

Beyond Emotional Self-Regulation

Affective Maturity in Light of Magda Arnold's Work

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Abstract

In recent decades, emotional self-regulation (ESR) has emerged as a significant interdisciplinary field of research in psychology, affective neuroscience, and philosophy. However, its link with affective maturity (AM) remains unexplored, even though they share an important underlying question: how to control our emotions rather than be controlled by them? Although AM lacks a scientific definition, it is employed in clinical, religious, and character-formation contexts and is particularly pertinent in marriage annulment causes. Drawing on Magda Arnold's personality theory as a starting point, this paper proposes a framework for integrating ESR and AM coherently from an interdisciplinary perspective. In particular, it delves into the anthropological foundations that can support such integration, as outlined in Arnold's pioneering work. By doing so, this theoretical review aims to minimise overlaps and ambiguities between the concepts, thus enabling the future development of criteria applicable to the assessment and treatment of clinical cases.

Keywords: Affective maturity, Self-ideal, Emotions, Philosophical anthropology, Thomistic psychology.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Emotional self-regulation (ESR) and affective maturity (AM) are two concepts that respond in different ways to a shared practical concern: how to control our emotions rather than be controlled by them. However, they operate at different conceptual levels which are often confused. While ESR is generally framed in terms of processes, AM is more difficult to define and measure, and often functions as an umbrella concept across clinical, formative, and canonical contexts. The relationship between these two concepts has not yet been studied, so there is a risk of treating them as interchangeable, or of defining them imprecisely.

Understanding how ESR and AM are articulated is important, since both concepts refer to the affectivity of the human person, which permeates psychic life and shapes cognition, personality development and the way individuals learn to live with and order their affective states, so it is not a marginal dimension of human life. In this context, Magda Arnold's work offers a particularly fruitful framework for clarifying the relationship between the two constructs. From a Thomistic anthropological perspective, she developed the concepts of emotional control, emotional maturity, and maturity of the will, articulating them around the notion of a valid self-ideal. These three notions will guide the subsequent analysis of how, in Arnold's framework, emotional regulation is integrated into a broader account of personal maturity. Despite Arnold's undeniable influence on contemporary cognitive psychology, extensive aspects of her proposal have only recently begun to be recognised. This paper argues that emotional self-regulation and affective maturity are conceptually distinct but hierarchically related constructs.

Drawing on Magda Arnold's theory of personality, we propose that affective maturity constitutes a broader notion that integrates emotional regulation within a morally oriented ideal of the self. To examine this claim, this article provides a theoretical overview and engages in a dialogue between contemporary literature on emotional self-regulation and affective maturity, articulated by Arnold's work. Insofar as Arnold, as we will see later, refers to value-related and moral aspects, it seems pertinent to us to enter into an interdisciplinary dialogue between psychology and philosophy. Moreover, the consideration of some notions from the work of Thomas Aquinas reinforces the idea that philosophy has the potential to illuminate current debates in psychology. Furthermore, this methodology has already begun to be used to address these concepts in the literature.¹

¹Cf. C. A. MARPLE, A. JEFFREY, S. A. SCHNITKER, *Reappraisal as a Means to Self-Transcendence: Aquinas's Model of Emotion Regulation Informs the Extended Process Model*, «Philosophical Psychology», (2024), pp. 1-28; R. M. DE JESÚS GÓMEZ, M. A. CORNU-LABAT, «Emotional Regulation» or «Affective Regulation»? «Frontiers in Psychology», 15/1429361 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1429361>; J. P. ROJAS-SAFFIE, N. GARCÍA-MATTE, V. SILVA-BEYER, *Allport, Aristotle*

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Emotional Self-Regulation

In recent decades, emotional self-regulation (henceforth ESR) has emerged as a significant interdisciplinary field of research,² with profound implications for clinical psychology,³ psychopathology,⁴ affective neuroscience,⁵ and virtue ethics.⁶ Despite its wide development and application in clinical, educational and organisational fields, conceptual ambiguity remains.⁷

Unlike self-control—which focuses on the processes involved in managing impulses⁸—ESR has primarily been defined in ways that underscore how emotions can be influenced, modulated, or guided in specific situations,⁹ but it often lacks a clear explanation of why it unfolds.¹⁰

and Aquinas: An Interdisciplinary Definition of Personality, «New Ideas in Psychology», 75/101096 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.newideapsych.2024.101096>.

²Cf. P. VALENZUELA et al., *Emotional Regulation and Human Flourishing: Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives*, «Frontiers in Psychology», 16/1565130 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.3389/978-2-8325-6201-7>.

³For a review, see K. L. GRATZ, N. H. WEISS, M. T. TULL, *Examining Emotion Regulation as an Outcome, Mechanism, or Target of Psychological Treatments*, «Current Opinion in Psychology», 3 (2015), pp. 85-90.

⁴For a review, see A. ALDAO, S. NOLEN-HOEKSEMA, S. SCHWEIZER, *Emotion-Regulation Strategies Across Psychopathology: A Meta-Analytic Review*, «Clinical Psychology Review», 30 (2010), pp. 217-237.

⁵For a review, see A. GRECCUCCI, J. FREDERICKSON, R. JOB, *Advances in Emotion Regulation: From Neuroscience to Psychotherapy*, «Frontiers in Psychology», 8 (2017), p. 985.

⁶Cf. J. H. KIM et al., *Emotion Regulation from a Virtue Perspective*, «BMC Psychology», 12/1 (2024).

⁷Cf. J. P. ROJAS-SAFFIE, N. GARCÍA-MATTE, *Emotional Self-Regulation and Personality in the Light of Thomas Aquinas's Philosophical Anthropology*, «Frontiers in Psychology», 15/1419202 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1419202>.

⁸Cf. R. F. BAUMEISTER, D. M. TICE, K. D. VOHS, *The Strength Model of Self-Regulation: Conclusions from the Second Decade of Willpower Research*, «Perspectives on Psychological Science», 13/2 (2018), pp. 141-145, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691617716946>; J. KUHL, *Individual Differences in Self-Regulation*, in *Motivation and Action*, ed. by J. Heckhausen, H. Heckhausen, Springer, Cham 2018, pp. 529-577.

⁹Cf. J. J. GROSS, *The Emerging Field of Emotion Regulation: An Integrative Review*, «Review of General Psychology», 2 (1998), pp. 271-299; IDEM, *The Extended Process Model of Emotion Regulation: Elaborations, Applications, and Future Directions*, «Psychological Inquiry», 26 (2015), pp. 130-137; R. A. THOMPSON, *Emotion Regulation: A Theme in Search of Definition*, «Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development», 59/2-3 (1994), pp. 25-52; IDEM, *Emotion and Emotion Regulation: Two Sides of the Developing Coin*, «Emotion Review», 3/1 (2011), pp. 53-61.

¹⁰Cf. L. C. CHARLAND, *Moral Undertow and the Passions: Two Challenges for Contemporary Emotion Regulation*, «Emotion Review», 3/1 (2011), pp. 83-91; D. J. HUGHES et al., *Personality Traits and Emotion Regulation: A Targeted Review and Recommendations*, «Emotion», 20/1 (2020), p. 63; M. TAMIR, *The Maturing Field of Emotion Regulation*, «Emotion Review», 3/1 (2011), pp. 3-7; EADEM, *Why Do People Regulate Their Emotions? A Taxonomy of Motives in Emotion Regulation*, «Personality and Social Psychology Review», 20/3 (2016), pp. 199-222.

Adopting a goal-oriented perspective,¹¹ some proponents view ESR as an adaptive behavioural strategy, highlighting individuals' efforts to shape their emotional experiences by down-regulating undesirable emotions and up-regulating preferred ones.¹² These functional ESR strategies can be distinguished as need-oriented, goal-oriented, or person-oriented,¹³ and also according to whether they serve hedonic or instrumental (behavioural, epistemic, social, and eudaimonic) motives.¹⁴ Despite these classifications, ESR's moral undertow has not been appropriately acknowledged¹⁵ in the most commonly used models in empirical literature, as Gross's extended process model of emotion regulation.¹⁶

Notably, most contemporary models are anchored in appraisal, an evaluative judgement—classically termed the cogitative power—reintroduced by Magda Arnold from her Thomistic moral foundations to assert that emotional control is guided by an objectively valid self-ideal.¹⁷ From this perspective, emotions are not uncontrollable forces but felt tendencies to action¹⁸ arising from sensible valuations, without being reducible to those valuations or appraisals. Distinguishing ESR as an operation (an activity performed at a given moment) and faculty (a universal human capacity), from a habit (a stable quality or acquired skill developed through continuous effort)¹⁹ could help to understand that ESR may not merely be an adaptive behavioural strategy, but a continuous effort towards the development of emotional maturity²⁰ and human flourishing.²¹ From that perspective, it is worth asking how ESR fits in with related concepts such as affective maturity.

¹¹Cf. R. A. THOMPSON, *Emotion and Emotion Regulation*, cit.; for a review, see C. MARTÍNEZ-PRIEGO, B. P. GARCÍA-NOBLEJAS, P. ROCA, *Strategies and Goals in Emotion Regulation Models: A Systematic Review*, «Frontiers in Psychology», 15/1425465 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1425465>.

¹²Cf. J. KUHLM, *Individual Differences in Self-Regulation*, cit.; J. J. GROSS, *Emotion Regulation: Affective, Cognitive, and Social Consequences*, «Psychophysiology», 39/3 (2002), pp. 281-291.

¹³Cf. S. L. KOOLE, *The Psychology of Emotion Regulation: An Integrative Review*, «Cognition & Emotion», 23 (2009), pp. 4-41.

¹⁴Cf. M. TAMIR, *Why Do People Regulate Their Emotions?*, cit.

¹⁵Cf. L. C. CHARLAND, *Moral Undertow*, cit.

¹⁶Cf. J. J. GROSS, *The Extended Process Model of Emotion Regulation*, cit.; K. L. GRATZ, N. H. WEISS, M. T. TULL, *Examining Emotion Regulation*, cit.

¹⁷Cf. M. B. ARNOLD, *Emotion and Personality*, vol. II: *Neurological and Physiological Aspects*, Columbia University Press, New York 1960.

¹⁸Cf. EADEM, *Emotion and Personality*, cit.

¹⁹Cf. J. P. ROJAS-SAFFIE, N. GARCÍA-MATTE, *Emotional Self-Regulation and Personality*, cit.

²⁰Cf. G. LABOUVIE-VIEF *et al.*, *Emotions and Self-Regulation: A Life Span View*, «Human Development», 32/5 (1989), pp. 279-299.

²¹Cf. F. RUIZ-FUSTER, A. BERNAL-MARTÍNEZ DE SORIA, M. F. ECHAVARRÍA, *Emotional Regulation and Arnold's Self-Ideal: A Way to Flourishment*, «Frontiers in Psychology», 15/1425850 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1425850>; C. MARTÍNEZ-PRIEGO, B. P. GARCÍA-NOBLEJAS, P. ROCA, *Strategies and Goals in Emotion Regulation Models*, cit.

2.2 Affective Maturity

Affective maturity (henceforth AM) and affective immaturity are constructs used across clinical, educational, and canonical contexts. However, they remain difficult to define, having often been described as elusive, polysemous, and somewhat arbitrary realities whose vagueness and frequent use require particular rigour in their description and assessment.²² In this context, several authors point out that terminology is inherently prone to ambiguities and misuses when not precisely defined, and that even attempts at classification (e.g., using ‘adjectives’ or categories) introduce inevitable grey areas.²³

The concept of AM is frequently linked to normative moral preconceptions about human beings. It is embedded in different approaches and encompasses very different areas and dimensions, including the biological, emotional, spiritual, and legal.²⁴ Accordingly, the literature on AM notes a vast diversity of terms and conceptual confusion, with definitions often relying on wide notions such as identity, fraternity or growth without reaching a precise conceptualisation.²⁵ This may partly explain why the concept remains less firmly established in psychological research than in educational contexts, where related constructs such as competence or emotional intelligence are often used.²⁶

In these fields, AM is often used as an umbrella term encompassing a wide range of intra- and interpersonal traits,²⁷ without reaching the level of a diagnostic category.²⁸ Rather than a fixed or definitive stage, it is better understood

²²Cf. C. DOUTHEAU, C. DUBERTRET, *Criteria for Evaluating the Mental Aptitude of Subjects Designated Affectively Immature: Methodological Aspects and Clinical Studies*, «Travaux Scientifiques des Chercheurs du Service de Santé des Armées», 4 (1983), pp. 161-162; A. G. CARANDANG, *The Concept of Affective Immaturity*, «Philippine Canonical Forum», 10 (2008), pp. 203-250; F. J. B. IGLESIAS, *La inmadurez afectiva en el consentimiento matrimonial*, unpublished manuscript, Pontifical University of Salamanca 1995; J. I. BAÑARES PARERA, *Consentimiento matrimonial e inmadurez afectiva*, in *Consentimiento matrimonial e inmadurez afectiva: Actas del VI Simposio Internacional del Instituto Martín de Azpilcueta*, ed. by J. I. Bañares Parera, J. Bosch Carrera, EUNSA, Pamplona 2007, pp. 11-32.

²³Cf. R. GEISINGER, *On the Requirement of Sufficient Maturity for Candidates to the Presbyterate* (can. 1031 § 1), unpublished manuscript, Pontificia Università Gregoriana 1995; P. SIVADON, F. LEVY-KLEIN, *Maturité Affective, Vocations et Troubles Mentaux*, «Annales Médico-Psychologiques», 109 (1951), pp. 68-74.

²⁴Cf. C. MORÁN BUSTOS, *La inmadurez de la persona y la incapacidad para consentir*, in *Dimensión jurídica de la actuación de la Iglesia hoy: Actas de las 41ª Jornadas de Actualidad Canónica*, Asociación Española de Canonistas, Madrid 2022, pp. 195-257.

²⁵Cf. J. R. PRADA RAMÍREZ, *La madurez afectiva, el concepto de sí y la adhesión al ministerio sacerdotal*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Roma 2004.

²⁶Cf. S. KAPPLER et al., *Underdeveloped Affective Maturity and Unintegrated Psychosexual Identity as Contributors to Clergy Abuse and Boundary Violations*, «Spirituality in Clinical Practice», 7/4 (2020), pp. 302-309.

²⁷Cf. M. A. ABRAHAM, *Toward Understanding and Measuring Affective Maturity in Catholic Seminary*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Divine Mercy University 2024.

²⁸Cf. P. AVIÑÓ DE PABLO et al., *Mapping Affective Maturity: A Scoping Review of Psychological*

as a dynamic process within the ongoing development of emotional life and personality, which may evolve positively or negatively throughout the life course and cannot be reduced to biological maturity or mere psychological health.²⁹

Abraham defines AM as “the quality of having integrated one’s emotions, desires, drives, personality, values, relationships, and responsibilities into a cohesive, and well-developed relational style that incorporates appropriate boundaries.”³⁰ It involves identifying, understanding, and expressing emotions appropriately, and is associated with self-mastery, relationships oriented towards others and oneself, self-transcendence, empathy, sexuality experienced as an integrated value and self-giving love.³¹ In this sense, it has also been described as a movement away from possessive or self-centred forms of affectivity towards self-giving and non-exploitative communion.³²

Similarly, several authors associate AM with a certain degree of inner freedom and self-determination, meaning that affectivity does not dominate deliberation or commitment unreflectively.³³ However, since freedom can be exercised in self-centred ways, these authors explicitly link AM to value orientations, distinguishing it from merely autonomous or formally self-directed functioning. From this perspective, affective development is described as a gradual movement away from egocentricity towards the ordered integration of affectivity, judgement and

and Philosophical Literature, manuscript in preparation, Open Science Framework 2026.

²⁹Cf. O. ALONSO-NOVO, *La incapacidad consensual en el c. 1095 del CIC y la inmadurez afectiva como posible causa de la incapacidad assumendi*, Universidad Internacional de La Rioja, Logroño 2018; B. FURTADO, *Rotal Jurisprudence on Affective Maturity as a Cause for Consensual Incapacity in Accordance with Can. 1095, 2º*, «Studies in Church Law», 15 (2020), pp. 301-347; J. I. MURILLO GÓMEZ, *Condiciones para asumir un compromiso estable*, in *Consentimiento matrimonial e inmadurez afectiva: Actas del VI Simposio Internacional del Instituto Martín de Azpilcueta*, ed. by J. I. Bañares Parera, J. Bosch Carrera, EUNSA, Pamplona 2007, pp. 33-48.

³⁰M. A. ABRAHAM, *Toward Understanding and Measuring Affective Maturity*, cit., p. 34.

³¹Cf. K. P. McCLONE, *Intimacy and Healthy Affective Maturity*, «Human Development», 30/4 (2009), pp. 5-13. A. M. A. LAWRENCE, *Affective Immaturity and Lack of Internal Freedom as a Motive for Nullity of Marriage*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana, Roma 1996; A. ORSI, *Coherencia de razonamiento y diferencias individuales: un estudio de sus características e interdependencias*, «Signos Universitarios», 7/13 (1988), pp. 69-102; M. CALATRAVA, R. ZAPATA, *The Loving Experience of the Therapeutic Relationship as a Factor in Affective Maturation in Adults*, «Integratus», 2/1 (2024), pp. 88-98.

³²Cf. T. SRAMPICKAL, *Emotional-Affective Maturity: Challenge to Formation*, in *Formation & Psychology: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, *Festschrift in Honour of Late Dr. Thomas Thypampil*, ed. by T. Tharayil, J. Mullakariyil, Danaharaya Publications, Alappuzha 2012, pp. 53-72.

³³Cf. J. I. MURILLO GÓMEZ, *Condiciones para asumir un compromiso estable*, in *Consentimiento matrimonial e inmadurez afectiva: Actas del VI Simposio Internacional del Instituto Martín de Azpilcueta*, ed. by J. I. Bañares Parera, J. Bosch Carrera, EUNSA, Pamplona 2007, pp. 33-48; A. M. A. LAWRENCE, *Affective Immaturity and Lack of Internal Freedom*, cit.; F. GIL DE LAS HERAS, *Neurosis, psicopatías e inmadurez afectiva: su tratamiento jurisprudencial en los tribunales eclesiásticos españoles*, «Ius Canonicum», 28/55 (1988), pp. 231-291; F. J. B. IGLESIAS, *La inmadurez afectiva en el consentimiento matrimonial*, cit.

voluntary action.³⁴ From an anthropological point of view, the framework also includes approaches that link maturity to morality, self-regulation, a sense of purpose and self-actualisation aimed at developing personal qualities.³⁵

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that AM broadly refers to the integration and organisation of a person's emotional life, particularly in relation to others, rather than to the isolated skill of emotional regulation. In this regard, one useful point of reference is the framework Arnold offers.

2.3 Contributions by Magda Arnold

Magda B. Arnold was a pioneer of the cognitive theory of emotions and is widely recognised as the founder of the appraisal approach to emotions.³⁶ Following Allport's, Goldstein's and Maslow's ideas about motivation and personality,³⁷ Arnold understood emotions as part of a unified conception of the human person, in which affective life is inseparable from cognition, motivation, and moral development. From her perspective, emotional development cannot be reduced to biological growth or chronological development.³⁸

Furthermore, Arnold³⁹ asserts that all psychological theories rest on an implicit philosophical understanding of human nature, and she expressly rejects reductionist approaches that explain human behaviour in mechanistic or deterministic terms. Instead, she views the individual as a rational, self-determining and unified being, and argues that emotional life must be understood in relation to freedom, responsibility, purposeful action and personality integration.⁴⁰

³⁴Cf. R. ZAPATA, *Celibato y madurez psicosexual y afectiva*, «Scripta Theologica», 35/3 (2003), pp. 853-872. P. E. SCHELL, *Virtud y madurez afectiva*, in *Virtud, psicología y salud mental*, ed. by M. F. Echavarría, F. de los Bueis Ordóñez, Dykinson, Madrid 2023, pp. 73-87; J. M. YANGUAS, *Madurez humana y madurez cristiana*, in *Consentimiento matrimonial e inmadurez afectiva: Actas del VI Simposio Internacional del Instituto Martín de Azpilcueta*, ed. by J. I. Bañares Parera, J. Bosch Carrera, EUNSA, Pamplona 2007, pp. 49-74.

³⁵Cf. A. POLAINO-LORENTE, *The Education of Feelings and Sexuality*, «Revista Española de Pedagogía», 64/235 (2006), pp. 429-452.

³⁶Cf. S. A. SHIELDS, A. KAPPAS, *Magda B. Arnold's Contributions to Emotions Research*, «Cognition & Emotion», 20/7 (2006), pp. 898-901.

³⁷Cf. R. R. CORNELIUS, *Magda Arnold's Thomistic Theory of Emotion, the Self-Ideal, and the Moral Dimension of Appraisal*, «Cognition & Emotion», 20/7 (2006), pp. 976-1000.

³⁸Cf. M. B. ARNOLD, *The Concept of Maturity*, unpublished manuscript, n.d. (a).

³⁹EADEM, *Psychology and the Image of Man*, «Religious Education», 54/1 (1959), p. 30; cf. J. GARCÍA-ALANDETE, *Magda Arnold's Understanding of the Human Person: Thomistic Personalism, Psychophysical Unity of the Person, Integration of Personality, and Transcendence*, «History of Psychology», 27/2 (2024), pp. 159-177.

⁴⁰Cf. M. B. ARNOLD, *Basic Assumptions in Psychology*, in *The Human Person: An Approach to an Integral Theory of Personality*, ed. by M. B. Arnold, J. A. Gasson, Ronald Press Company, New York 1954, pp. 3-48; J. GARCÍA-ALANDETE, *Magda Arnold's Understanding of the Human Person*, cit.

Arnold and Gasson address the role of emotion in relation to the self and personality integration. Building on her definition of emotion as “the felt tendency towards an object deemed suitable or away from an object deemed unsuitable, reinforced by specific bodily changes according to the type of emotion,”⁴¹ they contend that emotions can facilitate the perfection of our personality and the realisation of our potential.⁴²

Maturity cannot be understood simply as the outcome of growth but as a personal achievement involving the education of affective and volitional capacities. As Arnold said: “Maturity is a misnomer. Implies growth, but is really an education of the emotions, which is at bottom self-education.”⁴³ She explicitly distinguishes between chronological maturity, intellectual maturity, and emotional maturity, noting that while the first two “require only time,”⁴⁴ emotional maturity requires the active cooperation of the person.

Emotional development, therefore, involves gradually detaching oneself from immediate sensory attractions and learning to direct emotions so that they support rather than hinder rational action, because “emotion is an instrument for us to use”⁴⁵ when it becomes aligned with appropriate goals. In this process, emotional maturity implies the ability to go against emotion for a good reason, so that we no longer let ourselves be swayed by sheer emotion, but instead learn to appraise things not only as good or bad for us here and now, but also in the long run.⁴⁶ On the other hand, Arnold considers that emotional control (EC)—a notion closer to what is now understood as ESR than to self-control—does not consist merely in inhibiting or managing affective impulses, but in orienting emotional responses through evaluative judgement, “turning toward what is truly lovable from a human point of view and turning away from things that exert too strong a pull.”⁴⁷ In this sense, EC refers to the progressive governance of emotional life through appraisal, so that emotions may support rather than hinder personality integration. Although it partially overlaps with contemporary ESR, EC is embedded in Arnold’s broader account of emotional maturity and the valid self-ideal, and therefore cannot be treated as a simple equivalent of ESR.

The relationship between emotional control and maturity in Arnold is articulated around the concept of the self-ideal, a central motivational orientation that

⁴¹Cf. M. B. ARNOLD, J. A. GASSON, *Feelings and Emotions as Dynamic Factors in Personality Integration*, in *The Human Person: An Approach to an Integral Theory of Personality*, ed. by M. B. Arnold, J. A. Gasson, Ronald Press Company, New York 1954, p. 294.

⁴²Cf. F. RUIZ-FUSTER, A. BERNAL-MARTÍNEZ DE SORIA, M. F. ECHAVARRÍA, *Emotional Regulation and Arnold’s Self-Ideal*, cit.

⁴³Cf. M. B. ARNOLD, *Love and Emotional Maturity*, unpublished manuscript, n.d. (b).

⁴⁴EADEM, *The Concept of Maturity*, cit., p. 1.

⁴⁵*Ibidem*, p. 6.

⁴⁶Cf. EADEM, *Emotional Maturity in Religious Personnel*, unpublished manuscript, n.d. (c).

⁴⁷EADEM, *Emotion and Personality*, cit., p. 278.

gives unity and direction to a person's affective life.⁴⁸ As Arnold states, "a man's motivational system is established and organized around his self-ideal" and "maturity means forming a valid self-ideal and living it."⁴⁹ Thus, the self-ideal represents a person's life goal, "what we in our hearts are striving for, and what, in striving, we finally achieve,"⁵⁰ while also serving as an index of maturity in that it reveals a person's values.⁵¹ In this sense, "human perfection must be found in a self-ideal formed according to the best a man knows and understands and in actions that will actualise this ideal."⁵² Acting in accordance with it leads to the harmony and integration of the personality as emotional responses become increasingly coherent with one's highest ideals. In Arnold's formulation, maturity consists of "knowing what we should do and learning to want to do it."⁵³

Overall, Arnold's perspective makes it possible to conceive emotional maturity as a process of personal integration in which affectivity, reason, and volition are progressively ordered around a valid self-ideal.

3 INTERDISCIPLINARY DIALOGUE

The foregoing review reveals that, although ESR and AM both address the ordering of affective life, they rest on different—and sometimes unexamined—assumptions about its nature and purpose. Three questions emerge that can sharpen our understanding of their relationship. First, given that Arnold's framework explicitly incorporates a moral dimension, we ask what role this dimension plays in each concept and whether its presence or absence carries theoretical consequences. Second, since the contemporary distinction between self-control and self-regulation maps onto different degrees of emotional integration, we examine whether it can illuminate the threshold at which regulation becomes indicative of affective maturity. Third, in view of the central place Arnold assigns to the will as a distinct affective faculty, we consider how the distinction between emotion and volition bears on both concepts and on the broader question of human agency in the governance of affective life.

⁴⁸Cf. F. RUIZ-FUSTER, A. BERNAL-MARTÍNEZ DE SORIA, M. F. ECHAVARRÍA, *Emotional Regulation and Arnold's Self-Ideal*, cit.

⁴⁹M. B. ARNOLD, *Emotion and Personality*, cit., p. 286.

⁵⁰EADEM, *Psychology and the Image of Man*, cit., p. 34.

⁵¹EADEM, *Emotion and Personality*, cit., p. 282.

⁵²*Ibidem*, p. 287.

⁵³EADEM, *The Concept of Maturity*, cit., p. 10.

3.1 *The Role of the Moral Dimension in ESR and AM*

If we understand the moral dimension as a reference to the goodness or badness of human acts, then it must be acknowledged that most of the literature on ESR lacks this dimension. As a consequence, ESR would appear to be an activity or habit that is neither good nor bad in itself. The omission of moral reflection on ESR seems warranted if we adopt Gross's definition of ESR as "the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions,"⁵⁴ from which it follows that ESR could be found equally in the mother who patiently waits for the right moment to correct her child and in the thief who patiently waits for the right moment to rob a house.⁵⁵

This appears to conflict with the doctrine of the virtues, since the ability to regulate emotions is a defining feature of the moral virtues. In perennial philosophy, virtues can only be good: they incline towards good actions and, moreover, make good the person who possesses them. Along the same lines, Arnold regards emotional regulation as inseparable from the moral dimension. For her, the only way to overcome the attraction of pleasure is through the contemplation of spiritual values: "Emotional control demands a direction of attention toward spiritual values and a turning away from the merely pleasurable things of life, at least for a time, until their hold is loosened."⁵⁶ In another passage, Arnold connects the regulation of emotions with objective values through the self-ideal:

We must organize our personality according to a valid self-ideal if we are to escape the consequences of emotional indulgence. Contradicting the demands of our nature by giving free rein to our emotions instead of allowing them to support our human purposes inflicts us with a penetrating discontent and an unspeakable anguish.⁵⁷

Arnold's analysis of Adolf Hitler is revealing in this regard. She considers him immature on account of his adherence to a self-ideal with a 'juvenile flavour,'⁵⁸ yet she does not address whether he displayed emotional control or lack thereof. This omission is significant, for it suggests that Arnold does not contemplate the possibility of achieving governance over one's emotions while pursuing false moral values. Cases such as that of the thief who patiently waits for the right moment to rob a house do not appear to have been considered by the author. Taken as a whole, Arnold's work seems to present only two alternatives: either one indulges one's emotions or one governs them with the aid of a will firmly committed to objectively valid moral values. As she puts it: "A man may develop

⁵⁴J. J. GROSS, *The Emerging Field of Emotion Regulation*, cit., p. 275.

⁵⁵Cf. J. P. ROJAS-SAFFIE, N. GARCÍA-MATTE, *Emotional Self-Regulation and Personality*, cit.

⁵⁶M. B. ARNOLD, *Emotion and Personality*, cit., p. 278.

⁵⁷*Ibidem*, p. 298.

⁵⁸EADEM, *The Concept of Maturity*, cit., p. 4.

habits of right action (they used to be called virtues) or he may fall into habits of indulgence (formerly called vices).⁵⁹ The same binary appears in one of her definitions of emotional maturity: “the state in which the person controls his emotion rather than they controlling them.”⁶⁰

In contrast to ESR, the concept of AM appears to be intimately linked to the moral dimension in the literature. As noted above, numerous authors associate AM with values such as fraternal relationships, transcendence, empathy, self-giving, and love, emphasising the overcoming of egocentrism. This characterisation is fully compatible with the model of the virtuous person found in the work of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, which contains an explicit reference to the good. From this standpoint, it would be contradictory to hold that a person devoted to the pursuit of pleasure, fame, or wealth could be considered affectively mature, even if a high capacity for emotional regulation were verified in such a person.

The relevance of the moral dimension is fully aligned with Arnold’s framework. Her concepts of emotional control, emotional maturity, and maturity of the will all incorporate a necessary adherence to moral values. Indeed, as for Rudolph Allers,⁶¹ these values are objectively good:

So we can say that a philosophy of life is important, indeed indispensable, but unless it is the right philosophy, it will not make for maturity. Unless it provides for a scale of values which is objectively right, it will lead a man astray. If according to his philosophy of life, power is the highest goal, but in striving for power, a man seems to us like an overgrown boy who can take joy in anything but his hardening biceps, there must be something wrong with that philosophy. If the goal were objectively right, in striving for it we would act according to the way our life is designed, we would fulfill what it is meant for: if our philosophy is true, our final goal therefore objectively valid, then we should grow to full stature, full maturity as we strive toward it.⁶²

3.2 *The Distinction Between Self-Control and Self-Regulation*

Contemporary literature distinguishes between self-control and self-regulation. As we showed, the former refers to emotional management through effort and the control of expression, whereas the latter implies a more natural and integrated governance of emotions. It has been suggested that the former resembles the concept of continence and the latter that of virtue.⁶³ Following this categorisation, it can be argued that ESR entails a deeper mastery over the emotions than self-control.

⁵⁹EADEM, *Emotion and Personality*, cit., p. 278.

⁶⁰EADEM, *The Concept of Maturity*, cit., p. 1.

⁶¹Cf. M. F. ECHAVARRÍA, *Aportes de Rudolf Allers a la fundamentación antropológica de la psicoterapia*, «Espíritu», 62/146 (2013), pp. 419-431.

⁶²M. B. ARNOLD, *The Concept of Maturity*, cit.

⁶³Cf. J. P. ROJAS-SAFFIE, N. GARCÍA-MATTE, *Emotional Self-Regulation and Personality*, cit.

This distinction can also be discerned in Arnold's work. In some passages, she clearly understands emotional control as self-control: "Emotional maturity seems to imply an ability (and willingness) to go counter to emotion for a good reason, so that eventually we no longer let ourselves be swayed by sheer emotion."⁶⁴ In other passages, however, she appears to be describing something closer to self-regulation: "[control of emotion] does not mean merely that emotions should be reduced or restrained, or that the actions to which they urge should be omitted. More to the point, emotions should be controlled in such a way that they help rather than hinder personality organisation."⁶⁵ Although Arnold acknowledges both situations, she does not introduce a conceptual distinction between them, referring to both as emotional control. This poses a theoretical difficulty for those studying her work, since it remains unclear whether going against an emotion already qualifies as emotional control, or whether emotional control properly begins only once the emotions have been integrated into the personality as a whole, becoming aligned with one's life goals.

The literature on AM does not appear to contain an explicit reflection on this distinction either. Although some descriptions of affective maturity relate more closely to self-regulation than to self-control, it is not discussed whether self-control already implies some degree of affective maturity. For her part, as we have seen, Arnold does not elaborate a conceptual distinction between the two, which gives rise to a further unresolved question: can a person who goes against their emotions be considered emotionally mature, or is maturity attained only once the emotions are ordered in favour of objective values? Arnold's work does not address this question explicitly.

3.3 *The Distinction Between Emotion and Volition*

Although some theories of ESR explicitly incorporate the role of the will,⁶⁶ most of the literature does not mention this faculty. It would appear that the concept of motivation has been placed in its stead, whereby the regulation of emotions is said to be oriented towards different types of goals.⁶⁷ However, by failing to distinguish clearly between emotional and volitional motivations, these accounts treat all goals as though they were of the same kind.

Arnold, by contrast, incorporates this distinction, drawing in a remarkably

⁶⁴M. B. ARNOLD, *Emotional Maturity in Religious Personnel*, cit., p. 1.

⁶⁵EADEM, *Emotion and Personality*, cit., p. 276.

⁶⁶Cf. N. H. FRIJDA, *Emotion Regulation and Free Will*, in *Decomposing the Will*, ed. by A. Clark, J. Kiverstein, T. Vierkant, Oxford University Press, New York 2013, pp. 199-220; R. F. BAUMEISTER, D. M. TICE, K. D. VOHS, *The Strength Model of Self-Regulation*, cit., pp. 141-145; J. KUHL, *Individual Differences in Self-Regulation*, cit., pp. 529-577.

⁶⁷Cf. M. TAMIR, *Why Do People Regulate Their Emotions?*, cit.

natural way the difference between emotion and will.⁶⁸ From this distinction arise the categories of ‘emotional maturity’ and ‘maturity of the will,’ and it is further acknowledged that emotion and will may come into conflict.⁶⁹ Arnold is unequivocal about the role played by the will: the regulation of emotions, insofar as it forms part of emotional maturity, requires the maturity of the will:

To choose a rational good instead of creature comfort, to choose a higher good instead of a lower good, requires a developed ability of choosing, a developed discipline of choosing. Here, then, it is no more a matter of simply growing up to maturity in years, or in intelligence; here as in emotional maturity, it is a matter of educating our will.⁷⁰

For its part, the literature on AM only rarely mentions the role of the will explicitly. Yet it is laden with references to distinctly volitional dimensions of human life, such as freedom, values, morality, love, and self-giving. This should not come as a surprise, since AM has been studied extensively within Christian intellectual circles, where the will constitutes a fundamental anthropological presupposition. It is precisely for this reason that its scant thematisation is striking. It is noteworthy, for instance, that some authors characterise the will as capable of opposing the affections, whereas the broader Christian tradition has consistently regarded the will as an affective faculty in its own right. This is evident in the work of Thomas Aquinas.⁷¹

4 RESULTS

First, our inquiry reveals that there are significant differences between the concept of ESR as it appears in the contemporary literature and the concept of emotional control as developed by Magda Arnold in her work. These differences are summarised in *Table 1*.

Second, our inquiry shows that there are no significant differences between what is currently understood as affective maturity and Arnold’s concept of maturity. Strictly speaking, she does not coin a specific term to refer to the conjunction of emotional maturity and maturity of the will. When she mentions them together, she does so using the word maturity without qualification.⁷² For the purposes of this section, we shall understand maturity as the simultaneous

⁶⁸Cf. M. B. ARNOLD, *The Concept of Maturity*, cit.

⁶⁹Cf. EADEM, *Emotion and Personality*, cit.

⁷⁰EADEM, *The Concept of Maturity*, cit., p. 5.

⁷¹THOMAS AQUINAS, *The Summa Theologica*, Burns Oates and Washbourne, London 1920 (hereinafter *S. Th.*), I, q. 80, a. 2.

⁷²Arnold also employs the word maturity to denote the perfection of other domains, as for instance she posits that the possession of a ‘valid self-ideal’ is a hallmark of maturity. In our view, this primarily concerns the cognitive-evaluative domain, a point we shall expand below.

	Literature on ESR	EC in Arnold's work
Moral dimension	No reference to the moral dimension.	Emotional regulation cannot be conceived apart from the moral dimension.
Self-regulation vs self-control	They are regarded as different activities. Only self-regulation would constitute ESR proper.	No conceptual distinction is drawn between the two. It remains unclear whether self-control could be considered EC.
Role of the will	There is scant reference to the role of the will.	The will is indispensable for ordering the emotions.

Table 1 – Differences between ESR (as it appears in the literature) and EC (as it appears in Arnold's work)

achievement of emotional and volitional maturity. The cognitive aspects will be considered in a later section. These points are summarised in *Table 2*.

	Literature on AM	Maturity in Arnold's work
Moral dimension	There is a clear reference to the moral dimension.	There is an explicit mention of the validity of the values pursued by the person.
Self-regulation vs self-control	This distinction is not explicitly addressed.	This distinction is not explicitly addressed. It remains unclear whether a person who has only achieved self-control can be considered mature.
Role of the will	Although not explicitly mentioned, the will can be identified as an anthropological presupposition underlying many of the concepts employed.	The will must mature for the achievement of personal maturity.

Table 2 – Differences between AM (as it appears in the literature) and maturity (as it appears in Arnold's work)

Third, Arnold's work enables a clearer understanding of the relationship between emotional regulation and affective maturity. As we have seen, affective maturity can be understood as the simultaneous achievement of emotional maturity and maturity of the will. For Arnold, emotional control is the defining feature of emotional maturity: "emotional maturity means emotional control."⁷³ Emotional regulation is therefore a part of affective maturity, not an equivalent concept. What would additionally be required for AM is the achievement of ma-

⁷³M. B. ARNOLD, *Love and Emotional Maturity*, cit., p. 1.

turity of the will, which is intimately linked to the pursuit of objectively valid moral values.

Moreover, in Arnold's framework, maturity of the will is not merely a parallel dimension of affective maturity but its generative condition: emotional detachment "can only come about when we have educated our will to choose what is right."⁷⁴ This relationship is illustrated in *Figure 1*. It follows that emotional maturity, too, is necessarily bound to moral values. From this perspective, the thief who patiently waits for the right moment to rob a house would not constitute a genuine instance of emotional regulation—a conclusion that stands in direct contradiction with the notion of ESR as it appears in the contemporary literature.

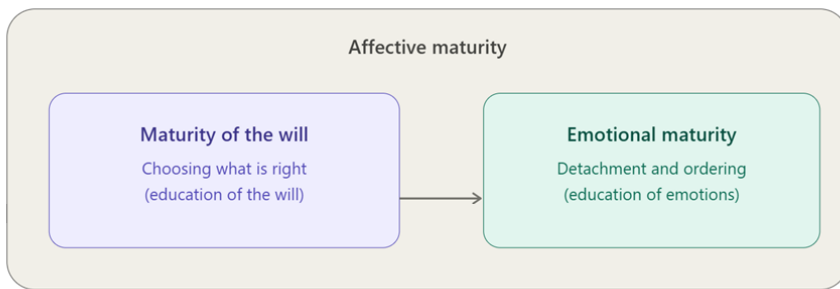


Figure 1 – Affective maturity and its constitutive dimensions according to Arnold's framework. Maturity of the will functions as the generative condition of emotional maturity. The arrow indicates that the education of the will makes possible the progressive detachment from disordered emotional attachments and the ordering of affective life.

How, then, can we harmonise the concepts of EC and ESR, given that the former implies a moral dimension and the latter does not? One way of doing so without reducing either concept would be to draw on the distinction between the formal and material dimensions of the virtues. Although this has received little attention in Aristotelian-Thomistic scholarship, there is a passage in the work of Thomas Aquinas where he distinguishes between moral virtue and the perfection of a given faculty apart from virtue:

The evil of drunkenness and excessive drink, consists in a falling away from the order of reason. Now it happens that, together with this falling away from reason, some lower power is perfect in reference to that which belongs to its own kind, even in direct opposition to reason, or with some falling away therefrom. But the perfection of that power, since it is compatible with a falling away from reason, cannot be called a human virtue.⁷⁵

⁷⁴EADEM, *The Concept of Maturity*, cit., p. 10.

⁷⁵*S. Th.*, I-II, q. 55, a. 3, ad 2.

The perfection of a faculty can only be regarded as virtue when it is accompanied by right reason—that is, when it correctly discerns what is good and is joined by a will that adheres to that good. Drawing on the distinction between matter and form, one could hold that the perfection of the faculty constitutes the matter of the virtue, while right reason constitutes its form. It follows that when the perfection of a faculty occurs without right reason, we are left with the matter of the virtue only—in other words, a merely material virtue. In this sense, giving alms qualifies as virtue only insofar as it proceeds from genuine generosity; if it is performed solely to elicit admiration, it remains a material virtue alone.

If we apply this reasoning to our subject, it could be argued that ESR is equivalent to the material perfection of the sensitive appetite, inasmuch as the mere possession of ESR does not necessarily entail right reason. By contrast, what Arnold understands by EC would be equivalent to the perfection of a faculty accompanied by right reason—that is, it would be equivalent to human virtue proper. It would follow that ESR constitutes the material dimension of what Arnold understands by EC.

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 *About the Relationship Between ESR and AM*

Our inquiry showed that ESR and AM are not equivalent or interchangeable concepts, but are ordered to one another as part-to-whole. The remaining part would be the maturity of the will. If we consider the Thomistic schema of human faculties, it could be argued that ESR, emotional control, and emotional maturity are realities circumscribed to the sensitive appetite, whereas the maturity of the will clearly belongs to the will. To which faculty, then, should we assign the valid self-ideal, to which Arnold gives such importance in her account of emotional control? Insofar as the self-ideal consists in a vision of the good for the person—a good that is true and valid to the extent that it corresponds to reality—it seems appropriate to assign it to the intellect. This does not mean disregarding the fact that the self-ideal also has a sensitive dimension, inasmuch as it contains associated images, experiences, and sensory judgements, and would therefore also have some form of presence in the internal senses.

Strictly speaking, however, the valid self-ideal does not form part of affective maturity but rather constitutes one of its conditions. Cognitive operations and faculties cannot be part of a whole that is affective in nature, since the parts must share the nature of the whole. Thomas Aquinas reaches the same conclusion when, in assigning parts to the cardinal virtues, he includes only moral virtues, excluding the intellectual virtues.⁷⁶ This can be corroborated by the fact that, al-

⁷⁶ *S. Th.*, II-II, q. 128, a. 1; q. 143, a. 1.

though a valid self-ideal is necessary for affective maturity, it can perfectly well be present in an affectively immature person—as in someone who knows what they ought to become but gives up trying. This distinction is summarised in *Table 3*.⁷⁷

Cognitive conditions of maturity	Affective maturity
INTELLECT	WILL
Valid self-ideal	Maturity of the will
SENSES	SENSITIVE APPETITE
Sensitive associations of the self-ideal	Emotional maturity
	Emotional control
	ESR

Table 3 – Cognitive conditions and affective components of maturity in Arnold’s framework

5.2 On the Distinction Between Self-Control and Self-Regulation

As noted earlier, Magda Arnold describes situations of both self-control and self-regulation, yet she does not coin distinct concepts to differentiate between them. This choice is intriguing, especially considering Arnold’s familiarity with the Aristotelian-Thomistic doctrine of the virtues, which conceptualises the difference between continence—that is, emotional disorder resisted by the will—and virtue—that is, the natural docility of the emotions in following the will—a distinction that seems to correspond closely to that between self-control and self-regulation.⁷⁸

It seems plausible to suggest that Magda Arnold avoids drawing this distinction in order not to separate these two situations too sharply. Indeed, the theory draws a clear dividing line, giving the impression that continence and virtue are two entirely distinct states. In real life, however, these two realities appear to overlap, at least from a phenomenological point of view. It is precisely from this perspective that Magda Arnold makes an important contribution, as she describes with remarkable insight how a person moves from struggling against disordered passions toward a peaceful governance of the emotions. This transition does not occur once and for all, but rather involves a certain back-and-forth depending on the context and the different situations of life. Throughout this process, the common factor is the will’s determination toward the good, which Magda Arnold

⁷⁷While *Table 3* maps these components onto distinct faculties, they do not operate in a strictly unilateral, top-down hierarchy. Emotional maturity requires that the sensitive appetite itself become habituated to spontaneous cooperation with the higher faculties, rather than merely submitting to volitional control.

⁷⁸Cf. J. P. ROJAS-SAFFIE, N. GARCÍA-MATTE, *Emotional Self-Regulation and Personality*, cit.

understands as adherence to a valid self-ideal. In this respect, she agrees with Thomas Aquinas, for whom the will is the common factor in both continence and virtue.⁷⁹

To fully understand the concept of ESR without falling into a purely rationalist and top-down perspective, it is crucial to highlight the deep transformation of sensitive appetite. From a Thomistic standpoint, the journey towards virtue is characterised by the gradual acquisition of new dispositions (habits) through the practice of virtuous deeds and the pursuit of the good. Instead of being mere passive forces that are controlled from above, emotions can be perfected through the moral virtues, referred to by Aristotle as the political rule of the passions.⁸⁰ For instance, the concupiscible appetite is trained by temperance,⁸¹ while the irascible appetite is shaped by fortitude.⁸² As these powers are refined, the nature and intensity of the passions that arise in various situations are altered. At the same time, the acquisition of these moral virtues also entails a certain refinement of the internal senses, insofar as passions arise in response to the sensory assessment made by these senses. This process allows emotions to actively contribute to our goals and actions in accordance with reality. Ultimately, this development reflects a shift from simple self-control to genuine ESR, fostering a true integration of the individual and a maturation of the whole person.

5.3 *On the Distinction Between Emotion and Volition*

Applied to the study of ESR, the distinction between emotion and volition holds considerable promise. On the one hand, by introducing the will, it restores human free agency and places the focus on the personal factor in the regulation of emotions, thereby moving away from theories that seek to explain emotional regulation exclusively in terms of psychological, biographical, or biological factors. Moreover, the distinction between emotion and volition enables differentiation among various kinds of motivation. It would be worthwhile, for example, to clarify within Tamir's proposal which motivations are emotional and which are volitional.⁸³ Insofar as philosophical anthropology regards the will, together with reason, as one of the faculties entrusted with governing the human soul, one might predict that volitional motivations would prove more adequate than emotional ones. Future research could fruitfully explore this point.

Applied to the study of AM, it also seems promising to incorporate the will

⁷⁹ *S. Th.*, II-II, q. 155.

⁸⁰ *S. Th.*, I-II, q. 56, a. 4, ad 3. For a comparison with other ESR theories, cf. J. P. ROJAS-SAFFIE, N. GARCÍA-MATTE, *Emotional Self-Regulation and Personality*, cit.

⁸¹ *S. Th.*, II-II, q. 141, a. 3.

⁸² *S. Th.*, II-II, q. 123, a. 3.

⁸³ Cf. M. TAMIR, *Why Do People Regulate Their Emotions?*, cit.

as a genuinely affective faculty. This means that we should not simply affirm that the will influences AM, or that affective immaturity can affect the will. Instead, it suggests that the state of the will is a fundamental component of AM itself. Bringing the insights of perennial philosophy to bear on the study of AM—especially its capacities to love, desire, and delight—could significantly enrich this field of research. In this sense, the distinction between emotion and volition enables greater precision in identifying what differentiates ESR from AM: while ESR is circumscribed to the governance of the sensitive appetite, AM additionally requires a well-disposed will as a distinct affective faculty.

This point gains further precision if one considers which virtue perfects the will. For Thomas Aquinas, justice is the virtue proper to the will,⁸⁴ and its formal object is the good of another (*bonum alterius*). It follows that the maturity of the will is not a purely inward achievement but is intrinsically relational: the will matures insofar as it becomes habitually disposed to render to others what is due to them. This has important consequences for the understanding of AM. If the maturity of the will is a constitutive part of AM, as Arnold's framework suggests, then AM itself cannot be adequately conceived without reference to the person's stable capacity to order herself towards others in justice. Moreover, the Thomistic doctrine of the connection of the virtues⁸⁵ implies that no single moral virtue can be possessed in its perfect form without the others. Prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance presuppose one another, so that genuine temperance in the governance of the emotions requires, and is in turn required by, justice in one's relations with others. This reinforces the view that AM is not reducible to the perfection of the sensitive appetite alone, but demands the simultaneous and interconnected maturation of the different moral virtues. From a canonical perspective, this consideration may prove particularly relevant: in marriage annulment causes, the question at stake is not merely whether a person was capable of regulating emotional impulses, but whether he or she was capable of assuming and sustaining the obligations of conjugal life, which are, by their very nature, obligations of justice towards the other spouse.

5.4 *The Moral Dimension in ESR and AM*

Including the moral dimension sheds new light on our understanding of ESR and AM because emotions are based on judgements about what is good or harmful to the individual.⁸⁶ In this sense, affective life is intrinsically oriented towards

⁸⁴*S. Th.*, II-II, q. 58, a. 4.

⁸⁵*S. Th.*, I-II, q. 65, a. 1.

⁸⁶Cf. M. B. ARNOLD, *Emotion and Personality*, cit.

value and cannot be reduced to neutral regulatory processes.⁸⁷ Integrating both concepts is coherent within a comprehensive understanding of the human person, where emotion, cognition, and motivation are inextricably linked, and regulatory processes are guided by evaluative judgements rather than operating as purely technical abilities.⁸⁸ This perspective challenges the assumption that psychological accounts of personality can remain neutral with regard to moral or philosophical considerations.

As broader anthropological reflections have noted, attempts to exclude such dimensions often overlook the fact that maturity itself implies an orientation towards an ideal of development.⁸⁹ Along these lines, even cautious authors who are wary of introducing moral language into psychology have acknowledged its relevance. For example, Gordon Allport argued that the study of mature personality must consider its moral dimension because maturity is defined by the extent to which one has developed in relation to an ideal.⁹⁰ As noted in Schell's analysis, the moral dimension of personality must be taken into consideration, since maturity appears to depend on the degree of development attained in relation to an ideal. In this sense, the notion of an 'ideal' is intrinsic to personality and functions as an organising principle that directs human development.⁹¹

This idea is already present in the work of Magda B. Arnold, who states that the self-ideal guides the development and organisation of personality towards maturity.⁹² In fact, maturity means forming a valid self-ideal and living by it.⁹³ This reinforces the view that affective maturity involves not only regulation but also an orientation towards meaningful, evaluatively grounded goals.

At the same time, this point also raises an important issue. In Arnold's work, the validity of the self-ideal is objective and ultimately connected to a wider philosophical and—in some ways—theological understanding of the human person, rather than being merely subjective or functional. From the standpoint of contemporary psychology, this may seem to exceed the proper scope of empirical inquiry. Nevertheless, this tension should not lead to a premature dismissal of Arnold's proposal. Even if one does not accept all its metaphysical implications, her work remains theoretically fruitful insofar as it highlights a question that psychological theories often leave implicit: that affective development and per-

⁸⁷Cf. C. J. ERRÁZURIZ MACKENNA, *Affective Immaturity and Consensual Incapacity*, «Philippine Canonical Forum», 13 (2011), pp. 189–208.

⁸⁸Cf. M. B. ARNOLD, *Emotion and Personality*, cit.; J. J. GROSS, *The Emerging Field of Emotion Regulation*, cit.

⁸⁹P. E. SCHELL, *Virtud y madurez afectiva*, cit.

⁹⁰G. W. ALLPORT, *Pattern and Growth in Personality*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA) 1961.

⁹¹P. E. SCHELL, *Virtud y madurez afectiva*, cit.

⁹²Cf. M. B. ARNOLD, *Emotion and Personality*, cit.

⁹³Cf. *ibidem*.

sonality maturity are always influenced, in one way or another, by assumptions about what constitutes a good or integrated human life.

From this angle, the moral dimension ultimately impacts the clinical domain. When the underlying evaluation is mistaken, emotional responses become inappropriate, and action tendencies become maladaptive. This can lead to forms of psychological disintegration.⁹⁴ In this sense, disintegration is not merely a failure of regulation but a consequence of misalignment between affectivity, reality, and the goals that guide the individual. This resonates with the claim that ideological confusion gives rise to psychologically immature and impoverished personalities,⁹⁵ suggesting that disturbances at the level of underlying worldviews may translate into forms of psychological fragility. While such claims may initially appear to be outside the remit of psychological science, they highlight a point already implicit in Arnold's framework: that emotional life is structured by evaluative and meaning-oriented processes that cannot be fully understood without reference to the person's broader conception of reality.

This perspective may also be enriched by further considering the relational dimension of affective life. As Antonio Malo notes, despite its undeniable merits, Arnold's theory remains predominantly centred on the individual, while the relational dimension remains comparatively in the background.⁹⁶ Yet many of the most significant human emotions are intrinsically relational: shame presupposes the gaze of the other; gratitude arises from the recognition of a gift received; guilt implies a wounded relationship. In such cases, emotion cannot be understood if isolated from the interpersonal context. Even so-called basic emotions—fear, anger, joy, or sadness—are always structured within relationships. This becomes especially clear in the relation between emotion and rational judgement, since judgement is never a purely solitary act but is mediated by language, culture, and the interpretation of others. We learn to recognize and name what we experience through meaningful relationships.

In this regard, the foregoing considerations on justice and the connection of the virtues offer a path for addressing the limitation identified by Malo.⁹⁷ If justice, as the virtue of the will, is constitutively oriented towards the other, then incorporating it into the account of AM provides a principled way of integrating the relational dimension within the framework of the self-ideal. The valid self-

⁹⁴Cf. *ibidem*; K. R. SCHERER, *Appraisal Considered as a Process of Multilevel Sequential Checking*, in *Appraisal Processes in Emotion: Theory, Methods, Research*, ed. by K. R. Scherer, A. Schorr, T. Johnstone, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2001, pp. 92-120.

⁹⁵Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, March 25, 1992.

⁹⁶Cf. A. MALO, *The Relational Unity of The Person in Emotion: An Expansion of Magda Arnold's Theory*, paper presented at the *International Conference: Emotions and Flourishing. From Magda Arnold's Proposal to Contemporary Psychological and Philosophical Perspectives*, Rome, February 25-27, 2026.

⁹⁷Cf. *ibidem*.

ideal would thus include the person's orientation towards just and self-giving relationships, an aspect already implicit in many descriptions of affective maturity but that gains firmer philosophical grounding when articulated through the virtue of justice.

6 CONCLUSIONS

Our research has allowed us to establish that emotional self-regulation (ESR) is a necessary, but not sufficient, component of affective maturity (AM), which also requires maturity of the will. Arnold's work has shown us that these concepts have a moral dimension that has not been sufficiently explored from psychology. It has also shown us the relevance of incorporating the will as an affective faculty.

The omission of the distinction between emotional control (EC) and ESR in the literature on AM and in Arnold's work does not allow us to answer whether self-control is sufficient to attain AM.

This viewpoint could have significant implications for clinical psychology and canonical causes, and should be the subject of more in-depth research. It highlights that theories of ESR implicitly rely on normative assumptions about human flourishing.⁹⁸ It also demonstrates the value of interdisciplinary dialogue in clarifying and integrating psychological and anthropological knowledge.⁹⁹ Also, it may contribute to highlight dimensions that could be considered in a clinical context, such as those relating to a person's evaluative framework, their organising ideals, and how they integrate affective, cognitive, and volitional factors.

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⁹⁸Cf. K. KRISTJÁNSSON, *Virtuous Emotions*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2018.

⁹⁹Cf. M. B. ARNOLD, *Psychology and the Image of Man*, cit., pp. 30-36.