

The Integration of Philosophy and Psychology in Magda B. Arnold's Work*

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Abstract

The psychologist Magda B. Arnold (1903-2002) was one of the prominent female contributors to twentieth-century psychology. Best known for her appraisal theory of emotion, Arnold developed a broader account of the human person that integrates philosophical anthropology and empirical psychology. Drawing on Aristotelian-Thomistic thought, phenomenological analysis, and personalistic psychology, her work sought to overcome reductionist approaches by situating psychological processes within a unified understanding of the person.

This article examines Arnold's contribution to the integration of philosophical and psychological perspectives. It argues that her account of emotion, personality, and free agency offers valuable resources for advancing interdisciplinary dialogue between these fields. In particular, Arnold's work shows how emotional life can be understood only within a broader framework that includes evaluation, experience, reason, and human action.

Keywords: Magda Arnold, Emotion, Appraisal, Personality integration, Philosophical psychology, Phenomenology.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Magda Arnold's approach to the study of emotion is noteworthy for several reasons. Her work provides not only a comprehensive review of twentieth-century theories of emotion but also engages with pre-scientific perspectives, including classical philosophical accounts. In doing so, she offers a wide-ranging historical analysis enriched by critical evaluation. Particularly distinctive in contemporary emotion research is her effort to clarify terminology, define key concepts, and trace the historical evolution of central notions such as passion, emotion, and affect.

However, Arnold's contribution extends beyond emotion theory. Her broader intellectual project reflects a sustained attempt to integrate empirical psychology with a philosophical understanding of the human person. Her anthropological and ethical views were profoundly shaped by Aristotle's moral psychology and Aquinas's philosophical and theological synthesis. Arnold also incorporated phenomenological insights, particularly from Max Scheler and Jean-Paul Sartre, integrating them into her own psychological framework.

At the same time, her personalistic orientation was informed by twentieth-century psychological approaches that emphasized the unity and organization of personality, especially the work of Gordon Allport and Viktor Frankl. In addition, selected elements from Maslow's theory of motivation—reinterpreted in terms of a hierarchy of values—and Goldstein's concept of self-actualization contributed to her understanding of appraisal, emotion, and personality integration.

The aim of this article is not to offer an exhaustive presentation of Arnold's theory of emotion and personality, but rather to examine the philosophical and psychological integration underlying her work.¹ First, I explore Arnold's understanding of the philosophical presuppositions that necessarily shape psychological theories. I then highlight the principal philosophical and psychological sources of her thought and her phenomenological approach to psychological experience. Finally, I outline the anthropological framework within which Arnold's understanding of emotion and personality must be situated—namely, that of free agency.

2 PHILOSOPHICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES

Arnold argues that every psychological theory rests upon implicit philosophical assumptions concerning the nature of the human person. These assumptions are

¹For a detailed exposition of Arnold's theory of emotion, cf. P. VALENZUELA, *The Value of Emotions Based on Magda B. Arnold and Barbara L. Fredrickson Theories*, cit. For an account of Arnold's theory of personality, cf. F. RUIZ-FUSTER, *Teoría de la personalidad de Magda B. Arnold*, doctoral thesis, Universidad de Navarra, Pamplona 2022.

not derived from empirical investigation but rather provide its conceptual foundation. Yet, in the effort to establish psychology as an autonomous science, such presuppositions are often left unexamined or are implicitly denied.

For Arnold, this omission is problematic because scientific inquiry is necessarily guided by prior conceptions of its object. In psychology, these concern fundamental questions about human nature, including the relation between mind and body, the role of freedom, and the ultimate aims of human life. Although such questions fall within the domain of philosophy, they inevitably shape the interpretation of empirical findings. Consequently, psychological theories frequently incorporate normative or metaphysical commitments without explicitly acknowledging them.²

Arnold emphasizes that science, strictly speaking, describes what is, but does not determine what ought to be. Nevertheless, psychologists often move from descriptive claims to normative conclusions, for instance when proposing models of healthy behavior or desirable forms of personality. Such transitions implicitly rely on philosophical assumptions about the good for human beings. For Arnold, greater clarity about these assumptions is essential for the coherence and validity of psychological theory.³

Within this framework, she offers a critical analysis of several dominant approaches of her time, including behaviorism, psychoanalysis, and various forms of determinism. These perspectives, she argues, tend to adopt reductionist conceptions of the human person, interpreting behavior in terms of mechanistic processes, unconscious drives, or causal determinants that leave little room for agency. While such approaches may capture certain aspects of human functioning, they fail to account for the unity, intentionality, and purposiveness of personal life.

She critically examined the underlying philosophical assumptions and anthropological commitments of these approaches, while also noting a certain intolerance among psychologists toward positions that explicitly acknowledge metaphysical presuppositions. In this context, she argued that the question of God cannot be entirely excluded from psychological inquiry, insofar as it bears directly on broader assumptions about human nature.⁴ Arnold draws attention to

²Cf. 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, New York 1954, p. 3.

³*Ibidem*, pp. 7-8. Arnold referred to the fact that some psychologists had been called in by government agencies to help them decide on action. Surely it is because of psychology's struggle to become a science by forgetting its philosophical heritage explains why psychologists hide behind a fact/value distinction. Regarding the descriptive/normative character of contemporary positive psychology pretensions, cf. L. GULLIFORD, *Virtue in Positive Psychology*, «Acta Philosophica», 29/1 (2020), pp. 91-111.

⁴Cf. J. GARCÍA-ALANDETE, *Magda Arnold's Understanding of the Human Person: Thomistic Personalism, Psychophysical Unity of the Person, Integration of Personality, and Transcendence*, «History

a striking inconsistency: psychologists who took religion seriously and treated religious experience as a legitimate psychological phenomenon—such as Jung and Allport—often refrained from addressing the implication that, without an objective foundation, such experiences might be reduced to illusion. Conversely, those who dismissed religion as mere superstition frequently appealed to scientific authority to justify their stance.⁵

If then, the question of the nature, origin, and destiny of man must be faced and we recognize that the answer will decisively influence our scientific research and theory, we had better investigate the alternatives open to us. The problem requires not a scientific but a philosophical method of inquiry, and the alternative we choose will provide the basic assumptions for our scientific research.⁶

Arnold argues that such questions cannot be entirely excluded, since they bear directly on the understanding of human nature. Whether explicitly acknowledged or not, every psychological theory presupposes some view of the origin, nature, and destiny of the human person.

Arnold also examined psychological theories grounded in physical naturalism, critical idealism, psychophysical parallelism, and personalism. Among these, she defended the personalist position, arguing that its underlying assumptions are better suited to account for empirical findings. More specifically, the personalist framework incorporates a hierarchical conception of nature and of the human being, affirms the unity of the person, and supports a creationist view of human existence. Within this perspective, human beings are understood as integrated agents rather than as aggregates of processes. It is therefore no coincidence that Arnold regarded personalist psychologists as uniquely capable of defending human free agency in its fullest sense.⁷

Within this personalist framework, emotion assumes a central role. Arnold regards emotion as a privileged point of access to the person, insofar as it reflects how individuals evaluate and respond to their world. Emotions are not merely subjective states but disclose what is significant or valuable for the subject. For this reason, the study of emotion becomes a way of approaching the person as a whole, rather than as a collection of isolated processes.

of Psychology», 27 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1037/hop0000247>, pp. 159-177.

⁵M. B. ARNOLD, *Basic Assumptions in Psychology*, cit., pp. 8-11.

⁶*Ibidem*, p. 11.

⁷*Ibidem*, pp. 14-27. Arnold and Gasson argument about that the results of scientific psychological research, especially concerning human choice, development, and psychotherapy, point to the personalistic alternative, and thus necessitate a rehabilitation of final causes in psychology. They concluded that the personalistic conception, with its stated understanding that we have an eternal destiny is actually more scientific than the mechanistic one. Cf. R. KUGELMANN, *Importing Phenomenology into North American Psychology*, in *Recent Contributions to the History of the Human Sciences*, ed. by A. Mulberger, B. Gómez Zúñiga, Profil Verlag, Passau 2005, p. 70.

Accordingly, Arnold maintains that psychological inquiry must always return to the person; otherwise, it risks losing its proper object and, as she puts it, “start[ing] to swing out to the stratosphere.” Emotion provides precisely this point of return to the personal dimension. Her research is therefore centered on emotion as a means of understanding personality in its unity. She explicitly affirms that emotion is “the most important personal aspect of personality”, since it is through emotion that individuals appropriate their own worldview: “one can have any sort of world view or philosophy, but it is the emotion that makes it your own, you have to acknowledge it, have to deal with it.”⁸

Her position is not that psychology should be subordinated to philosophy, but that a clear awareness of their distinct roles and mutual relation is necessary. Philosophy provides the conceptual and anthropological framework within which psychological research takes place, while psychology contributes empirical insights that can inform and refine philosophical reflection. The integration of these perspectives is therefore not optional but essential for a coherent account of human experience.⁹

Arnold's analysis remains relevant to contemporary debates, where tensions between empirical research and philosophical reflection persist. By highlighting the role of underlying assumptions, she invites psychologists to critically examine the conceptual foundations of their theories and to engage more explicitly with philosophical anthropology. In doing so, she reinforces the broader aim of her work: to bridge the gap between philosophy and psychology in the study of the human person.

3 PHILOSOPHICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SOURCES OF ARNOLD'S THOUGHT

A closer examination of the principal influences shaping Arnold's thought leads first to the philosophical tradition of Aristotle and Aquinas, and then to the psychological frameworks with which her work engages.

Arnold's work displays a clear and substantive affinity with the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, especially in its understanding of the human person and, more specifically, in her account of emotion. Most notably, her conception of emotion aligns with Aristotle's and Aquinas's understanding of its composite nature, integrating cognitive, affective, and physiological dimensions. Arnold defines emotion as a “felt tendency toward an object judged suitable, or away from an object judged unsuitable, reinforced by specific bodily changes according to

⁸S. A. SHIELDS, *A Conversation with Magda Arnold*, «The Emotion Researcher», 13/3 (1999), p. 3.

⁹In this regard, there are truly valuable efforts made in contemporary scholarship. Cf. B. FOWERS, B. COKELET, *The Virtues of Interdisciplinary Research in Self, Motivation and Virtue: Innovative Interdisciplinary Research*, ed. by N. SNOW, D. NARVAEZ, Routledge, New York 2020, pp. 43-61.

the type of emotion.”¹⁰ This formulation closely parallels Aquinas’s definition of passion (emotion) as “a movement of the sensitive appetite—irrational soul—when we think of good or evil.”¹¹ In both cases, emotion is not reducible to either bodily processes or subjective feeling, but is structured by an evaluative relation to its object.

Arnold also adopts a classificatory framework that reflects this evaluative structure. Like Aquinas, she distinguishes emotions according to whether their object is perceived as good or bad, present or absent, and easy or difficult to attain or avoid. This schema corresponds broadly to the classical distinction between concupiscible and irascible tendencies,¹² though Arnold reformulates these within a psychological vocabulary (impulsive and contending emotions). Her account thus preserves the insight that emotions are dynamically related to the perceived conditions of action.¹³

A further point of continuity lies in the intentional character of emotion. Aristotle and Aquinas had already emphasized that passions are directed toward objects under some aspect of value. Arnold reaffirms this view and contributes to its development within modern psychology by insisting that emotions are inherently object-directed and cognitively mediated. In this respect, her work anticipates and influences later cognitive approaches to emotion, particularly those that emphasize the appraisal-based structure of affective states.

The most significant Thomistic influence on Arnold’s theory is her notion of *appraisal* (or estimate).¹⁴ She explicitly relates this to the internal sense that Aquinas described as the *vis aestimativa* or cogitative power. For Aquinas, this faculty enables the subject to make sense-based judgments about particular objects in terms of their relevance for action—specifically, whether they are beneficial or harmful. Arnold adopts this insight and reformulates it within a psychological framework: appraisal is an immediate, often non-reflective evaluation of an object as good or bad for the subject. Her central statement is that in the origin of every emotion, there is an intuitive estimate (a sense judgment) that something

¹⁰M. B. ARNOLD, J. A. GASSON, *Feelings and Emotions as Dynamic Factors in Personality Integration*, in *The Nature of Emotion*, ed. by M. B. Arnold, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1968, p. 203.

¹¹*ST* I-II, q. 22, a. 3. Hereafter, all references to the *Summa Theologica* refer to the edition translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 2nd rev. ed., Burns, Oates and Washbourne, London 1920-1922.

¹²Cf. *ST* I, q. 81, a. 2 and *ST* I-II, q. 23, a. 1, Aquinas divides the passions into two broad kinds. The concupiscible passions (love and hate, desire and aversion, joy and sorrow) have the formal object sensible good or evil taken absolutely whereas the irascible passions (hope and despair, confidence and fear, anger) have the formal object sensible good or evil taken as difficult or arduous.

¹³Cf. M. B. ARNOLD, *Emotion and Personality. Vol. 1: Psychological Aspects*, Columbia University Press, New York 1960, p. 196.

¹⁴Cf. R. CORNELIUS, *Magda Arnold’s Thomistic Theory of Emotion, the Self-Ideal, and the Moral Dimension of Appraisal*, «Cognition and Emotion», 20/7 (2006), pp. 976-1000.

is good or bad for us may that later be supplemented by reflective judgment.¹⁵

In this context, Arnold preserves a hierarchical understanding of the human person. Evaluation involves both cognitive and affective dimensions, and these are ordered in a structured way. Reason apprehends the intelligible good and directly informs the will, while indirectly shaping the sensible appetite through evaluative processes. Emotion thus emerges from the interaction between different levels of cognition and desire, rather than from isolated mechanisms.¹⁶ What is particularly distinctive in Arnold is her attempt to translate this philosophical account into an empirically oriented theory of psychological functioning.

Her interest in the relation between mind and brain reflects this integrative aim. Arnold sought to frame the mind-body problem in terms of correlations between neural processes and conscious experience, without reducing one to the other. While acknowledging the localization of functions in the brain, she maintained that conscious experience is irreducibly unified and depends on the integration of these functions within a holistic system. This perspective informed her interdisciplinary approach, particularly in her attempt to connect neurological processes with evaluative and motivational aspects of emotion.¹⁷

Arnold's engagement with Aristotelian ethics further reinforces the practical dimension of her theory. Like Aristotle, she understands virtues and vices as habits of deliberate choice shaped by rational evaluation.¹⁸ In her account of emotional education, she emphasizes the importance of forming appropriate affective dispositions from an early age.¹⁹ Emotions are not merely passive experiences but can be shaped and integrated into the development of character. In this respect,

¹⁵Cf. M. B. ARNOLD, *Emotion and Personality. Vol. 2: Neurological and Physiological Aspects*, Columbia University Press, New York 1960, pp. 174-175; EAD., *The Internal Senses—Functions or Powers? Part II*, «The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review», 26/1 (1963), p. 24. Arnold's aim in this article is to examine the concrete empirical and scientifically observable phenomena ontologically connected with a psychological process that is analyzed by the Scholastics philosophically. Cf. also M. F. ECHAVARRÍA, *El corazón: un análisis de la afectividad sensitiva y la afectividad intelectual en la psicología de Tomás de Aquino*, in *Propuestas antropológicas del siglo XX*, ed. by J. F. Sellés, EUNSA, Pamplona 2004, pp. 181-220.

¹⁶Cf. A. MALO, *Antropología de la afectividad*, EUNSA, Pamplona 2004, p. 132. According to the author, this cogitative power would not be necessary, if the intention is to study action (instead of beginning with knowledge) and one begins with the instincts in the animal and the tendencies in humans since these inclinations lead us to discover certain objects that satisfy them. Certainly, if we explain action based on knowledge, then a new sense is needed otherwise we cannot explain how animals or humans can capture *insensate* intentions.

¹⁷Cf. H. BORTFELD, S. M. SMITH, L. G. TASSINARY, *Memory and the Brain: A Retrospective*, «Cognition and Emotion», 20/7 (2006), p. 1039.

¹⁸Cf. NE II, 1104b9-24. Hereafter, all references to Aristotle's works follow *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 2 vols., Princeton University Press, Princeton 1995. Cf. also M. B. ARNOLD, *Emotion and Personality*, vol. 1, cit., pp. 191-199.

¹⁹Cf. M. B. ARNOLD, *Emotion and Personality*, vol. 2, cit., pp. 277-278.

her theory situates emotion within a broader framework of moral development and personal formation.

From a psychological perspective, Arnold can be situated within the tradition of personalistic psychology, which provides the overarching orientation of her work. She draws in particular on Gordon Allport's emphasis on the organization and integrity of personality. Allport's rejection of reductionist and atomistic accounts of behavior resonates with Arnold's own commitment to understanding the person as a unified whole.

Allport's influence is especially relevant because his understanding of personality offered Arnold a psychological framework compatible with her philosophical anthropology. Against both behaviorist reductionism and psychoanalytic determinism, Allport defended the person as an organized, dynamic unity rather than as a mere collection of habits, drives, or isolated psychological mechanisms. His notion of personality as a dynamic organization of psychophysical systems provided an important conceptual bridge between biological processes, psychological functions, and personal agency.²⁰

Moreover, Allport's account of mature personality—characterized by intentionality, future orientation, value commitments, and the pursuit of meaningful goals—²¹ closely parallels Arnold's concern with personality integration. Particularly significant is his concept of functional autonomy, according to which mature motives cannot be reduced entirely to their original biological conditions. This view resonates with Arnold's rejection of purely deterministic explanations of motivation and with her insistence that human beings act in relation to values and self-chosen ideals. Thus, Allport's contribution lies not merely in his theory of personality but in providing a psychological model in which motivation, emotion, and agency can be understood within the unity of the person.

She also engages with Viktor Frankl's existential analysis,²² especially his emphasis on meaning, responsibility, and the role of values in human life.²³ Arnold shared the existential critique of determinism and the insistence that human beings are fundamentally responsible agents. She recognized that the question of meaning is central to the development of personality and to what is now often described as human flourishing. However, she was also critical of Frankl's lack of conceptual clarity, particularly in his use of notions such as freedom and responsibility, and of the insufficient grounding of his theoretical claims.

²⁰Cf. G. W. ALLPORT, *Personality: A Psychological Interpretation*, H. Holt and Company, New York 1937.

²¹Cf. IDEM, *Pattern and Growth in Personality*, H. Holt and Company, New York 1961.

²²Cf. V. E. FRANKL, *The Doctor and the Soul: From Psychotherapy to Logotherapy*, Knopf, New York 1965.

²³Cf. M. B. ARNOLD, J. A. GASSON, *Logotherapy and Existential Analysis in The Human Person*, cit., pp. 464-465.

Arnold's concept of the self-ideal—a conception of the good that orients a person's life as a whole—illustrates both her proximity to and her distance from Frankl. Like Frankl, she sees orientation toward values and purposes as central to personal integration. At the same time, she insists on the need to evaluate the content of these ideals, and not merely their existence.²⁴ The self-ideal thus becomes a key integrating principle of personality, structuring both cognition and emotion.

Additional psychological influences include Abraham Maslow and Kurt Goldstein, particularly in relation to motivation, self-actualization, and the holistic understanding of the person. From Maslow, Arnold adopts the idea of a hierarchical structure of human motivation but reinterprets it in terms of values rather than needs. While Maslow's theory describes human development as progressing toward self-actualization,²⁵ Arnold places greater emphasis on the evaluative dimension of motivation: human action is not only directed toward the satisfaction of needs but toward what is apprehended as valuable and worthy of pursuit.

Goldstein's influence is evident in Arnold's understanding of the person as an organized whole. His concept of self-actualization, understood as the organism's tendency to realize its own possibilities,²⁶ provided an alternative to mechanistic explanations of behavior and reinforced a holistic conception of human functioning. Arnold integrates this insight within her personalist framework, interpreting self-actualization not merely as the fulfilment of biological potential but as the progressive integration of cognition, emotion, motivation, and values. In this sense, both Maslow and Goldstein contribute to Arnold's broader account of personality as a dynamic and unified system.²⁷

Taken together, these philosophical and psychological influences reveal the distinctive character of Arnold's project. She does not simply combine different traditions, but integrates them within a coherent framework centred on evaluation, intentionality, and the unity of the person. Her work thus represents a significant attempt to bridge philosophical anthropology and empirical psychology in the study of emotion.

²⁴*Ibidem*, pp. 483, 487. Cf. also S. PARENTI, *Magda Arnold: psicologa delle emozioni*, D'Ettoris Editori, Crotone 2017, ch. 5, in fine.

²⁵Cf. A. H. MASLOW, *Motivation and Personality*, Harper & Row, New York 1954.

²⁶Cf. K. GOLDSTEIN, *The Organism: A Holistic Approach to Biology Derived from Pathological Data in Man*, American Book Company, New York 1939 (original German 1934).

²⁷Cf. 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.

4 A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPERIENCE

In addition to the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, Arnold's work is informed by phenomenological approaches to emotion and psychological experience. Phenomenology offered a way of recovering the first-person dimension of experience against reductive explanations that treated mental life exclusively in terms of external behavior or physiological mechanisms. In this respect, Arnold's approach shares the phenomenological concern for describing phenomena as they are experienced before explaining them through theoretical models.

Arnold was particularly familiar with authors such as Max Scheler and Jean-Paul Sartre, whose analyses of emotion emphasized intentionality, meaning, and the relation between emotion and the world of values.²⁸ Scheler's account of affective intentionality and value perception,²⁹ as well as Sartre's interpretation of emotion as a meaningful mode of relating to the world,³⁰ provided important points of comparison for Arnold's own theory. Nevertheless, she integrated these insights selectively, maintaining that phenomenological description must ultimately be complemented by empirical psychological investigation.

Arnold's approach also reflects broader developments within phenomenological psychology originating in Husserl's work.³¹ Although she does not adopt Husserl's transcendental project, her analysis shares the methodological conviction that psychological inquiry must begin with a careful description of experience itself.

Arnold's "phenomenological analysis" is best understood as a descriptive approach grounded in common human experience. She maintains that the study of emotion must begin from what is directly given in experience rather than from theoretical constructs imposed upon it. Emotions are not abstract entities but lived realities that involve both bodily changes and meaningful relations to the world.

This methodological stance is closely connected to her critique of reductionist approaches, particularly behaviorism. Such approaches, she argues, neglect

²⁸Concretely, Arnold entitled *Phenomenological Analysis of Emotion* the chapter 9 of her book *Emotion and Personality* (vol. 1, p. 169) and mentioned already in the Introduction her intention of offering such analysis (p. 13). Cf. also R. REISENZEIN, *Arnold's Theory of Emotion in Historical Perspective*, «Cognition and Emotion», 20/7 (2006), p. 927.

²⁹Cf. M. SCHELER, *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik* (1913-1916); English trans. *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston (IL) 1973.

³⁰Cf. J. P. SARTRE, *Esquisse d'une théorie des émotions*, Hermann, Paris 1939. English trans. *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*, Routledge, London 1962.

³¹'Phenomenological analysis' originally referred to a special philosophical method devised by Husserl, the intuition of essences (eidetic seeing, *Wesensschau*). Husserl sharply distinguished this method from introspection, and it is closer to conceptual analysis. Cf. E. HUSSERL, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. First Book*, Kluwer, Dordrecht 1982.

the experiential dimension of emotion by reducing it to observable behavior or physiological processes. While Arnold does not deny the importance of these dimensions, she insists that they must be understood in relation to the experience they mediate. The primary datum of psychological inquiry is therefore the experiencing person.³²

She particularly stressed that the study of emotion as of any other psychological state must be based on common sense and experience as the starting point of every inquiry and as a way of checking the psychological—as well as philosophical—understanding of emotion.³³

Within this framework, Arnold identifies several fundamental features of emotional experience. First, passion is a persistent and overwhelming urge, and that emotion is an experience that not only disturbs but also arouses to action. Second, when a person is profoundly moved, she is committed in her both body and soul. Third, there are many emotions and fourth, some emotions are pleasant while other are unpleasant.³⁴ These features highlight the unity of cognition, affect, and motivation in emotional life.

Her insistence on the primacy of experience has important epistemological implications. Arnold argues that scientific psychology ultimately depends on ordinary human experience as its foundation. Scientific concepts are abstractions derived from this experience and must remain accountable to it. Consequently, theoretical models cannot legitimately contradict what is directly given in experience, although they may refine or reinterpret it.

Her method of phenomenological analysis intends

[t]o discover the nature of emotion <for which> I will try to isolate this common factor in emotional experience and discuss the conditions that bring it about. This phenomenological analysis of emotion will provide the basis for an inquiry into the neural connections that mediate this process and the physiological changes which accompany it.³⁵

This position leads Arnold to reverse the usual explanatory order in psychological research. Instead of beginning with physiological mechanisms and inferring psychological processes, she proposes that one must first clarify the structure of experience and then investigate the mechanisms that underlie it. Without such clarification, there is a risk of explaining processes whose nature has not been adequately understood.

³²Cf. M. B. ARNOLD, *Emotion and Personality*, vol. 1, cit., p. 12.

³³Arnold's appeal to common experience resonates with broader attempts to ground psychological inquiry in lived experience and ordinary understanding. See, for example, F. BRENTANO, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (1874), Routledge, London 1995; F. HEIDER, *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations*, Wiley, New York 1958.

³⁴Cf. M. B. ARNOLD, *Emotion and Personality*, vol. 1, cit., p. 12.

³⁵*Ibidem*, p. 13.

At the same time, Arnold does not reject empirical or neurophysiological approaches. On the contrary, she seeks to integrate them within a broader framework. Phenomenological analysis provides access to the structure of experience, while empirical research investigates its underlying processes. These approaches are complementary rather than opposed.

Arnold's emphasis on common experience also reflects her concern with the role of ordinary language in psychology. She criticizes the tendency to replace everyday psychological terms with technical vocabulary derived from mechanistic models. Terms such as "thinking" or "will" are often abandoned in favor of more neutral or operationalized concepts, but this risks losing contact with the phenomena they are meant to describe. For Arnold, ordinary language expresses fundamental aspects of experience that should not be disregarded.³⁶

In this sense, her approach can be understood as a form of conceptual analysis grounded in lived experience. By starting from what is commonly experienced and expressed, she seeks to identify the essential features of emotion without reducing them to abstract variables. This approach allows her to remain faithful to the complexity of emotional life while still engaging in scientific inquiry.³⁷

From her phenomenological methodological approach, and in continuity with what has been emphasized, Arnold develops a number of important reflections on psychology as a science:

Psychology as a science enjoys an advantage no other natural science possesses: the observer is always one of the objects observed. An experimental fact cannot contradict our own experience, for it is our experience which registers the observation [...] This is the privilege, so to speak of being on the inside, and so able to provide a check on its results. In other words, in psychology, there is a possibility of an empirical verification of scientific generalizations from the inside, which ought to be gratifying to a scientist. Therefore, if the basic assumptions of the human being are correct, and the experimental evidence is combined with such a true view, then the result, our conclusion, should give us as a picture of the human being which may extend our experience but cannot contradict it.³⁸

Arnold highlights here what she takes to be a distinctive epistemological advantage of psychology—one that other theorists might instead regard as a limitation. For her, this condition of "being on the inside," namely that the observer is also among the objects observed, constitutes a privilege rather than a defect, since it allows for an internal check on the results of observation. In this way, psychology possesses a unique possibility of verifying its generalizations from within experience itself.

³⁶*Ibidem*, p. 6.

³⁷Cf. R. REISENZEIN, *Arnold's Theory of Emotion in Historical Perspective*, cit., p. 926.

³⁸M. B. ARNOLD, *Basic Assumptions in Psychology*, cit., p. 15.

Accordingly, when sound philosophical-anthropological assumptions are combined with experimental evidence, psychology can be expected to yield an account of human functioning that both extends and refines individual experience, without ever contradicting it. This requirement—that theoretical conclusions remain consistent with lived experience—thus becomes a fundamental criterion for the validity of psychological explanation.

Arnold emphasizes that common experience should not be understood as a set of common-sense explanations of particular facts, but rather, in a deeper sense, as the direct experience of human beings—an experience that constitutes the foundation of both scientific inquiry and philosophical reflection. If experience is recognized as our primary data, then the reliability of our logical and mathematical reasoning ultimately depends on the assumption that our senses provide trustworthy access to reality, since all verification presupposes sensory experience. This leads to a fundamental alternative: either we trust our senses as a valid source of knowledge about the world, or we reject them and thereby undermine the very possibility of attaining truth. In this sense, without confidence in sensory experience, science itself becomes impossible, as theories would amount to constructions lacking any means of verification.³⁹

At the same time, Arnold distinguishes common experience from its popular or uncritical interpretations. While science is grounded in experience, it requires the development of precise concepts and technical terminology, especially in domains that cannot be grasped directly. Nevertheless, she argues that the transformation of ordinary psychological vocabulary provides an important indication of how far psychology has distanced itself from its experiential basis. A notable example is the concept of “will” or “volition,” which, once central to psychological inquiry, has largely been replaced by terms such as self-determination, need, or desire. By the mid-twentieth century, this shift reflects the widespread influence of deterministic assumptions, according to which human behavior is explained in terms of motivating causes that leave little room for genuinely voluntary action.⁴⁰

Arnold's phenomenological orientation is therefore not an end in itself, but part of a broader integrative project. It serves to ensure that psychological theories remain connected to the realities they aim to explain, while also allowing for their systematic investigation. By combining phenomenological description with empirical research and philosophical reflection, Arnold develops a framework that avoids both reductionism and abstraction.

Her contribution lies precisely in this integration. Rather than choosing between philosophy and science, or between experience and explanation, she seeks to articulate a coherent account of emotion that does justice to all these dimen-

³⁹Cf. M. B. ARNOLD, *Emotion and Personality*, vol. 1, cit., p. 6.

⁴⁰Cf. *ibidem*, pp. 3-9.

sions. In doing so, she offers a model for interdisciplinary work that remains highly relevant to contemporary discussions in both philosophy and psychology.

5 FREE AGENCY AND THE INTEGRATION OF EMOTION WITHIN THE PERSON

A central aspect of Arnold's philosophical anthropology is human agency, understood in terms of self-determination and responsibility. She maintains that a personalist psychology presupposes—whether explicitly or implicitly—that human beings are the efficient causes of their own activity. As such, they are intelligent agents who act on the basis of motives and purposes. Self-determination, however, does not imply that human action is uncaused, unmotivated, or arbitrary. On the contrary, actions are motivated and intelligible, and may even be predictable insofar as a person's habitual responses are known.⁴¹ What distinguishes human agency is not the absence of causality, but the fact that the person is the origin of action.

In this respect, Arnold draws on a broadly Aristotelian framework of causality. Human beings act in view of ends (final causes), while being constituted by both material and formal principles.⁴² It is this formal organization that distinguishes human beings and grounds their capacity to act “humanly,” that is, in accordance with reasons and choices.⁴³ Psychological explanation must therefore take into account not only causal mechanisms but also the teleological structure of action.

Within this framework, Arnold emphasizes the central role of consciousness, freedom, and responsibility. Against deterministic accounts—particularly those associated with psychoanalysis—she argues that human action is not governed by unconscious forces in a way that eliminates freedom. While unconscious factors may influence behavior, they do not in themselves determine action. Indeed, Arnold maintains that a genuinely human act requires not only motivation but decision: a conscious and rational motive necessitates judgment, but not action. Action requires a further step—namely, choice.

From this perspective, situations of compulsion or loss of control are interpreted as deviations from normal functioning. When behavior is experienced as

⁴¹See a contemporary account related to prospection or the way we handle the future through our actions in R. F. BAUMEISTER *et al.*, *Pragmatic Prospection: How and why People Think about the Future*, «Review of General Psychology», 20/1 (2016), pp. 3-16. Cf. also J. A. MERCADO, *Harmonising Reason and Emotions: Common Paths from Plato to Contemporary Trends in Psychology in Desire and Human Flourishing. Perspectives from Positive Psychology, Moral Education and Virtue Ethics*, ed. by M. Bosch, Springer, Cham, 2020, pp. 89-105.

⁴²Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Physics*, 194b16-195a3; 198a14-25; *De Anima*, 412a6-412b9.

⁴³Cf. M. B. ARNOLD, *Basic Assumptions in Psychology*, cit., pp. 40-47.

compelled, this often indicates a disruption in the integration of the person, such as in affective disorders or disordered personality structures. In such cases, the absence of conscious intention corresponds to a diminished degree of freedom.⁴⁴

Arnold's account of motivation reflects this emphasis on evaluation and agency. In *Motives as Causes*, she argues against deterministic interpretations of motivation by showing that motives function as reasons for action rather than as mechanical causes that compel behavior.⁴⁵ A motive is not simply a physiological drive, but an object or course of action apprehended as good or bad, desirable or harmful. Human action is therefore intelligible through motives, yet these motives require personal endorsement through judgment and decision. Such evaluation involves both cognitive and affective dimensions and gives rise to a tendency toward or away from the object. However, a motive becomes fully operative only when it is accepted and sustained in free action.⁴⁶

Freedom, in this context, is understood as self-determination: the capacity to initiate action on the basis of one's own evaluation. Human beings are not merely carried along by their immediate inclinations but are capable of acting in light of what they judge to be truly good. This is particularly evident in Arnold's distinction between immediate appraisal and reflective judgment.⁴⁷ While the former gives rise to spontaneous emotional responses, the latter enables individuals to assess and regulate their actions. Thus, even when an emotional inclination points in one direction, a person may act otherwise on the basis of reflective evaluation.⁴⁸

This capacity for reflective self-determination underlies the unity of human action. Human beings do not merely react; they appraise, emote, deliberate, choose, and act. In doing so, they become the causes of their own actions and, consequently, of the dispositions and habits that arise from them. These habits are not simply the result of repetition, but of an ongoing process of personal integration in which desires, emotions, values, and rational motives are progressively ordered. External factors and circumstances may influence this process, but they do not determine it.

Freedom and responsibility are therefore inseparable. To act freely is to be accountable for one's actions, not only in relation to others but also to oneself.⁴⁹ Arnold connects this insight to moral development, understood as the gradual

⁴⁴Cf. *ibidem*, pp. 19–24.

⁴⁵Cf. M. B. ARNOLD, *Motives as Causes*, «Phenomenological Psychology», 1/2 (1971), <https://doi.org/10.1163/156916271X00110>, pp. 185–192.

⁴⁶Cf. M. B. ARNOLD, *Basic Assumptions in Psychology*, cit., p. 39.

⁴⁷Cf. M. B. ARNOLD, *Emotion and Personality*, vol. 1, cit., p. 245.

⁴⁸*Ibidem*, p. 235.

⁴⁹This thought should not be taken for granted since there are in contemporary scholarship some detractors of free human agency. In this regard, cf. J. M. DORIS, *Précis of Talking to our Selves: Reflection, Ignorance, and Agency*, «Behavioral and Brain Sciences», 41 (2018), pp. 1–12.

formation of stable dispositions oriented toward the good. Within this process, she distinguishes between different kinds of norms—social, legal, and moral—and emphasises that not all have the same binding force. Specifically, within the moral sphere, rules are grounded in natural law, which possesses both an intrinsic and an extrinsic dimension. It is extrinsic insofar as it presupposes an objective moral order, according to which human beings are oriented toward the good in accordance with their natural inclinations. At the same time, it is intrinsic, in that this order is apprehended and articulated by the subject as a practical good—something recognized as worthy of pursuit. Human nature is thus characterized by a fundamental inclination to seek the good and avoid the bad, and to do so rationally. This inclination underlies practical rationality and constitutes the basis of the intentional structure of human action.⁵⁰

In this sense, Arnold's account presupposes an Aristotelian-Thomistic understanding of the dynamism of practical rationality. Human beings are naturally inclined to pursue what is good and to avoid what is bad, but this inclination must be guided and shaped through deliberation and habit formation. In this context, Arnold refers to moral virtues and prudence as habits of deliberate choice grounded in rational reflection. Virtues, as stable dispositions of choice, arise from repeated actions guided by rational evaluation.

Accordingly, she argues that overcoming disordered emotional habits requires the cultivation of alternative habits oriented by rational motives. Each action undertaken on the basis of reflective judgment generates a disposition toward similar actions, thereby contributing to the formation of stable patterns of behaviour. At the same time, enduring affective orientations—such as sentiments—are understood as established dispositions that have been endorsed through reflection and enacted through deliberate choice.⁵¹

Emotion plays a crucial role within this dynamic. By providing an immediate evaluation of the environment, emotions disclose what is significant or valuable for the subject.⁵² At the same time, they are not merely passive indicators but can be integrated into deliberate action through reflective judgment. In this way, emotion contributes both to the motivation of action and to the formation of character.

Arnold's broader contribution lies in showing that emotion, far from being opposed to reason, is intrinsically connected to it. Emotions provide evaluative

⁵⁰Cf. ST I-II, q. 94, a. 2. Cf. also A. M. GONZÁLEZ, *El fundamento de la ley natural*, in *En busca de una ética universal: un nuevo modo de ver la ley natural*, ed. by T. Trigo, EUNSA, Pamplona 2011, pp. 147-166; P. VALENZUELA, *The Value of Emotions Based on Magda B. Arnold and Barbara L. Fredrickson Theories*, cit., p. 267 ff.

⁵¹Cf. M. B. ARNOLD, *Emotion and Personality*, vol. 1, cit., pp. 191-199.

⁵²Cf. K. GASPER, K. BRAMESFELD, *Imparting Wisdom: Magda Arnold's Contribution to Research on Emotion and Motivation*, «Cognition and Emotion», 20/7 (2006), p. 1009.

information about the world, disclosing what appears significant or valuable for the person. Nevertheless, emotions cannot serve as autonomous guides of human action, since their appraisal may require confirmation, correction, and integration through reflective judgment. Rather, emotions function as indispensable aids: they reveal the person's relation to values and provide the motivational energy necessary for pursuing them.

This becomes especially clear in Arnold's notion of the self-ideal, understood as the organising principle through which the person evaluates goals, integrates motives, and directs action toward a meaningful life. The formation of the self-ideal requires the integration of cognition, emotion, and volition; emotions support this process insofar as they help individuals recognise and respond to what they perceive as valuable. However, the self-ideal itself must also be evaluated according to whether it is oriented toward genuine goods.

In this respect, Arnold's account reconnects with the Aristotelian insight that human action is ultimately directed toward the realisation of a fulfilled life. By linking emotion, evaluation, self-ideal, and action, she shows how affective experience contributes to human flourishing.⁵³ Emotions do not determine the ends toward which a person is directed, but they play a crucial role in sustaining commitment to those ends once recognised as valuable.

6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This article has examined Magda B. Arnold's contribution to the integration of philosophical and psychological perspectives. Her work demonstrates that a coherent account of psychological life requires both a philosophical understanding of the human person and empirically grounded investigation, rather than a separation between them.

At the conceptual level, Arnold develops an account of emotion and personality centred on appraisal, motivation, and personal integration, drawing on Aristotelian-Thomistic insights while reformulating them in psychological terms. Emotions are understood as intentional and value-laden responses, situated within a broader conception of the human person as a unified whole. Methodologically, her use of phenomenological analysis ensures that psychological theory remains grounded in lived experience, establishing a criterion according to which scientific explanations must extend, but not contradict, experience.

At the anthropological level, Arnold's emphasis on free agency provides the

⁵³Cf. 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>.

broader framework within which her understanding of emotion and personality is situated. Her account integrates cognition, affect, and volition within a dynamic conception of the person as a self-determining agent. The study of emotion thus becomes a privileged access point to the unity of the person and to the processes through which values are recognised, appropriated, and enacted.

Taken together, these dimensions reveal both the coherence and originality of Arnold's project. Her work challenges the fragmentation characteristic of many contemporary approaches in psychology by showing that philosophical anthropology, phenomenological description, and empirical investigation are not competing frameworks but mutually illuminating perspectives. The integration she proposes is therefore not merely methodological, but conceptual, grounded in a unified understanding of the human person.

Arnold's work remains highly relevant for contemporary debates in philosophy and psychology. In a context still marked by tensions between reductionist models and more holistic approaches, her emphasis on evaluation, experience, and free agency offers a compelling alternative. By reconnecting emotion, reason, personality, and action, she provides a framework capable of addressing the complexity of human experience.

Her enduring contribution lies in showing that emotions cannot be understood as isolated psychological events, but only within the broader unity of the person who experiences, evaluates, chooses, and acts. This insight remains as significant today as in Arnold's own time.

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