to enthusiasm properly conceived. Elster points out that the cognitive antecedent in this case is not a belief about factual matters, and that the case only makes for what he calls 'observer enthusiasm', and not what he calls agent enthusiasm. And the latter seems needed for the type of action we see in the historical situations. This 'observer enthusiasm' seems quite like admiration and does not come with direct action tendencies, but can of course lead to action, like expressing one's admiration etc.⁸

Elster's argument is relative to the view that proper or central emotions require antecedent beliefs about factual matters, and that limits the range of what should be considered a proper emotion. As mentioned above, I want to work with a wider conception of enthusiasm than what would be considered enthusiasm by these strict standards.⁹

⁸Thanks to Jon Elster for pointing this out.

⁹As already mentioned, we need not and perhaps should not limit the notion of the factual in this way, as there may be no reasonable limitation on the topic of beliefs that serve as antecedent to emotions, *as long as they are beliefs*. Religious beliefs are of course basically non-factual and can lead to very objectionable forms of enthusiasm (compare Hume, who was very concerned with such objectionable types of enthusiasm and used the term to denote it and only it.) On the other hand, observer enthusiasm understood this way gives no clear action tendency beyond that of moods, on a fairly standard way of thinking about action tendencies. (The Kantian view may not, however, understand the beliefs in question as being without action tendencies, and that must be remembered when we consider the position.)

Emotions* and emotions

I shall discuss the issue further via something which can be conceived of as a thought experiment about current psychological theorizing, recognizing that we may be facing stricter and less strict criteria for what an emotion is in general and cannot easily settle how strict they should be and on what grounds that can be settled. To keep the options clear and alive, let us use words in this way: Emotions* are what the 'best' current psychological theories of 'emotions' depict, and they typically require pretty specific action tendencies, and as cognitive antecedent some clearly factual belief, conceived relative to some theoretically grounded conception of what that is. These theories make use of specific scientific observational and operational criteria, and partly because of that work with few basic emotions. While there is much agreement about properties of the central cases of emotion, the hard issues seem to be how to think about outliers, and how to think about the relations to all the emotions we normally recognize in folk psychology. When they do good explanatory work, they do exist, it seems.¹⁰

Enthusiasm is rarely mentioned in psychological research, as Elster observes, and we may of course ask within such a thought experiment whether it satisfies the criteria for being an emotion*. Emotions without the star are all then the emotions in folk psychology, and enthusiasm is one of them. Emotion* are what the best theories recognize. Answers to the emotion* question may go either way, and, in case of yes, there may be both enthusiasm* and enthusiasm.¹¹ It might also be that some particular cases of 'enthusiasm', but not all, share the properties of emotions* but that not all cases of enthusiasm do that, the difference being that some do not have proper factual or concrete cognitive antecedents. These cases of enthusiasm may be seen as exhibiting affective states akin to emotions*, but they are not emotions*. We could then think of them as emotion*-like moods, where moods typically require less and sometimes little or nothing in the way of cognitive antecedents, as they can come and go without them. Finally, it may be that there are no case of enthusiasm*.

¹⁰There are, of course, very different competing conceptions of what might determine the 'betterness'-relation in psychological theorizing. Psychology as a discipline is in the process of being more and more interwoven with neuroscience, and there are lots of questions about how this fact should be conceived of in relation to such a betterness-relation.

¹¹Note that enthusiasm* may turn out to be an anticipation-based emotion, and that enthusiasm on my more generous view can be present-oriented, by being enthusiastic about the activity one is currently engaged in.

It might in fact be fairly easy to build up what we call ‘enthusiasm’ in folk psychology about a fairly abstract normative idea, even easier than for many other things, and in such cases concrete action tendencies may appear remote or vague. Such enthusiasm can be seen as a form of joy in engaging in considering an ideal or a normative thought, bringing along intensive affect and strong devotion. The fact that a requirement of solid factual cognitive antecedents is not satisfied as it should be in the case of central emotions*, may thus in some cases itself make room for increased social contagiousness. This is so because normal factual judgements are or should be tied up in with grounds for making them: there is some friction in acquiring factual beliefs or judgements without evidence or against the evidence one has, even if there is an opposite causal push. Presumably, the closer an affective state is tied to concrete judgements, the more significant the friction in spreading it in case the necessary antecedent factual judgments are quite ungrounded or contrary to all evidence.¹² In the case where we conceive of this ‘enthusiasm’ as an affective state akin to emotion*, but not an emotion*, we could be facing a situation in which this state could more easily be socially contagious than central emotions*.

The present suggestion is then this: ‘enthusiasm’ of this non-starred type is an affective state it is good to be in. As the connection to antecedent factual and concrete judgement is not strong or tight, this may give rise to the state being more easily contagious in a group. The affective state in question may also simply be about a common pursuit of an attractive goal, so that one is enthusiastic about the pursuit. It might also depend on an antecedent belief about this goal itself. In this latter case, it may be without very specific action-directing properties. If so, action-directing properties can nevertheless arise from any hazy judgement to the effect that ‘this is the action that serves this ideal’, ‘this is the lead we must follow to realize this ideal’, etc. Those judgements would be additional to the ‘emotion’ and would need to arise in the social context, a context where the ‘enthusiasm’ itself does create some ‘blindness’. With something like an additional action-directing belief on board, however ungrounded, combining with the ‘enthusiasm’ understood this way, we would face derived action-directing tendencies.¹³

¹²Note that there are different cases here depending on the extent to which the required judgements may easily be widely shared, or how easy for instance wishful thinking can be applied. In self-directed moral judgement, as in the cases of guilt (directed towards an action by the person) or directed towards the person him/herself as in shame, the contagiousness could be very limited.

It may thus be that relative to one way of thinking about emotions (as emotions*) enthusiasm can be recognized as having several forms. The first form is as a proper type of emotion*, i.e. as a response to a proper factual belief (even if irrational) as a cognitive antecedent. It might also be of a non-anticipation sort of emotion directed at being engaged in a joint pursuit of a good or attractive goal. There may further be a type of emotion-like affective state directed at a goal, typically combining with the belief to the effect that 'this is the way to go' about some action type. It may be that there is no enthusiasm*; I take no stand on that. We may thus have several forms of enthusiasm in a particular historical situation. These forms may exist at the same time in one and the same social group, and they may interact in ways that contribute to its spreading, strengthening and significance.

The presence of 'enthusiasm' in any such form might have interesting properties in making the group into a more effective group agent. The different forms of enthusiasm would in that case have somewhat different causal roles, and one of them would always require additional beliefs for directing the action of the group. But such beliefs may easily arise, for instance in interaction with exemplars of enthusiasm*, or of enthusiasm about the pursuit of goal itself. Furthermore, the individual members of the group might perceive a resulting unity in action and effectiveness of the group for the task at hand as wonderful, and this may contribute to enthusiasm about the pursuit. This perceived effectiveness in the joint effort might strengthen the agentive effectiveness of the group by also strengthening both the enthusiasm and the belief that this is the way to go. We could be in the neighborhood of Paul Ekman's view about emotional wildfires. There would always be need for an explanation of how the wildfire gets started in the first place, for any type of enthusiasm, and the activity could, of course, also give rise to other affective states. Things like this could, in theory at least, be going on in all the historical examples discussed by Elster, and I see him as quite open for such views.

Of course, with a belief about how to realize what one is enthusiastic about, appropriate action tendencies would typically be in place, and some of the parallels with anger, as for instance exaggerated or extreme optimism, can naturally be expected as strong affection would push other attitudes aside or crowd them out. The parallel with anger would

¹³Surely, such action may also bring about some very bad results. The three cases Elster looks at may be somewhat exceptional cases where there is also a very substantial element of luck, luck in these hazy ungrounded beliefs serving as premises for action turning out true.

not be full, as anger is an emotion*, but full enough if we can understand how similar tendencies towards optimism, urgency etc. could naturally arise. That would go a long way towards answering Elster's objection that one would lose these parallels to anger, and one would have a better grasp of the real parallels between enthusiasm and anger.

Summing up

I heartily agree with Elster that we should resist giving up the view that emotions need cognitive antecedents and triggers. But I suggest both a more relaxed view on what this might amount to in the current case, and a different take on the relationship between work in psychological theory and the general psychological notions used in historical explanation, 'emotions and emotion*'. Maybe joy is not always an emotion*, even if it is an emotion. It seems to me that the goal of much current psychological theorizing is not primarily to make good sense of the full variety of emotions in ordinary language; current theorizing is mainly driven by other concerns. The richness of the ordinary language distinctions is nevertheless very important for understanding historical situations and explaining what happens. There may surely be different ways of thinking about the relationship between the output from psychological theorizing and ordinary language distinctions between emotions; my picture is that we should have the broad aim of tying down these relations and see how emotions of ordinary language are grounded in and related to emotions*, without expecting that when psychological theory gives us emotions*, we are simply given the tools we need for understanding historical situations.¹⁴ Here I may differ from Elster.

This somewhat laidback view could, on this background, endorse a version of the Kantian type approach to enthusiasm.¹⁵ Furthermore, as I understand Kantian views, they see or should see the categorical imperative as at least indirectly generating action tendencies. The imperative is basically a rational filter on already existing action tendencies; filtering out one of them as the thing to do. This filter's properties in its employment is at bottom of the idea of freedom one is enthusiastic about on the Kantian view in question.¹⁶ Seen from such a perspective, enthusiasm does bring along action tendencies, while too much emotion may hinder

¹⁴It seems to me that the betterness-relation regarding psychological theorizing requires this type of sensitivity to what is normally or regularly called enthusiasm.

¹⁵As advocated by Sharma, discussed in Elster's paper (reference in Elster, 2020).

the full rationality in the operation of the categorical imperative when considering all relevant principles and their bearing on the issue at hand. Therefrom stems the 'blindness'. If we commit to such a view on the actual role of the categorical imperative as indirectly modifying existing action tendencies, it does not obviously present a strong counterexample to the view that enthusiasm is an emotion, even if the case at hand may not be an emotion*. Furthermore, the basic theoretical issue about what way we should think of the link to action tendencies seems quite open, as we can surely have stricter (emotion*) and looser (emotion) views on that, as pointed out above.

Irrespective of whether we see enthusiasm simply as an emotion or as, in some cases, affective states akin to but not an emotion*, we can, it seems, make some further progress in understanding why it can make a huge difference in specific historical situations, as is so clearly demonstrated by Elster's examples and his discussions of them. The current note aims to present an open scenario for how to think about the causal contribution enthusiasm can make in social situations, for instance by being socially contagious in a more radical way than central emotions* are, in virtue of being more independent of factual beliefs about the concrete situations. This independence or at least semi-independence of concrete and factual cognitive antecedents adds in a certain way to its potential for having a social and historical role, and it may also explain its typical reliance upon luck. It also may modify the way one thinks of the connections between theories of emotions/emotions* on one side and the understanding of social and historic events on the other. A hope is that this might enrich the picture of the general role of affective states in various types of historical situations and help improve our understanding both of them and of history.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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¹⁶Whether these properties are experienced or recognized by reason in a non-observational way is a complex issue I shall not go into.

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