

THE MATERIALIZATION OF ETHICAL QUALITIES

Developing Petrażycki's conjectures about projective processes

by Edoardo Fittipaldi

1. By *materialization of ethical qualities, entities and processes*, I shall mean *a person's tendency to conceive and treat certain ethical qualities, entities and processes as if they were brute qualities, entities and processes, while these qualities, entities and process exist, in whole or in part, only in her/his psyche.*

2. *How does it happen that ethical qualities usually expressed by adjectives and participles like 'obligatory', 'prohibited', 'mandatory', etc. are treated by people and jurists as if they were brute qualities?*

3. Petrażycki's general process of projection.

Моторные раздражения, возбуждаемые в нас разными объектами (их восприятиями или представлениями) или переживаемые по их адресу, сообщают соответственным восприятиям или представлениям особую окраску, особые оттенки так что самые объекты представляются нам в соответственным особом виде, как если бы они объективно обладали подлежащими особыми свойствами. Так, напр. жаркое (его восприятие, вид, запах и т.д.) возбуждает в нас аппетит, то он приобретает в наших глазах особый вид, мы приписываем ему особые свойства и говорим о нём, что он аппетитен, имеет аппетитный вид и т.д. Если тот же объект, при ином физиологическом состоянии нашего организма, или иной предлагаемый нам в пищу объект возбуждает в нас не аппетит, а противоположную эмоцию, пищевую репульсию, то мы, в случае относительной слабости этой отталкивающей эмоцией, приписываем ему свойство неаппетитности, говорим, что имеет неаппетитный вид, в случае же большой интенсивности подлежащего моторного раздражения, наделяем его свойством и эпитетом "отвратительности". [Petrażycki 1909-10: 38]

~~Stimuli~~ [Motorial excitements] aroused in us by various objects (by perceptions or ~~ideas~~ [representations] of them), or experienced with reference to them, communicate to the corresponding perceptions or ~~ideas~~ [representations] a particular coloration[, a particular nuance,] so that the objects themselves appear to us as if they objectively possessed the relevant qualities. Thus, if a certain object such as a roast (the perception, appearance, sight,

smell, and so forth) arouses appetite in us, it then acquires in our eyes a particular aspect, and we ascribe particular qualities to it and speak of it as appetizing, as having an appetizing appearance, and the like. If the same object (the physiological condition or our organism being different) or another object offered to us as food awakens in us the contrary (negative) ~~impulsion~~ [emotion] instead of appetite, we then—if this (negative) ~~impulsion~~ [emotion] is relatively weak—ascribe to the object the quality of unappetizing, whereas if ~~stimulus~~ [the motorial excitement] is more intense, we endow the object with the quality of "loathsomeness". [Petrażycki 1909-10*: 40]

4. Let's read a typical description of this situation by Petrażycki.

Если честному человеку предлагают совершить, напр., за деньги или иные выгоды, обман, лжесвидетельство, клевету, отравление кого-либо или т.п., то само представление таких "гадких", "злых" поступков вызывает репульсивные эмоции, отвергающие эти действия. [Petrażycki 1909-10: 20]

In an honorable man, invited to commit (for money or other advantage) deceit, perjury, defamation, homicide by poisoning, or the like, the very idea of such "foul" and "wicked" conduct will evoke ~~impulsions~~ [repulsive emotions] which reject these acts. [Petrażycki 1909-10*: 30]

5. Roast is definitely my favorite dish but it doesn't appetize me at all, now!

6. I like roast (English) / L'arrosto mi piace (Italian) / Der Braten schmeckt mir (German)

7. By *degree of subjective stability* of a projective quality I mean *how often that quality is perceived or felt in association with the representation or perception of a certain brute entity or course of action.*

8. Four kinds of *changes of the perception of a certain quality* (associated with the perception of a certain individual—or kind of—entity or course of action) must be distinguished:

1. when change seems to depend *on the will* of each of us;
2. when it doesn't seem to depend on the will of each of us, but does seem to depend *on internal changes of ours*, that we have the impression we cannot control by our will;

3. when it seems to depend, neither on our will, nor on internal changes of ours, but on *external changes*;
4. when it seems to be connected with *nothing*, i.e. when it seems to be completely unpredictable.

9. *Both the changes of brute and ethical qualities seem to depend on happenings external to us, rather than on happenings internal to us.*

10. The other factor that affects the degree of stability of a projective quality is its *degree of intersubjective diffusion*. By this term I mean the *frequency of people that a subject assumes to experience a certain projective quality associated to a certain entity or course of action*.

11. *The more the perception of a certain quality in an entity is diffused in a community, the more probable it is that this quality will be considered to be an objective brute quality of the entity or course of action, rather than a subjective evaluation projected into the entity.*

12. George Berkeley distinguished two kinds of Ideas (1710: § 29):

1. ideas that are completely dependent on the will of each of us and
2. ideas that don't have a like dependence on will the will of each of us.

13. As to the second kind he writes:

When in broad daylight I open my eyes, it is not in my power to choose whether I shall see or no, or to determine what particular objects shall present themselves to my view; and so likewise as to the hearing and other senses; the ideas imprinted on them are not creatures of my will. [Berkeley 1710: § 29]

14. The steadiness, order and coherence of certain ideas..

The [I]deas of Sense are more strong, lively, and distinct than those of the imagination; they have likewise a steadiness, order, and coherence, and are not excited at random, as those which are the effects of human wills often are, but in a regular train or series. [Berkeley 1710: § 30]

15. The fiction of the continued existence of objects according Hume.

Our memory presents us with a vast number of instances of perceptions perfectly resembling each other, that return at different distances of time, and after considerable interruptions. This resemblance gives us a propension to consider these interrupted perceptions as the same; and also a propension to connect them by a continu'd existence, in order to justify this identity, and avoid the contradiction, in which the interrupted appearance of these perceptions seems necessarily to involve us. Here then we have a propensity to *feign* the continu'd existence of all sensible objects; and as this propensity arises from some lively impressions of the memory, it bestows a vivacity on that *fiction*: or in other words, makes us believe the continu'd existence of body. If sometimes we ascribe a continu'd existence to objects, which are perfectly new to us, and of whose constancy and coherence we have no experience, 'tis because the manner, in which they present themselves to our senses, resembles that of constant and coherent objects; and this resemblance is a source of reasoning and analogy, and leads us to attribute the same qualities to similar objects. [Hume 1739-40: § 1.4.2, emphases added]

16. Vedere tutto nero (Italian) / Alles schwarz sehen (German)

17. The general features of brute qualities, i.e. of qualities that are assumed to exist independently of each of us:

1. they seem to be independent of the will of each of us;
2. they seem to have a continued existence—*ceteris paribus*;
3. they don't seem to be connected with internal changes of each of us;
4. they seem to produce similar perceptions in other people.

If this is the way projective mechanism works from a psychological point of view we are forced to conclude that the mechanism is the same, it doesn't matter whether we are dealing with brute or projective qualities.

From a psychological point of view, therefore, *all qualities (as well as entities and processes) are projective*. What Petrażycki calls *projections* are but *wrong projections*.