

# Moral Imagination in Light of Magda Arnold's Appraisal Theory

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## Abstract

The growing interest in imagination and its relevance to moral education has led to the use of the term moral imagination. This multifaceted concept refers to the ability to represent possible futures and alternative scenarios, to develop empathy and moral sensitivity, and to guide ethical deliberation. However, contemporary literature lacks a clear articulation linking moral imagination to the theory of internal senses, particularly the cogitative sense, which is responsible for weighing up what is desirable in relation to the singular good.

This article explores the relationship between moral imagination and Magda B. Arnold's appraisal theory, with the aim of demonstrating how her contributions regarding evaluative judgements can shed light on the contemporary notion of moral imagination.

Arnold argues that all emotions require an evaluation, a sensory judgement, of the situation based on what is perceived as valuable or harmful for the person. From this perspective, it is proposed that imagination cannot be separated from evaluation, as images must also be assessed in terms of their orientation towards the good. Understanding this evaluative dimension reveals the link between emotion and moral imagination, providing a framework for examining how they contribute to the self-ideal. Furthermore, an open question remains regarding the possible activation of emotions through the direct intervention of intellect and will, representing a promising avenue for future research that could further expand the explanatory scope of the evaluative model.

**Keywords:** Moral imagination, Appraisal theory, Magda Arnold, Thomistic internal senses, Emotion, Self-ideal.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, there has been an increased interest in the imagination and its relevance for moral education. In this context, the term moral imagination has emerged across different disciplines to denote the capacity to represent possible futures, construct alternative scenarios, enhance empathetic understanding and moral sensitivity, and guide ethical deliberation. However, despite its growing use, the concept often lacks a precise anthropological foundation that explains how imaginative activity is linked to moral evaluation and affective experience.

Specifically, contemporary literature can benefit from an explicit articulation between moral imagination and the Thomistic theory of internal senses, particularly the cogitative power. This tradition provides the philosophical basis for Magda B. Arnold's appraisal theory, which offers a fruitful framework for understanding how imaginative representations acquire moral significance through evaluation.

If moral imagination is defined as the anticipation of courses of action and the evaluation of their possible consequences, it becomes necessary to clarify the nature of the evaluation that intervenes in this anticipation. Arnold maintains that every emotion, in order to be activated, requires an evaluation—a sensory judgement—of the situation in terms of whether it is beneficial or harmful to the subject. From this perspective, affective experience does not merely respond to what objects are in themselves, rather, it is influenced by their evaluated significance in relation to the subject. This conception introduces the evaluative aspect at the very core of emotional activation.

The present paper aims to explore the contemporary notion of moral imagination in light of appraisal theory, with the goal of showing that the evaluative dimension constitutes the structural link between emotion and moral imagination. From this standpoint, it will be contended that moral imagination cannot be adequately understood without attending to the evaluative process that integrates representation, affectivity, and action, grounded in the Thomistic theory of the internal senses. This theoretical framework facilitates comprehension of the evaluative dynamic, which is oriented towards the configuration of the self-ideal, conceived as a teleological horizon of personal life.

Methodologically, the paper adopts a conceptual and systematic approach, articulating a dialogue between contemporary psychology of emotion and the Thomistic philosophical tradition. This integration serves to elucidate the an-

thropological assumptions that contemporary literature does not sufficiently explicate when employing the term moral imagination.

In accordance with this approach, the article is divided into three sections and a conclusion. The first section describes the contemporary notion of moral imagination and identifies the primary theoretical lacunae in its anthropological foundation. The second section presents the essential elements of Arnold's appraisal theory, with particular emphasis on her conceptualisation of evaluative judgement as a condition for the elicitation of emotion. In addition, a concise exposition of Thomas Aquinas's theory of the internal senses is provided, with the aim of elucidating the influence of this doctrine on the Czech-American psychologist. The third section develops the central thesis, arguing that the evaluative dimension constitutes the structural link between moral imagination and emotion in the orientation toward the self-ideal. Finally, the conclusion synthesises the contributions and points to an avenue for further investigation: the intervention of intellect and will in affective activation. This question remains open to be addressed in the context of the ongoing doctoral research.

## 2 MORAL IMAGINATION

As Moberg and Seabright<sup>1</sup> have noted, the notion of moral imagination is a multifaceted concept, since it has been approached from various disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, education, and business ethics. The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of the concept by synthesising the main theoretical contributions from the last twenty-five years. While the notion has relevant antecedents in philosophical and psychological thought—such as the works of Murdoch,<sup>2</sup> Camps,<sup>3</sup> Nussbaum,<sup>4</sup> Johnson,<sup>5</sup> Kekes<sup>6</sup> and Werhane<sup>7</sup>—the academic literature has shown significant growth since the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, with particular intensity from 2010 onwards.

In order to analyse this body of work systematically, the author conducted a prior academic study (unpublished), consisting of a review of a corpus comprising 24 journal articles, 6 book chapters—two of which appear in popular works—

<sup>1</sup>Cf. D. J. MOBERG, M. A. SEABRIGHT, *The Development of Moral Imagination*, «Business Ethics Quarterly», 10/4 (2000), pp. 845-884, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3857836>.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. I. MURDOCH, *La soberanía del bien*, Taurus, Barcelona 2019.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. V. CAMPS, *La imaginación ética*, Ariel, Barcelona 1991.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. M. NUSSBAUM, *El conocimiento del amor. Ensayos sobre filosofía y literatura*, Antonio Machado Libros, Madrid 2005.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. M. JOHNSON, *Moral Imagination: Implication of Cognitive Science for Ethics*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1993.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. J. KEKES, *Moral Wisdom and Good Lives*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1995.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. P. H. WERHANE, *Moral Imagination and the Search for Ethical Decision-Making in Management*, «Business Ethics Quarterly», 8 (1998), pp. 75-98, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052150X00400084>.

2 popular books, and 2 documents from the grey literature. The analysis yielded several conclusions, the most salient of which was the absence of a unified or precise definition of the term. Nevertheless, three points of convergence can be identified in contemporary understanding: a cognitive, an affective, and a volitional dimension. These three elements facilitate comprehension of moral imagination as a complex capacity that, supported by theoretical reasoning, expands perception, enriches judgement, and stimulates action.

The ensuing sections present the most relevant considerations for each of these dimensions according to the different disciplines.

### 2.1 Cognitive Dimension

First, a cognitive component is identified, referring to the capacity to represent possible alternatives, to understand the perspectives of others and to envisage courses of action in light of what is perceived as good or morally appropriate.

In philosophy, Hartman approaches moral imagination from an Aristotelian perspective, defining it as a “faculty of discerning judgment, and in some cases a faculty of moral judgment.”<sup>8</sup> Building upon this philosophical framework, Moberg and Seabright<sup>9</sup> describe moral imagination, in the domain of business ethics, as the capacity to evoke possible alternatives when confronted with ethical dilemmas. Conversely, Werhane and Moriarty<sup>10</sup> underscore the necessity to expand the cognitive frameworks that inform decision-making in intricate organisational contexts. In the field of education, Fletcher<sup>11</sup> emphasises the importance of visualising situations from multiple perspectives, fostering a richer understanding of moral conflicts. From a psychological perspective, Pardales<sup>12</sup> conceives moral imagination as the faculty that allows one to represent diverse life possibilities and Narvaez and Mrkva<sup>13</sup> establish a correlation between this faculty and creativity, as well as the capacity to generate images of what is good and right.

<sup>8</sup>Cf. E. M. HARTMAN, *An Aristotelian Approach to Moral Imagination*, «Professional Ethics», 8/3 (2000), p. 60, <https://doi.org/10.5840/profethics200083/415>.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibidem*.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. P. H. WERHANE, B. MORIARTY, *Moral Imagination and Management Decision Making*, Business Roundtable Institute for Corporate Ethics, Charlottesville 2009, [https://www.globalewerteallianz.ch/wp-content/uploads/Werhane-P.H.-Moriarty-B.\\_Moral-Imagination\\_2009.pdf](https://www.globalewerteallianz.ch/wp-content/uploads/Werhane-P.H.-Moriarty-B._Moral-Imagination_2009.pdf).

<sup>11</sup>Cf. N. M. FLETCHER, *Envisioning the Experience of Others: Moral Imagination, Practical Wisdom, and the Scope of Empathy*, «Philosophical Inquiry in Education», 23/2 (2016), pp. 141-159.

<sup>12</sup>Cf. M. J. PARDALES, *So, How Did You Arrive at that Decision? Connecting Moral Imagination and Moral Judgement*, «Journal of Moral Education», 31/4 (2002), pp. 421-432, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305724022000029653>.

<sup>13</sup>Cf. D. NARVAEZ, K. MRKVA, *The Development of Moral Imagination*, in *The Ethics of Creativity*, ed. by S. Moran, D. Cropley, J. C. Kaufman, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2014, pp. 25-45, [https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137333544\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137333544_2).

When considered as a whole, these approaches are shown to converge in presenting moral imagination as a form of practical cognition aimed at expanding the moral horizon of the subject.

## 2.2 *Affective Dimension*

The second dimension highlights the affective component of moral imagination, which fosters the development of empathy and moral sensitivity towards the needs of others as well as oneself.

Werhane and Moriarty<sup>14</sup> argue that moral imagination enables individuals to transcend immediate action consequences, which implies a sensitivity to the human impacts involved. In the domain of education, both Fletcher<sup>15</sup> and Altuna<sup>16</sup> regard moral imagination as a precursor to empathy and as a condition for providing better care for others. From a psychological perspective, Vanello<sup>17</sup> relates moral imagination to the notion of 'affective empathy', understood as the emotional response that arises when the subject has experienced situations similar to those being imagined.<sup>18</sup> At the philosophical level, Granados<sup>19</sup> emphasises that imagination can be shaped through the virtues, entailing an affective formation that guides moral sensitivity. Accordingly, moral sensitivity may be understood as the affective disposition that enables the subject to perceive, understand and respond appropriately to concrete situations by recognising potential moral harm, taking all those involved into account, and considering the situation from the perspective of others.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Cf. P. H. WERHANE, B. MORIARTY, *Moral Imagination and Management Decision Making*, cit.

<sup>15</sup>Cf. N. M. FLETCHER, *Envisioning the Experience of Others*, cit.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. B. ALTUNA, *La imaginación moral, o la ética como actividad imaginativa*, «Daimon Revista Internacional de Filosofía», 74 (2018), pp. 155-169, <https://doi.org/10.6018/daimon/270061>.

<sup>17</sup>Cf. D. VANELLO, *Moral Understanding, Affect, and The Imagination*, «Inquiry», 68/2 (2025), pp. 183-208, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2022.2077431>.

<sup>18</sup>The present paper adopts the notion of 'affective empathy' proposed by Vanello, according to which empathy involves an emotional response to another person's situation. However, the psychological literature offers alternative notions of empathy that understand it as the imaginative reconstruction of another person's experience, without necessarily implying emotional participation (cf. M. NUSSBAUM, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001). For a broader discussion of the different meanings attributed to empathy, see D. BATSON, *These Things Called Empathy: Eight Related but Distinct Phenomena*, in *The Social Neuroscience of Empathy*, ed. by J. Decety, W. Ickes, MIT Press, Cambridge 2009. As the present article is not concerned with developing a theory of empathy, no attempt is made to adjudicate between these different conceptions.

<sup>19</sup>Cf. L. GRANADOS, *Una imaginación virtuosa: inventar un camino de acciones para alcanzar el fin común*, in *Pedagogía y virtudes. La excelencia en el camino del amor*, ed. by V. Fernández, C. Granados, J. A. Granados, Didaskalos, Madrid 2022, pp. 143-165.

<sup>20</sup>Cf. B. ALTUNA, *La imaginación moral, o la ética como actividad imaginativa*, cit.

Taken together, these approaches demonstrate that moral imagination is not emotionally neutral, but rather it engages the subject's affectivity.

### 2.3 Volitive Dimension

Finally, it is important to note that moral imagination also possesses a volitional dimension. This is because it does not merely represent or project possibilities, but also orients action and ethical deliberation.

In the field of business ethics, Werhane and Moriarty<sup>21</sup> delineate it as the capacity to formulate viable ethical alternatives even within structurally constrained contexts. In the domain of education, Bohlin<sup>22</sup> highlights the role of mental images as guides for moral action. In a similar vein, Granados,<sup>23</sup> Gil<sup>24</sup> and Bohlin<sup>25</sup> establish a correlation between moral imagination and the flourishing of learners, asserting that it serves to facilitate the projection of valuable forms of life. From a psychological perspective, Moberg y Seabright,<sup>26</sup> Pardales<sup>27</sup> and Kaftanski<sup>28</sup> relate moral imagination to the construction of 'possible selves', understood as drivers of personal change and transformation. Finally, in the philosophical domain, Rumayor *et alii*.<sup>29</sup> emphasise its connection with desire and will, demonstrating that to imagine morally implies orienting one's willing toward a good recognised as valuable.

It is important to note that several authors<sup>30</sup> have introduced the notion of 'immoral imagination' in order to caution against the potential dangers associated with the disordered exercise of this faculty. In this sense, as Rozuel<sup>31</sup> argues, "the moral quality of imagination reflects the quality of the individual", thereby

<sup>21</sup>Cf. P. H. WERHANE, B. MORIARTY, *Moral Imagination and Management Decision Making*, cit.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. K. E. BOHLIN, *Educando el carácter a través de la literatura: despertando la imaginación moral en las aulas de secundaria*, Didaskalos, Madrid 2020.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. L. GRANADOS, *Una imaginación virtuosa*, cit.

<sup>24</sup>Cf. M. GIL, *El cultivo de las humanidades y las emociones: reflexiones en torno a la educación moral y política*, «Pensamiento», 72/274 (2016), pp. 1141-1156.

<sup>25</sup>Cf. K. E. BOHLIN, *Educando el carácter a través de la literatura*, cit.

<sup>26</sup>Cf. D. J. MOBERG, M. A. SEABRIGHT, *The Development of Moral Imagination*, cit.

<sup>27</sup>Cf. M. J. PARDALES, *So, How Did You Arrive at that Decision?*, cit.

<sup>28</sup>Cf. W. KAFTANSKI, *Imagination, Mental Representation, and Moral Agency: Moral Pointers in Kierkegaard and Ricœur*, «Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences», 23 (2022), pp. 179-198, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-022-09813-x>.

<sup>29</sup>Cf. M. RUMAYOR, V. FERNÁNDEZ-ESPINOSA, N. HADDAD, *Educación en virtudes a través de la literatura: narrativa, imaginación y deseo*, «Estudios sobre Educación», 48 (2025), pp. 35-52, <https://doi.org/10.15581/004.48.002>.

<sup>30</sup>Cf. M. A. SEABRIGHT, M. SCHMINKE, *Immoral Imagination and Revenge in Organizations*, «Journal of Business Ethics», 38 (2002), pp. 19-31; C. ROZUEL, *Challenging the 'Million Zeros': The Importance of Imagination*, «Journal of Business Ethics», 138 (2016), pp. 39-51; Y. RATAJCZYK, *Moral Perception as Imaginative Apprehension*, «The Journal of Ethics», 29 (2025), pp. 257-276.

<sup>31</sup>Cf. C. ROZUEL, *Challenging the 'Million Zeros'*, cit., p. 45.

emphasising that the manner in which one imagines has a direct influence on one's ethical formation.

To conclude this section, it can be observed that, although contemporary literature recognises the cognitive, affective, and volitive dimensions of moral imagination, the evaluative process that articulates these dimensions into a dynamic unity has not been sufficiently explicated. For this reason, the following section analyses Magda B. Arnold's appraisal theory in order to demonstrate how her account of evaluative judgement can illuminate the value structure underlying the contemporary notion of moral imagination. The dialogue between these two perspectives constitutes the specific contribution of the present work.

### 3 MORAL IMAGINATION IN LIGHT OF MAGDA ARNOLD'S APPRAISAL THEORY

#### 3.1 *Magda Arnold's Appraisal Theory*

Magda Arnold is acknowledged as one of the leading exponents of cognitive approaches to the study of emotion within modern psychology.<sup>32</sup> According to Cornelius, her contribution was particularly significant because she offered "a systematic exploration of the meaning of appraisal, presented a schema of what the appraisal process might be, and examined the relationship between appraisal, emotion, and action."<sup>33</sup>

Arnold's central thesis posits that every emotion arises from a prior evaluation—appraisal—which is not the result of reflective deliberation, but rather an immediate and involuntary estimation of the perceived object. As Echavarría observes, "Arnold insists that perception or mere idea is not sufficient to trigger emotion and action; a value judgment is required."<sup>34</sup> This judgement does not consist in abstract intellectual reasoning, but in an immediate apprehension of the object under the aspect of its convenience or harmfulness for the subject. The arising of an emotion is predicated upon the evaluation of the object in its concrete relation to the perceiving subject, here and now.<sup>35</sup> The process of evaluation serves to determine whether the object

<sup>32</sup>Cf. R. REISENZEIN, *Arnold's Theory of Emotion in Historical Perspective*, «Cognition and Emotion», 20/7 (2006), pp. 920-951, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02699930600616445>.

<sup>33</sup>R. R. CORNELIUS, *Magda Arnold's Thomistic Theory of Emotion, the Self-ideal, and the Moral Dimension of Appraisal*, «Cognition and Emotion», 20/7 (2006), p. 977, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02699930600616411>.

<sup>34</sup>M. ECHAVARRÍA, *Las teorías psicológicas de las emociones frente a Tomás de Aquino*, in *Le emozioni secondo san Tommaso*, ed. by S. Bonino, G. Mazzota, Urbaniana University Press, Roma 2019, p. 55.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 67.

is beneficial or harmful, valuable or damaging for the subject. In summary, without appraisal there is no emotion. As Arnold herself states:

To arouse an emotion, the object must (also) be appraised as affecting me in some way, affecting me personally as an individual with my particular experience and my particular aims... [This] means that I know it not only, as it is apart from me, but also that I estimate its relation to me, that I appraise it as desirable or undesirable, valuable or harmful for me.<sup>36</sup>

Consequently, emotion does not merely respond to what things are in themselves, but to their evaluated meaning in relation to the concrete subject, their experience and goals. Kappas reinforces this idea by noting that “objects that elicit emotions do so because they appear to have personal relevance.”<sup>37</sup> For this reason, Arnold defines emotion as:

The felt tendency toward anything intuitively appraised as good (beneficial), or away from anything intuitively appraised as bad (harmful). This attraction or aversion is accompanied by a pattern of physiological changes organized toward approach or withdrawal. The patterns differ for different emotions.<sup>38</sup>

Accordingly, emotion is conceptualised as a tendency toward action, that is, as an active movement outward. Parenti explains this clearly: “while perception and appraisal constitute the cognitive aspects of the process, that is, the receptive part, emotion as a tendency to action constitutes an active movement outward.”<sup>39</sup> The emotional dynamic may therefore be described in the following sequence: “perception, intuitive evaluation and emotion.”<sup>40</sup>

However, Arnold emphasises that the evaluation that elicits emotion is not the result of deliberate reflection, but is immediate and involuntary. She illustrates this point as follows:

If we see someone pointing a finger at our eye, we instantly avoid the threat, even though we know that the person has no intention of harming us, or even touching us. Before we can give this instant response, we must somehow have estimated that the finger pointed at us could harm us. Since the movement is immediate, that is, involuntary, the appraisal of danger must be equally immediate.<sup>41</sup>

At this juncture, Echavarría’s observation becomes particularly relevant: “Arnold acknowledges that this evaluation corresponds to what in Thomas

<sup>36</sup>M. B. ARNOLD, *Emotion and Personality. Vol. 1: Psychological Aspects*, Columbia University Press, New York 1960, p. 171.

<sup>37</sup>A. KAPPAS, *Appraisals Are Direct, Immediate, Intuitive, and Unwilling... and Some Are Reflective*, «Cognition and Emotion», 20/7 (2006), p. 955, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02699930600616080>.

<sup>38</sup>M. B. ARNOLD, *Emotion and Personality*, cit., p. 182.

<sup>39</sup>S. PARENTI, *Magda Arnold, psicóloga de las emociones*, Pequeño Monasterio, Pamplona 2021, p. 85.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 84.

<sup>41</sup>M. B. ARNOLD, *Emotion and Personality*, cit., p. 172.

Aquinas is the estimative power in animals and the cogitative power in human beings.”<sup>42</sup> This correspondence highlights the influence of Aquinas on the Czech-American psychologist and allows appraisal to be linked with the internal senses, particularly with the cogitative power, which is responsible for “making value judgments about singular realities.”<sup>43</sup> For this reason, it is important to provide a contextual framework for the Thomistic theory of the internal senses. This will facilitate a more precise understanding of the anthropological foundation that Arnold adopts to enrich her theory of emotional experience, thus moving beyond merely biological components.<sup>44</sup>

### 3.2 *The Influence of Thomas Aquinas on Arnold's Appraisal Theory*

In order to comprehend the anthropological framework underlying Arnold's appraisal theory, it is necessary to briefly present Thomas Aquinas's theory of knowledge, particularly his account of sensation and the internal senses.

According to the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, external objects are known through sensible forms (species), received by the external senses without the matter of the object itself. These sensible forms are subsequently processed by the internal senses which are responsible for receiving, retaining and apprehending the *intentiones*<sup>45</sup> of the perceived species—that is, the particular meanings that are not directly perceived by the external senses.<sup>46</sup> The internal senses are classified into four: common sense, imagination or phantasy, estimative power in—animals—or cogitative power—in humans—and memory. As Juanola explains, “the common sense is the focal point of the five external senses, as it gathers the different sensations of the five senses,”<sup>47</sup> unifying them into a single perceived object. This faculty, alternatively designated as ‘sensory common sense’ requires the physical presence of the object and allows the experience of a unified world.

The internal sense of imagination is defined as “a repository (thesaurus) of the forms received through the senses,”<sup>48</sup> retains sensible species so that they can be represented again through images, independently of the current presence of the object. In addition to retaining, imagination also completes and combines these representations. Juanola illustrates:

<sup>42</sup>M. ECHAVARRÍA, *Las teorías psicológicas de las emociones frente a Tomás de Aquino*, cit., p. 67.

<sup>43</sup>R. CORAZÓN, *Filosofía del Conocimiento*, EUNSA, Pamplona 2002, p. 67.

<sup>44</sup>S. PARENTI, *Magda Arnold, psicóloga de las emociones*, cit.

<sup>45</sup>Cf. TOMMASO D'AQUINO, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 78, a. 4.

<sup>46</sup>M. ECHAVARRÍA, *Agent Intellect and Divine Illumination in Thomas Aquinas' Summa Theologiae*, «Cauriensia. Revista Anual de Ciencias Eclesiásticas», 20 (2025), pp. 205-224, <https://doi.org/10.17398/2340-4256.20.205>.

<sup>47</sup>J. D. JUANOLA, *Actualidad psicológica de la teoría de los sentidos internos en Santo Tomás de Aquino*, Tesis doctoral, Universitat Abat Oliba CEU, Barcelona 2015, p. 76.

<sup>48</sup>TOMMASO D'AQUINO, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 78, a. 4.

It is a faculty distinct from the common sense because, unlike it, imagination can operate in the absence of sensation, although it requires the species gathered by it to form an intentional image of what is perceived.<sup>49</sup>

The first two senses described are called ‘formal,’ as they formally process perceived sensory data, whereas the others are considered ‘intentional,’ as they grasp an *intentio*, that is, a particular meaning<sup>50</sup>. While the estimative power in animals assigns singular meanings to perceived objects “based on instinctive inclinations and for purely pragmatic purposes,”<sup>51</sup> in humans, this faculty is called the cogitative power or particular reason, as it “compares individual intentions as universal reason does”<sup>52</sup> and is moved and governed<sup>53</sup> “by the intellect strictly speaking,”<sup>54</sup> serving as a bridge to moderate passions (or emotions in the contemporary sense). Memory, finally, preserves what has already been estimated, thereby providing the temporal dimension that allows recognition of the perceived object.

It is precisely the cogitative power, governed by reason, that enables Magda Arnold not to reduce the emotional dynamic to immediacy, distinguishing instead between ‘sensory’ and ‘reflective’ judgements, which follow this initial estimative evaluation—giving rise to emotion—to complement or correct it<sup>55</sup>. As she describes in *Emotion and Personality*:

...in the adult and older child, the estimation of well-being or misfortune is both intuitive and reflective. But the intuitive judgment is immediate; the reflective judgment follows. This is demonstrated by the fact that intuitive evaluation is often complemented or corrected by subsequent reflection. When this occurs, the emotion changes according to the new intuitive estimation following the corrective judgment.<sup>56</sup>

In this sense, the possibility arises for emotion to be modified by higher cognitive processes. Accordingly, Echavarría states that “in a second moment, the intellect could intervene, accepting or rejecting particular estimative evaluations

<sup>49</sup>J. D. JUANOLA, *Actualidad psicológica de la teoría de los sentidos internos en Santo Tomás de Aquino*, cit., p. 84.

<sup>50</sup>Cf. M. ECHAVARRÍA, *La percepción de la sustancia en la unidad de la conciencia*, in *Opere et veritate. Homenaje al profesor Ángel Luis González*, ed. by E. Alarcón, A. Echavarría, M. García-Valdecasas, R. Pereda, EUNSA, Pamplona 2018, pp. 233-244.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 234.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 240.

<sup>53</sup>Cf. TOMMASO D’AQUINO, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 78, a. 4.

<sup>54</sup>M. ECHAVARRÍA, *Desire and Freedom: Are We Responsible for Our Emotions?*, in *Desire and Human Flourishing. Positive Education*, ed. by M. Bosch, Springer Nature Switzerland, Cham 2020, p. 67, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47001-2\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47001-2_5).

<sup>55</sup>Cf. S. PARENTI, *Magda Arnold, psicóloga de las emociones*, cit.

<sup>56</sup>M. B. ARNOLD, *Emotion and Personality*, cit., p. 175.

and imposing another orientation on the affect through the will.”<sup>57</sup> Consequently, the complete sequence of the emotional process—described by the same author in the prologue of *Magda Arnold, Psychologist of Emotions*—is as follows: sensation, intuitive evaluation (primary), emotion, reflective evaluation (secondary) and action (approach or avoidance).<sup>58</sup>

Cornelius retrieves one of the examples Arnold presents in *Feelings and Emotions. The Loyola Symposium* (1970) to illustrate this idea:

The diabetic may crave sweets yet refrain from giving in to his desire because he knows what the consequences of an indulgence will be. The smoker knows the dangers of smoking but hopes that he will be lucky and goes on smoking. In both cases, there is reflection, a weighing of alternatives, in which the intuitive appraisal leading to desire is either counterbalanced or reinforced by deliberate judgment. The final decision may not be the most attractive alternative nor is it always the most prudent choice.<sup>59</sup>

This possibility of rational intervention finds its foundation in the philosophical tenets of Thomas Aquinas, who affirms in the *Summa Theologica*:

External senses require stimulation from external sensible objects to act, whose presence does not depend on reason. But the internal faculties, both appetitive and apprehensive, do not require external objects. Thus, they are subject to the command of reason, which can not only provoke or calm the affections of the appetitive powers but also form the representations of the imaginative power.<sup>60</sup>

Reason can therefore influence affective life not only by correcting sensory judgements but also by modulating imaginative representations that have been perceived for evaluation. In this regard, Astorquiza posits that “human reason can govern emotions, primarily by influencing the cogitative power,”<sup>61</sup> but not exclusively. The intellect can also intervene in imagination, thereby activating the formation of certain images, since “it is not a matter of applying universal considerations, but of bringing to or removing from the mind certain images that produce particular emotions.”<sup>62</sup> Bosch underscores this dynamic, stating that “emotions do not react to the imperative of the intellect, but to the representations of the imagination.”<sup>63</sup>

<sup>57</sup>M. ECHAVARRÍA, *Las teorías psicológicas de las emociones frente a Tomás de Aquino*, cit., p. 69.

<sup>58</sup>S. PARENTI, *Magda Arnold, psicóloga de las emociones*, cit., p. 26.

<sup>59</sup>R. R. CORNELIUS, *Magda Arnold's Thomistic Theory of Emotion, the Self-Ideal, and the Moral Dimension of Appraisal*, cit., p. 986.

<sup>60</sup>TOMMASO D'AQUINO, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 81, a. 3 ad 3.

<sup>61</sup>P. ASTORQUIZA, *Interacción entre la razón y las emociones en el ser humano según Santo Tomás de Aquino*, «Civilizar. Ciencias Sociales y Humanas», 8/14 (2008), p. 121, <https://doi.org/10.22518/16578953-757>.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 122.

<sup>63</sup>M. BOSCH, *Education of Desire for flourishing*, in *Desire and Human Flourishing. Positive Education*, cit., p. 33, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47001-2\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47001-2_3).

Emotion, therefore, arises from an immediate estimation of the benefit or harm of a perceived object in relation to the subject; it can be confirmed or corrected through reflection and is mediated by imaginative representations that reason can, to some extent, modulate. The appraisal theory elucidates not only the activation of emotion but also highlights the unified interaction among emotion, imagination, and reflective judgement.

Arnold further develops her appraisal theory beyond a merely emotional analysis to a broader orientation of the personality through introducing the concept of self-ideal. The Czech-American psychologist defines it as “the goal in life, what we desire in the depths of our heart and what, by striving for it, we eventually achieve.”<sup>64</sup> In this sense, objects and situations are not evaluated solely in terms of their immediate impact but also in relation to the self-ideal that each subject chooses, which functions as a standard of perfection, a vital *telos*.

To conclude this section, Cornelius’ remark is illustrative: “the concept of the self-ideal was conceived by Arnold as a central organizing principle of the personality and an important source of motivation for the individual.”<sup>65</sup> The following section will explore the relevance of the evaluative dimension as the structural link between emotion and moral imagination in the pursuit of the personal ideal.

#### 4 EVALUATIVE DIMENSION AS A LINK BETWEEN EMOTION AND MORAL IMAGINATION IN THE PURSUIT OF THE SELF-IDEAL

In light of the foregoing, it can be asserted that the evaluative dimension constitutes the core that structures moral imagination. While contemporary literature identifies three dimensions in this faculty—cognitive, affective, and volitional—Arnold’s appraisal theory clarifies that these dimensions do not operate in a merely juxtaposed or independent manner. Rather, they are dynamically integrated within an evaluative process that bridges imaginative representation, emotional experience, and practical orientation. From this perspective, dialogue with appraisal theory provides a more precise anthropological grounding for understanding how individuals, through evaluative judgements—both intuitive and reflective—integrate emotion, imagination, and action in the formation of their self-ideal.

Considering the role of imagination as central to the appraisal of perceived objects, the sequence can be described as follows: imagination presents possibilities; appraisal evaluates them in terms of benefit or harm; emotion mobilises the individual toward approach or avoidance; and the will can subsequently confirm

<sup>64</sup>M. B. ARNOLD, *Psychology and the Image of Man*, «Religious Education», 54 (1959), p. 34, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0034408590540105>.

<sup>65</sup>R. R. CORNELIUS, *Magda Arnold’s Thomistic Theory of Emotion, the Self-Ideal, and the Moral Dimension of Appraisal*, cit., p. 987.

or adjust this orientation through reflective judgement. The sequence outlined by Arnold “perception, appraisal (intuitive or sense judgment), emotion (understood as a felt tendency), action” together with the possibility of a subsequent reflective evaluation, as noted above, provides a dynamic framework that integrates the threefold structure identified in the contemporary notion of moral imagination. The cognitive dimension is realised in the representation of alternatives; the affective dimension, in the emotional resonance arising from their evaluation; and the volitional dimension, in the practical orientation resulting from this assessment.

This framework is particularly fruitful when incorporating Arnold's notion of the self-ideal as an organising principle of the personality. Contemporary authors describe this concept as ‘future-oriented projections’<sup>66</sup> or ‘possible selves,’<sup>67</sup> which function as drivers of personal transformation. As Moberg and Seabright note, these “represent individuals’ ideas about what they could become, what they would like to become, and, especially, what they fear becoming.”<sup>68</sup> Similarly, Kaftanski emphasises that such representations act as a “map guiding our development as persons.”<sup>69</sup> Thus, imagination is not limited to reproducing past experiences but, as Arnold also observes, “is used to plan action and anticipate its outcomes.”<sup>70</sup>

In this context, imagined objects and scenarios are not evaluated solely in terms of their immediate impact, but also in relation to the personal ideal that the individual recognises as a horizon of fulfilment. The self-ideal is this employed as a regulative criterion for evaluation. As Ruiz Fuster *et alii.* observe: “in accordance with the goals set by reason and the appropriate self-ideal, individuals can use imagination and thought to impact both reflective and intuitive appraisal, and ultimately, emotions.”<sup>71</sup> In accordance with this idea, Cornelius reminds us that, for Arnold, emotions function as “guardians of the self-ideal,”<sup>72</sup> guiding us to approach or avoid certain objects and events in accordance with the self-ideal that is assumed.

However, this process does not occur automatically. As Echavarría points out,

<sup>66</sup>Cf. W. KAFTANSKI, *Mental Images and Imagination in Moral Education*, «Journal of Moral Education», 53/1 (2024), pp. 119-138, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2023.2236801>.

<sup>67</sup>Cf. D. J. MOBERG, M. A. SEABRIGHT, *The Development of Moral Imagination*, cit.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 868.

<sup>69</sup>W. KAFTANSKI, *Mental Images and Imagination in Moral Education*, cit., p. 122.

<sup>70</sup>M. B. ARNOLD, *Story Sequence Analysis: A New Method of Measuring Motivation and Predicting Achievement*, Columbia University Press, New York 1962, p. 33.

<sup>71</sup>F. RUIZ-FUSTER, A. BERNAL-MARÍNEZ DE SORIA, M. F. ECHAVARRÍA, *Emotional Regulation and Arnold's Self-Ideal: A Way to Flourishment*, «Frontiers in Psychology», 15 (2024), p. 10, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1425850>.

<sup>72</sup>R. R. CORNELIUS, *Magda Arnold's Thomistic Theory of Emotion, the Self-Ideal, and the Moral Dimension of Appraisal*, cit., p. 990.

“the possibility of being responsible for our emotions will depend on the capacity to govern this type of cognition”<sup>73</sup> and Cornelius adds:

What makes emotions do one or the other depends on the extent to which our emotions are controlled by reason. It is only when this happens, Arnold and Gasson argue, that emotions can serve as a means of self-actualisation and personality integration.<sup>74</sup>

It is therefore necessary to consider Juanola’s observations regarding the perfection of the sensitive faculties:

Sensitive faculties can be perfected insofar as the reason in which they participate is optimally disposed for operation. The painter does not possess a more perfect visual faculty, but is more aware and able to discern nuances of color that allow him to express what he intends.<sup>75</sup>

This perfection does not imply a greater sensory capacity, as Juanola illustrates with the painter, but rather a more conscious and precise use informed by knowledge. In summary, internal sensitive faculties can be perfected in their exercise not through physical refinement, but because will and reason direct and fine-tune their operation. To the extent that imaginative representations are ordered towards the singular good, affective evaluation aligns with the self-ideal, thereby fostering an integrative inner unity. As Parenti summarises, “the true character of a person is revealed in the choices made,”<sup>76</sup> that is, in the concrete way evaluation, emotion, and will converge.

Ultimately, it is important to note that a further inquiry remains open, consistent with Echavarría’s repeated observations in various publications<sup>77</sup>:

What is missing in the conception of Arnold and Lazarus (not in that of Thomas Aquinas) is a more extensive development of the idea that emotions can also be activated top-down, because reason and will can use the internal or central senses to move emotions, and because an intense affect of the will can also drag along the proper emotional movements (*redundantia*).<sup>78</sup>

From this perspective, it becomes necessary to examine the specific role of imagination in this dynamic. In particular, it must be clarified how the representations generated by this faculty can be activated, modulated, and ordered by

<sup>73</sup>M. ECHAVARRÍA, *Desire and Freedom: Are We Responsible for Our Emotions?*, cit., p. 65.

<sup>74</sup>R. R. CORNELIUS, *Magda Arnold’s Thomistic Theory of Emotion, the Self-Ideal, and the Moral Dimension of Appraisal*, cit., p. 985.

<sup>75</sup>J. D. JUANOLA, *Actualidad psicológica de la teoría de los sentidos internos en Santo Tomás de Aquino*, cit., p. 218.

<sup>76</sup>S. PARENTI, *Magda Arnold, psicóloga de las emociones*, cit., p. 109.

<sup>77</sup>Cf. M. ECHAVARRÍA, *Las teorías psicológicas de las emociones frente a Tomás de Aquino*, cit., and M. ECHAVARRÍA, *Desire and Freedom: Are We Responsible for Our Emotions?*, cit.

<sup>78</sup>M. ECHAVARRÍA, *Las teorías psicológicas de las emociones frente a Tomás de Aquino*, cit., p. 71.

reason and will in the generation of emotions. This issue will be further developed in the context of the ongoing doctoral research to refine and complete the proposed model.

In summary, the evaluative dimension constitutes the anthropological structural link between moral imagination and emotion, integrating representation, affectivity, and action in the orientation toward the self-ideal. The education of imagination, therefore, emerges as a central task of moral formation, insofar as it facilitates the harmonisation of affective life with the self-ideal.

## 5 CONCLUSION

In contemporary literature, moral imagination is presented as a multifaceted faculty that integrates three dimensions: a cognitive, an affective, and a volitive one. The term is defined as the capacity to represent possible scenarios, to develop moral sensitivity and empathy, and, finally, to guide ethical deliberation. In this context, Magda Arnold's appraisal theory demonstrates that these dimensions do not operate independently, but are articulated through evaluative judgements that link external sensory perception with an affective response understood as a tendency towards action.

Within this theoretical framework, emotion does not arise simply from the inherent properties of objects themselves, but from their evaluated significance in relation to the subject. This process is mediated by imagination—defined as a sensitive internal faculty capable of retaining and combining the species received from the external senses—and can be modulated by the intervention of reason and will.

The self-ideal functions as an organising principle of the personality, guiding the evaluation of imagined objects and situations by comparing them with the standard of perfection that the individual aspires to achieve. Consequently, future-oriented projections or possible selves can become drivers of personal change and deliberate planning of action. For this reason, it is important to emphasise that such sensitive faculties can be perfected so that they are ordered towards the particular good in the pursuit of the personal self-ideal. This enables intuitive judgements to be harmonised with reflective judgements derived from the intellect.

Finally, the research also underscores certain limitations that have been previously identified by Echavarría, such as the activation of emotions through the direct intervention of the intellect and will. This perspective proposes that reason and will may intervene directly in the generation of affects. The specific role of imagination within this top-down dynamic will be further developed in the ongoing doctoral dissertation.

It can be concluded that the evaluative dimension constitutes the structural link that integrates emotion, imagination, and action under the guidance of the self-ideal, thereby consolidating itself as a central element in moral education and in the attainment of one's self-ideal.

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