

Summary

Origins, nature and functions of emotions: A study of Leon Petrażycki's theory of emotions in the context of contemporary research

Leon Petrażycki is well known as the creator of the psychological (or better: psychosocial) theory of law, but he also worked on and interestingly developed many other important issues from various disciplines. In this book, I focus on Petrażycki's psychology of emotions. I analyze his concept of emotions and evaluate it in the context of his theory of law, as well as in a broader perspective: as a scientist he sought a scientific explanation of emotions in general.

In Chapter 1, I analyze the most important philosophical concepts of emotions. This chapter provides the necessary background and appropriate materials for a general evaluation of Petrażycki's project. To assess his concept and theory of emotions in terms of their novelty and originality, one must know how emotions were understood at different points in the history of philosophy. As we shall see, the solution of the Polish researcher is part of a relatively narrow trend of reflection on emotions, which are considered as primary, positive, motivational processes, and necessary phenomena for effective functioning in the world.

In Chapter 2, I analyze Petrażycki's justification for the need to study emotions and I present an elementary introduction to his methodology. According to the Polish philosopher, the existing ways of studying sociocultural phenomena, in particular the law, did not give the expected results because they were inadequate. Petrażycki proposed his own scientific methodology. It contains some universal postulates, referring to all the sciences, regarding not only the correct formation of concepts, statements, scientific theories, but also it includes appropriate methods of studying psychic phenomena, including emotions. Petrażycki proposes a mixed method, firstly, introspection, secondly, experimental research, and thirdly, all other methods that can contribute to a better understanding of the nature of emotions.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the post-Kantian classification of mental phenomena, cognition, will and feelings, and its criticism made by Petrażycki. He shows that throughout history, these phenomena have often been mixed with each other, and unfamiliar foreign elements have been wrongly attached to individual elements: noncognitive components have been linked with cognition, nonfeeling ones – with those related to feelings, those that are beyond will – with volitional ones. Once we clarify, correct and define these phenomena and order them properly, we can see that these phenomena still do not exhaust the entirety of our mental life. According to Petrażycki, this division has to be replaced with another, more adequate one. He divided all basic mental phenomena into two main classes: two-sided phenomena (that is, passive-active ones, these include emotions), and one-sided phenomena. These are further divided into two subclasses: a) one-sided passive ones (cognitive and emotional experiences), and b) one-sided active ones (experiences of the will).

In Chapter 4, I analyze Petrażycki's position on the nature of emotions. First, I focus on the concept itself, on its two-sided character, which from the beginning aroused a lot of controversy among researchers of Petrażycki's thought. Such broadly understood emotions include various phenomena, including drives and instincts. Next, I discuss selected theses of Petrażycki's theory of emotions. In his opinion, emotions constitute the primary basis for the development of the psyche. They have a biological adaptive function – they adapt the body to specific living conditions. Emotions also affect the course of neurophysiological processes and different forms of thinking. The most specific feature of emotions understood in this way is motivation – emotions motivate to action. Taking into account these and other aspects of the theory of emotions, I show how Petrażycki anticipated the ideas of later researchers of emotions.

In Chapter 5, I present Petrażycki's views on the genesis of moral and legal norms. I also explain the specific character of these norms. I discuss in detail the structure of ethical (moral and legal) experiences, which consist of ethical emotions and imaginary actions. On the basis of these associations, rules and norms of conduct are created. Strictly speaking, moral and legal norms are projections of internal experiences. Petrażycki distinguishes two types of ethical norms: moral norms and legal norms. The moral norms are imperative and represent the nature of validity (they are obeyed), while the legal norms are imperative-attributive and they also always entitle someone to something, that is, they give someone a right.

Petrażycki's theory of emotions contains many important and current statements. Firstly, Petrażycki claims that emotions are evolutionary phenomena that regulate the body's actions in such a way that its ability to survive in the world increases significantly. Secondly, emotions cause a variety of physiological changes and neurological processes. Thirdly, emotions prepare the body for various

behaviors, stimulate the body to act, and guide actions. Fourthly, emotions form the foundation of intellectual life, exerting an overwhelming influence on cognitive processes, attention, perception and different forms of thinking. Fifthly, emotions form the basis of ethical life: they combine with the imaginations of certain activities, thus creating in the psyche positive and negative evaluations and standards of conduct.