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INCORPORATING EMOTIONS INTO ECONOMIC SOCIOLOGY:

AN ANALYTIC TYPOLOGY[1]

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Economists have by tradition eliminated emotions from their analysis, as Albert O. Hirschman argued in *The Passions and the Interests* (1977). Recently, however, an attempt has been made to introduce emotions into economics and sociology—both separately and together (for example, Barbalet 1998; Elster 1998; Heckathorn 1993; Loewenstein 2000; Massey 2002; Smelser 1998; Turner 2000). In this comment, I will synthesize a wide range of literature, so that economic sociologists may join the debates.

The existing literature on emotion and the social sciences poses more questions than answers and suggests fundamental problems that require solution. With the exception of research in the neurosciences (notably Damasio 1999), the path from feeling an emotion (the physical and the cognitive) to action is often under-theorized and under-empiricized. The central problem for social scientists is the identification of the social mechanisms that transpose a feeling state into an emotional action. While there are many important first steps in this direction (for example, Elster 1999; DiMaggio 2002), the answers are far from in.
One way to get analytic purchase on these problems is to theorize the possible ways that emotions and events might interact. This comment presents a typology that I developed based upon a wide ranging reading in the literature. The model that I lay out in this comment aims at analytic clarity—a starting point from which to begin research and generate hypotheses. The distinction between predictability and unpredictability in social life lies at the core of my analytic frame. Some aspects of social and emotional life are ordinary and expected—predictable and routine. Some events are extraordinary and range from natural to man-made disasters to the serendipitous confluence of unexpected events that are an often unacknowledged part of the fabric of social life. Predictability and unpredictability characterize events and emotions and point to different ontologies of emotion as well as epistemological approaches to emotion within the social and natural sciences. *Figure 1* summarizes the discussion.

Emotion as an entity is natural and innate. This is not a controversial statement no matter what body of literature one looks to. History and culture, time and space, determine the expression of emotion and provide the epistemological categories by which we classify the varieties of appropriate and inappropriate affect. While the distinction between the ontological and epistemological dimensions of emotion may blur *empirically*, it is necessary to maintain the distinction for *analytic* purposes. The formal analysis that follows is trans-historical and trans-cultural. The specific examples I give are Western and euro-centric.

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[1] A fuller version of the arguments presented here can be found in the Working Paper Series of Cornell's Center for the Study of Economy and Society available at: **http://www.economyandsociety.org/publications/working_papers.shtml**

Figure 1. Action as Emotion and Event: An Analytic Typology

EMOTIONS	EVENTS: *Predictable*	EVENTS: *Unpredictable*
Predictable	**1. P/P**	**2. P/NP**
Ontology:	Nature	Equilibrium
Epistemology:	Ethics	Calculus of rationality
Discipline:	Moral philosophy	Economics/mathematics
Unpredictable	**3. NP/P**	**4. NP/NP**
Ontology:	Culture	Emotion as Physical State
Epistemology:	Institutions	Appetite, aggression, fear
Discipline:	Sociology	Interdisciplinary Natural *and* Social Sciences

The problem of action is at the core of all social analysis no matter what theoretical perspective one holds (Alexander 1982). Traditional rational choice theories strip action of context—culture and history. Action is usually discussed in terms of means and ends—as if all the things about which individuals take action were discrete units. But actions only take place in the context of events that are historically and culturally situated. Events range from the micro-level of dyadic interaction to the macro-level of collective action. Emotions as well as temporal and spatial phenomena (history and culture) of more or less complexity constrain decisions or choices about action. I sit at my desk writing this comment. My emotions are in equilibrium. I want to finish. I type away. Sitting at my desk writing is an event. Everything that happens in between is a choice about an unpredictable event—what words will appear next on the page![2]

1. Predictable Emotions and Predictable Events

The old aphorism that claims that the only sure things in life are death and taxes has more than a ring of truth to it. Death and birth are the only truly predictable human events—although the timing of these events is deeply contextual. For both events appropriate affect is usually some form of sadness and some form of joy. The widespread trans-cultural presence of birth and death rituals attests to the emotional significance of these predictable events. Sadness at the death of a loved one and joy at the birth of a child are fairly predictable emotions no matter how they are culturally mediated. In practice of course if one harbored

[2] Writing is an event because presumably there will be an audience for this comment.

negative feelings for a family member or was confronted with an unwanted child one might feel joy at death and sorrow or anger at birth, but the principal point is that it is virtually impossible to feel no emotion in the presence of birth and death. In general, people cry at funerals and mothers report love at the first glimpse of their offspring. Birth and death represent the realm of *emotion and nature* that has most appropriately engaged *moral philosophy*.[3] How *ought* we feel in the face of the great existential events. What actions *ought* we take? This value-ridden sphere lies outside the realm of sociological analysis that in general does not take moral issues into account.[4]

2. Predictable Emotions and Unpredictable or Contingent Events

To a certain extent even in a fairly stable society everything that happens is a contingent event. Individuals make a hundred minor decisions everyday about actions. It would be counter-productive and inefficient if they stopped to think about each of these minor decisions. Frank describes these minor decisions as *habits* and argues that they are important for the smooth functioning of social life (1987). One could argue that rational choice is a predictable emotion (or non-emotion) in the face of an unpredictable or contingent event. In the face of these unpredictable events, individuals make choices based on the principal of maximizing *utility.* Preferences exist independently of emotions and what is predictable is non-emotionality and rational outcome. The goal is the optimum means to the desired ends. At the extremes, the ends justify the means and *efficiency* trumps ethics. This is the realm of *economics and mathematical reasoning.*

3. Unpredictable Emotions and Predictable Events

Predictable events are events that are structured by institutions—institutions as defined by Parsons ([1942] 1954; 1951) as values embedded in mediating structures.[5] Institutions that pattern events may be private such as the family (patterning love and marriage); or public, such as the market (jobs and organizations) or the polity (the states and citizenship). The legal system regulates criteria of participation or membership in these various institutional arenas. What is unregulated in the legal sphere is the range of emotional responses and correspondingly appropriate actions that individuals may engage within those institutional settings. This is where culture and emotion management come in. There are certain emotions, which are appropriate to each institutional setting. *Culture* is the governing frame and *institutions* are the structural support. Arlie Hochschild's (1983; 2003) work falls squarely within this category as does much of the research on sociology and emotion that her research has influenced.

From the vantage point of many of the issues raised in this comment, emotion managed is emotion short-circuited. Emotions may only be expressed if they are appropriate to the institutional framework in which they occur. Workers in the emotion industries, the flight attendants, sales persons, caregivers have to display emotion that is appropriate to their social role. They cannot dislike their clients. Emotion management is constitutive of all service industries. It is also increasingly a part of the now familiar term "corporate culture"

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[3] Nussbaum (2001) is the leading work in this field.

[4] See Fontaine (2001) for a discussion of empathy and social welfare.

[5] Camic (1990) published a historical account of Parsons' "Prolegomena to a Theory of Social Institutions." As the literature on institutions in general is voluminous, this comment follows Parsons' discussion in his 1942 essay "Propaganda and Social Control" as well as Chapter Two of *The Social System* (1951).

where all members of the organization have to behave in emotionally pleasing ways (Flam 1990).

In most market situations, i.e., jobs, what is required is to keep the emotions (and appetite out) or what Parsons ([1939] 1954) described as "affective neutrality." This is one of the reasons that nepotism and love at work, not to mention sexual harassment, are out of bounds. Although political and moral arguments are offered against these behaviors, they actually violate institutional norms because they mix public and private spheres leading to conflicts of interest and institutional disorder. They represent inappropriate affect in a market situation.[6] This is why coordinating home and work, family and market, is more than simply a technical and legal decision about hours worked or dividing the household labor. These different institutional spheres have different cultural rules about emotion. Feminists as well as students of European welfare states have discussed these issues at length but not in these terms. According to the logic laid out in this comment, institutional arrangements with their culturally proscribed emotion rules have created what scholars have re-calibrated as gender inequality.

4. Unpredictable Emotions and Unpredictable Events

As methodological individualists, rational choice theorists tend to gloss over the institutional patterning of affect. Emotion, as an unpredictable feeling state, is troubling to their calculations because it introduces the possibility of instability and disequilibria. There is no easy way to predict how emotions will pattern action when both emotions and events are unpredictable. Yet whether or not one subscribes to rational choice models, the realm of unpredictable emotions and events has been the area where much of the current interdisciplinary social research is occurring—the area where the *social and natural sciences* intersect. When unpredictable emotions and events occur simultaneously, a state of dis-equilibrium occurs between the agent and his or her environment. This is the state of uncertainty where "gut feelings" or "visceral" reactions govern actions (Roemer 2000).

Within politics, violence is the core subject. Within economics, appetites construed broadly from their benign manifestations in consumption to their more malign forms, greed and addiction, are the core subjects.[7] Appetites govern "irrational exuberance" as well as drug addiction. Appetites may be large or small but in general are unpredictable. I am 50 pounds overweight and diabetic but I cannot control my desire for cake. I go into a store—I cannot resist buying my 100th pair of shoes even though my credit cards are maxed out. These examples do not constitute unreasonable scenarios in the United States where personal bankruptcies due to overuse of credit cards abound and there is an emerging epidemic of obesity. Manning (2000) provides poignant narratives of consumers who lost the capacity to control their credit card purchasing and had to declare personal bankruptcy. Love and erotic attraction also falls within this category whereas marriage which falls into category 3 in *Figure 1*—the realm of institutions and emotions. American and European popular culture of all stripes suggests that love and dis-equilibria as well as uncertainty are of a single piece--i.e, as popular American music of past eras suggest—who knows where or when, some

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[6] For a discussion of how these distinctions work themselves out cross-culturally in the realm of sexual harassment, see Seguy (2003).

[7] The collection of essays in Loewenstein, Read and Baumeister (2003) discusses appetite on a variety of levels from the neurological to the legal and takes up issues of consumption, weight management, drug dependence and even—patience.

enchanted evening. The common Mediterranean European metaphor for falling in love—the thunder bolt—captures this uncertainty.

Appetites whether for food, sex or money, consumption items or even power can be large or small, disciplined or undisciplined (Watson 1999). Frank's (1988) example of family feuds reminds us how difficult it is to behave in a rational manner in the face of antipathies that cross generations. Excessively controlled appetites are as socially dysfunctional as those that are excessively uncontrolled—although the latter are more attractive subjects of research as well as popular interest. The miser is no more socially attractive than the profligate. Mean-spiritedness destroys the fabric of society by attenuating the possibilities of both cooperative and altruistic behavior (Monroe 1996).

By way of conclusion, it is clear that if economic sociologists want to analyze areas of economic life where economists have treaded lightly, they should pay attention to emotions. In doing so, as I have suggested in this note, they should be aware of the epistemological and ontological assumptions behind the broad, somewhat inchoate and very interdisciplinary literature that is developing around emotions in the social sciences.

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