

# **Coping with Complexity: Methodological Overlaps between Psychology and Philosophy**

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“All men naturally desire knowledge”

Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1.1, 980a

## 1. Introduction

Sciences are a human product, serving human needs. As we know it today, psychology is a young science: it only gained a certain autonomy at the end of the 19th century.

Rather than being linked to education and human development, psychology was born with a strong dependence on physiology and medicine. Physiology, in turn, is marked by the demands of measurement methods linked to physics.

Biology also lagged behind the exact sciences, and its collaboration with medicine and psychology would mature decades later.

It fostered a tension between the analytical and quantitative approach and the rediscovery of the organism, i.e. the behaviour of living beings, which is difficult to reduce to the schemes of physics and mathematics. For example, William James' descriptions of the reactions of frogs with lesions in the nervous system were outside an explanatory scheme based on a mechanical conception of the transmission of the electronic impulses that are at the basis of the responses of muscular contraction and consequent movement.

Kurt Goldstein's (Poland 1878-N.Y. 1965) work in human neurophysiology opened the door to a different perspective of studying the human body. In 1914 he started working at the *Neurological Institute* in Frankfurt, where he worked intensively to rehabilitate war wounded. From that period onwards, his interests focused on the neurophysiological evolution of organisms to adapt to more or less severe disabilities.

Goldstein, who studied philosophy before medicine, proposed a scientific methodology with deep philosophical roots, in which living beings are considered *functional totalities*. In other words, an application of *Gestalt* theory to organisms. The Gestalten approach means that the understanding of vital phenomena acquires greater depth and coherence when the mutual connections between the various components of organisms are seen as a whole. For example, Goldstein marvelled at the resilience of injured organisms, which established new internal communication pathways to compensate for the adverse effects of mutilation. From his rigorous observations, Goldstein developed the idea of *self-actualisation*, i.e. a general interpretation of these phenomena within the framework of a continuous effort of living organisms not only to maintain themselves but also to exercise their functions in the best possible way.<sup>1</sup>

Other schools that developed in the same years had not taken up these approaches.

Psychoanalysis continued with the sophistication of introspection inherited from Freud.

Behaviourism, on its side, continued to promote studies of stimulation and responses with a view subordinate to the measurement of external behaviour as the only dimension susceptible to scientific study.

Goldstein's proposal is therefore not halfway between psychoanalytic introspection and the behaviourism of Watson and Skinner. On the contrary, it implies a broader vision with greater

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<sup>1</sup> Cfr. Hoffman, E., *The Right to Be Human. A Biography of Abraham Maslow*, Tarcher, Los Angeles 1988, pp. 106-110.

possibilities of integrating the study of the different phenomena that manifest themselves in living development.

## 2. *The study of organisms in the Aristotelian school of thought*

Goldstein was very close to the movement of rediscovery of Aristotelian philosophy initiated by Franz Brentano (1838-1917) and which influenced the formation of Christian von Ehrenfels (1859-1932) and Alexius Meinong (1853 Leopoli, Ukraine-1920, Graz, Austria).

Brentano brought fundamental aspects of Aristotelian philosophy up to date, such as the different ways of understanding being, metaphysics, and intentionality in knowledge. Although it is not easy to establish a "catalogue" of the lines of thought linked to Brentano, one can assert that his work is at the root of the different forms of phenomenology, starting with those led by Husserl and Meinong as mentioned above, and of the renewal of Aristotelian studies throughout the 20th century.

This readmission of Aristotelianism brings the contemporary reader into contact with a little-known dimension of the work carried out in the Aristotelian Lyceum. Some of the works attributed to the Stagirite reflect teamwork that today we would call interdisciplinary because of the breadth of the themes and how they are integrated.

This integration becomes evident in the texts regarding nature. Among them, those regarding the descriptions of life and movement (e.g. "*On the soul*", "*On the movement of animals*") are particularly enlightening.

The understanding of the Aristotelian team on the interaction of bodily organs and their functions is awe-inspiring (e.g. *The parts of animals*). Furthermore, it is plausible to suppose that the composition of those works profited from the direct contact with various specialists. Let us not forget that Aristotle belonged to a family of physicians. He and his collaborators most probably had access to the specimens of numerous animals that Alexander the Great sent back to his homeland from the territories he conquered. The staff of the Lyceum could rely on the detailed information of the staff who took care of the various beasts to understand better their behaviour and how they "used" their various organs.

Furthermore, in the short treatises on nature (*Parva naturalia*), the explanations to relate physical phenomena to external and external sensibility are impressive. For example, one finds very sophisticated observations on sound as 'air movement' and how the various organs of hearing transmit it – physically – in the best possible way, vibration and percussion in the ossicles of the middle ear.

On several occasions, Aristotle puts forward methodological principles in different fields of research. One of the best-known notions is *induction (epagogé)*, whose canonical expression is "the passage from singular cases to the universal principle."<sup>2</sup> However, some of the examples given by the Stagirite in explaining this principle suggest that the connections established by the intellectual capacity to synthesise phenomena and express them in general or universal terms go beyond the mere statement and summary of cases in a broader principle or concept: understanding the relationships between the planets allows us to explain eclipses; the common-sense notion, translated into a legal principle that "the mother always know who the

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<sup>2</sup> The most complete and at the same time enigmatic explanation of this principle lies in the last chapter of the *Posterior Analytics*, lib. 2, c. 19, as the starting point of scientific knowledge.

father of a child is”; that we intuit that So-and-so is planning a coup d'état because he has acquired a personal escort... All these examples depend on experience, but the projections go beyond the mere collection of data. We further understand that the level of precision varies according to the field of knowledge.

### 3. Induction according to Leonardo Polo

Leonardo Polo was a Spanish philosopher who died in 2013. As a young man, he studied in depth the proposals of Descartes and Hegel, whom he brought into dialogue with Aristotelian thought in his years of intellectual maturity.

In several writings published from the 1990s onwards, Polo made his interpretation of *epagoge* explicit. He did so precisely in texts regarding the composition of living bodies, the vital functions common to different animals and those more peculiar to men, such as language development or the correlations between bipedalism and the brain's structure.

One of Polo's most thorough explanations of this capacity of our intellect belongs to a text on invention and creativity. The Spanish author argues that human inventiveness depends on understanding *systems*, that is, grasping relations rather than analysis.<sup>3</sup> His reading of Aristotelian induction is along these lines, interpreting it as a perception synthesising relations. He connects it with complexity science and, precisely, with systems theory<sup>4</sup>, which is why he calls it *systemic or epagogical knowledge*.<sup>5</sup> *Epagogical* abstraction is a growing knowledge that synthesises correlations, that understands unity in complexity.<sup>6</sup> *Epagoge* is an understanding of systems.

It is worth following the thread of one of Polo's arguments, which starts from very elementary notions, such as *having* and *using* things, which Heidegger also dealt with extensively. The importance of these explanations is not exhausted in describing what we do but in connecting them to different dimensions of human behaviour. For example, to explain human freedom within the economic activity. In such a case, understanding these elementary relations (having/using) presupposes that we distinguish the subordination between *ends* and *means*. Otherwise, we would not grasp the connection between instruments. For example, to use a hammer, it is necessary to grasp the relations generated between the hand, the hammer, the nail and the surface where the nail will penetrate. “No being inferior to man”, Polo argues, “can

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Polo, L. *La esencia del hombre*, in *Obras Completas XXIII-A*, EUNSA, Pamplona 2016., pp. 29 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Polo, L., *La esencia del hombre*, *cit.* p. 164. Polo seriously reflected on the gnoseological foundations of the systems theory that began to take hold in the 1970s, following the work of L. von Bertalanffy.

<sup>5</sup> Polo, L. *La esencia del hombre*, *cit.* pp. 162-164. A comparison between the analytical method and the systemic method is part of the same work (“El método adecuado para conocer la esencia del hombre”, 159-168); *Ética. Hacia una visión moderna de los temas clásicos*, in *Obras Completas XI-A*, EUNSA, Pamplona 2018 (English transl. Dumol, P.A., *Ethics. A Modern Version of its Classic Themes*, Sinag-Tala, Manila 2008), “Las limitaciones del método analítico”, pp. 43-57; *Quién es el hombre*, in *Obras Completas X-A*, EUNSA, Pamplona 2016, c. 2; *Antropología de la acción directiva*, in *Obras Completas XVIII-A*, EUNSA, Pamplona 2019, c. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Polo, L., *La esencia del hombre*, *cit.* pp. 162-163.

do so"" , and this is indispensable for free activity.<sup>7</sup> That economic activity is free implies that the use of the means for the satisfaction of needs is not entirely determined.<sup>8</sup> This indeterminacy is consistent with the openness of intelligence and the multiplicity of needs. Human beings understand and create plexuses between the things they use. Human beings organise themselves with others "because they never do things in isolation: they do things with something and for something else; in other words, by doing with things, they link them together; that is why man adds his organisation to the world."<sup>9</sup> This capacity for coordination and foresight comes to the fore in a classic example Aristotle's *Politics*. The Stagirite explains chrematistics within a lengthy discussion of human needs and the means to satisfy them in the context of the good life.<sup>10</sup> In that passage, he explains how Thales of Miletus had enriched himself by monopolising the oil presses. His observations had enabled him to foresee that the next olive harvest would be plentiful, and he bought many oil presses cheaply in advance. Thus, when the harvest began, he was in a position to rent them at a much higher price than he had paid.<sup>11</sup> In contrast to this ability to harmonise needs and opportunities, we can cite the case of King Midas, as Aristotle did a few lines earlier<sup>12</sup>: it is the inability to organise the means because of the obfuscation generated by greed. The ability to visualise opportunities translates into coherent practice. Polo uses the sociological term "structuring structure", in vogue in the 1970s, to underline that companies are a necessarily flexible arrangement, which improves living conditions, refining their capacity to respond to the demands of life<sup>13</sup>. This flexibility is directly related to the ability to cope with and promote change. Today's commercial enterprises are a relatively recent phenomenon, reaching levels of structuring of time and human activity that did not exist in other eras if we exclude military organisation<sup>14</sup>. Such progress in optimising vital time has permeated other less dynamic institutions, such as schools and universities. In any case, says Polo, they all require greater humanisation, and this happens through education understood as a "help to grow", in which

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<sup>7</sup> Polo, L., *Filosofía y economía*, in *Obras Completas XXV-A*, EUNSA, Pamplona 2015.

Cf. *Ayudar a crecer*, in *Obras Completas XVIII-A*, EUNSA, Pamplona 2019, p. 177.

<sup>8</sup> Polo considers the Aristotelian proposal on freedom and means to be correct, albeit limited. This conception of the economy assumes that its activities are subordinate to the higher levels of human perfection, i.e. knowledge and virtue. Cf. *La esencia del hombre*, *cit.*, pp. 34-36.

<sup>9</sup> Polo, L., *La esencia del hombre*, *cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>10</sup> Aristotle, *Politics* 1, 1258a-1259a36. On Thales as a wise man detached from material things, see Plato, *Hippias Major*, 281e and Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 6, 1141b3-8. The episode of the Thracian maid's mockery of Thales falling into a well because he was looking at the sky is in Plato, *Theaetetus* 174a.

<sup>11</sup> Aristotle, *Politics* 1, 1259a6-36. Polo comments on the figure of Thales in the passage of *La esencia del hombre* quoted earlier (p. 41).

<sup>12</sup> Aristotle, *Politics* 1, 1257b15-17.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Polo, L., *Filosofía y economía*, *cit.* pp. 379 and 397.

<sup>14</sup> Complexity and systems-based treatments have also found their way into the management literature. See, for example, Peter Senge's *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organisation* (1990), followed by MIT's Otto Scharmer's Theory "U". Senge closely followed the work of Kurt Levin. Levin shares the same scientific and cultural background with Goldstein. There are also essential overlaps in Sun Tzu's principles as a contemplative attitude towards phenomena to gain perspective, understand them, and engage in activity after grasping the facts' deep dynamics.

authority promotes growth (the "growth of the human being")<sup>15</sup>; where authority promotes the flourishing of each person. Polo wrote prolifically on education and methodology in psychology. However, for this paper, we consider only the fundamental principle of his *epagogical* approach: the capacity to understand sets of relationships and the need not limit it with an excessive emphasis on analysis. This ability to grasp relations also help to choose the correct parameters to measure in different fields of scientific experimentation.<sup>16</sup>

#### 4. Magda Arnold: emotions in an open, unitary explanation

##### 4.1. What are emotions

Emotions can be considered as felt tendencies toward an object judged as suitable, or away from an object judged unsuitable, reinforced by specific bodily changes according to the type of emotion. This definition corresponds with what Arnolds called *basic emotions*.

Arnold built on Aquinas's classification of passions her analysis of emotions concerning the object and the degree of impulsion. Accordingly, emotions differ for their object suitable or harmful to the self because of what we can distinguish: *positive emotions* (tending toward suitable objects) and *negative emotions* (tending away from harmful objects). Emotions also differ according to their operation or the degree of impulsion: *impulse emotions* (tending toward or away from an object when conditions are favourable) and *contending emotions* (contending for or against something when conditions are unfavourable). Finally, emotions differ also if the object is present, absent or at least foreseen.

From this perspective, *joy* is experienced when one believes that an object (a state of affairs) is present, is positive, and "rests in possession" of it (i.e., can be easily maintained). *Sorrow* or *sadness* occurs when a negative state is present but "conditions are favourable", that is, one believes one can cope with the negative state. *Fear* occurs if one believes an adverse event is absent (not yet present, but a future possibility) and is "too difficult to cope with". *Hope* occurs if one believes that a positive future state can be attained.<sup>17</sup>

Emotions, therefore, aim at the object. However, at the same time, feelings reflect the internal state of the subject. In Arnold's words, "emotion always focuses on the object, while feeling reveals my momentary state of mind".<sup>18</sup>

Arnold explains that in directing us to the possession of suitable objects, "emotions could be considered as instruments not only to reach particular objects but also to help us reach the perfection of our personality, the actuation of our potentialities in the possession of these objects".<sup>19</sup> From this perspective, emotion moves us to action and may also facilitate action. In

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<sup>15</sup> The obviousness of the statement does not make it any less relevant. From her perspective based on "non-violent communication", this point is frequently stressed by Miyashiro, M. R., *The Empathy Factor: Your Competitive Advantage for Personal, Team, and Business Success*, PuddleDancer Press 2011.

<sup>16</sup> Polo and his colleague Juan A. Pérez López addressed some of the challenges of developing artificial intelligence in decision-making. There are groups of scholars that are working on their proposals, updating the debates of the eighties.

<sup>17</sup> See M. B. Arnold & J. Gasson, *Feelings and Emotions as Dynamic Factors in Personality Integration*, *cit.* pp. 203-206. See Arnold's classification of emotions in the Appendix, *infra*.

<sup>18</sup> Arnold, M. B., *Emotion and Personality*, vol. 1, *cit.*, p. 21

<sup>19</sup> M. B. Arnold & Gasson, J. A., *Feelings and Emotions as Dynamic Factors in Personality Integration*, *cit.*, p. 212

this way, impulse and contending emotions are part of the equipment we may use to pursue our purposes or goals in life.

## 4.2. Emotions are object-subject directed and presuppose cognition

Then a theory of emotion should account for these effects of emotion. As stated, emotion moves us, fills our days with light and shade. Notwithstanding, the effects of emotion are not always favourable or pleasant. Through experimental psychology, it is well known—yet in Arnold's time—that on the one hand, emotions may disturb skilled functioning and disorganise well-integrated behaviour. Nevertheless, on the other hand, emotions may have an emergency function and are helpful for survival.

Because of that, Arnold argues that the discussion about emotion should lead to a theory that resolves these seemingly conflicting views; should provide the way of distinguishing the various emotions, assessing their value for human life; should also account for the differences and similarities between human and animal emotions.<sup>20</sup>

It is relevant to highlight what is nowadays mostly accepted but then was not, that is, emotions are object-directed, which means that emotions presuppose cognitions of their objects:

For someone to have an emotion, it is necessary to perceive or know the object somehow, though it is not necessary to know it accurately or correctly... To perceive or apprehend something means that I know what it is like as a thing, apart from any effect on me.<sup>21</sup>

Though emotions are not only objectively but also subjectively oriented, meaning that the particular object affects the whole person:

To arouse an emotion, the object must [also] be appraised as affecting me in some way, affecting me personally as an individual with my particular experience and my particular aims... [This] means that I know it not only objectively, as it is apart from me, but also that I estimate its relation to me, that I appraise it as desirable or undesirable, valuable or harmful for me.<sup>22</sup>

The emphasis placed on the subjective affection recalls the role Arnold gave emotion within the personality. Emotions are then personal states through which is reflected all that we love and value and what we reject as well.

Therefore, to rightly understand what an emotion is, we should consider both that emotion is arisen by an object and that this object affects us personally.

In a very Aristotelian-Thomist way of saying, Arnold explains that the possession of an object begins in the desire or appetite. Then, it is achieved in action, and finally, it is perpetuated by our joy in it.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See Arnold, M. B. *Emotion and Personality*, vol. 1, cit., p. 91

<sup>21</sup> Arnold, M. B. *Emotion and Personality*, vol. 1, cit., p. 171

<sup>22</sup> Arnold, M. B., *Emotion and Personality*, vol. 1, cit., p. 171.

<sup>23</sup> Based on Aristotle's account of emotions (passions or appetitive movements), Aquinas explains: "For 'the appetitive movement is circular', as stated in *De Anima* 3, 10; because the appetible object moves the appetite, introducing itself, as it were, into its intention; while the appetite moves towards the realisation of the appetible object so that the movement ends where it began. Accordingly, the first change brought in the appetite by the appetible object is called 'love', and is nothing else than complacency in that object; and from this complacency

However, as Arnold notes, the same object in different circumstances can arouse one or another emotion. i.e. seeing a bear in the zoo may arouse interest and curiosity, but when seeing it in the forest, we will surely experience fear.

Therefore, to answer the question about the particularity of an emotion, Arnold focuses on a more precisely inquiring 'what is the psychological process that turns perception into an emotional experience?' She argues that in the course from perception to emotion should be the clue to the distinctive quality of emotion.<sup>24</sup>

Her focus on studying the sequence *perception-emotion-action* entails a novelty instead of the common focus at her time scholarship: *emotion-emotional expression-action*.

Arnold claims that the only approach that promises a solution to the problem of how perception arouses emotion is a careful phenomenological analysis of the whole sequence from perception to emotion and action, an analysis that Sartre attempted, but failed, as Arnold explained. So instead, she aimed to examine emotion as a human experience, tracing the link between emotion and action.<sup>25</sup>

When analysing the interval from perception to emotion, she notes that emotion seems to have an object just as sense perception does. As stated above, normal emotion carries with it the reference to an object or situation that we somehow know. To have an emotion, then it is necessary to perceive or know somehow the object present –meeting a friend– foreseen or imagined –imagining winning an award–. It can be someone/something simple or a complex situation or state of mind like being praised or scolded.

However, emotion cannot be confused with perception. Emotion is more than that. As stated, in emotion, the object is known in a way not only objectively, as it is apart from me, but concerning oneself. Thus, I like/dislike it; I appraise it as desirable/undesirable, valuable or harmful for me so that I am drawn toward it or repelled by it. Perception is instead the simple apprehension of an object rather than a group of sensations. Indeed, before anything can have a meaning for us, it must be a thing, must be perceived and must also be seen in some relationship to us. It must be appraised. Meaning comes with an appraisal.

In sum, to arouse emotion, the object must be appraised as affecting me somehow, affecting me personally as an individual with my experience and my aims.<sup>26</sup>

### 5. Conclusive Remarks on Openness and Unity of Arnold's Emotions Theory

The idea of openness of knowledge, explained by Polo based on Aristotle's ideas, is projected bearing abundant fruit in Magda Arnold's proposal.

One of the elements that remain in Arnold's thinking, which we emphasised in the paragraph on Polo, is the open character of human knowledge, i.e., the capacity to know relationships and

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results a movement towards that same object, and this movement is 'desire'; and lastly, there is rest which is 'joy'. Since, therefore, love consists of a change wrought in the appetite by the appetible object. It is evident that love is a passion: properly so-called, according as it is in the concupiscible faculty; in a wider and extended sense, according as it is in the will". *Summa Theologiae* I-II:26:2.

<sup>24</sup> Arnold, M. B., *Emotion and Personality*, vol. 1., *cit.*, p. 91

<sup>25</sup> Arnold, M. B., *Emotion and Personality*, vol. 1., *cit.*, p. 170. According to Arnold, Sartre's antithesis of emotion and action concedes to emotion a magical power of transforming reality into a fantasy world where no action is possible, as humans are passive to the influence of emotions. See pp. 158-161, where Arnold exposes and criticises Sartre's position.

<sup>26</sup> Arnold, M. B., *Emotion and Personality*, vol. 1, *cit.*, p. 171



invent new ones. Progress in knowledge, and then in practice, depends on this indeterminacy. Such indeterminacy is also at the basis of the understanding of freedom.

This openness allows Arnold to explain the communication at different levels between sensibility and experience, which serves to understand the ascending path of knowledge, and the different phases of consciousness.

Openness becomes manifest also by understanding that from sensitivity, one gets knowledge of universals and the capacity for self-evaluation in the face of repetitive and personality-shaping situations.

Arnold's proposal is simultaneously unitary and complexity-sensitive. Its elements are helpful to understand better the relationships between the different faculties involved (desires, reason, will). It also explains diversity while maintaining a cohesive scheme without being univocal or deterministic.

This framework allows proper incorporation of the minimal survival criteria (fleeing, attacking, seeking) with different levels of knowledge and a well-founded notion of desirable and undesirable (i.e. right and wrong), and to open up to value-based psychology if one prefers this explanatory path.

It proposes consistent bases for assuming one's position concerning objects and the need to be aware of variations in moods for behaviour and psychological practice. Again, it is about learning to see diversity, this time linked to one's growth and supporting others in their personal development.

It also allows for enrichment from new scientific knowledge and experience. Arnold's debate with several of his contemporaries is along these lines, that is, to help to understand that the classical approach can offer a more robust explanation than some of the most influential of her time. On the one hand, there is a separation between perception and emotion that keeps them in harmony. On the other hand, the variety of emotions and their manifestations harmonised with freedom.

## Appendix

Magda Arnold's Basic Emotions, from *Emotion and Personality*, vol. 1, p. 196

Basic emotions classified according to their direction and degree of  
impulsion<sup>27</sup>

<b>IMPULSE EMOTIONS</b>	vs object (whether present or absent)	vs object not present (tendency vs or away from)	vs object present (rest in possession)	Kind (based on direction)
Object suitable (beneficial)	love, liking	wanting, desire	delight, joy	positive
Object unsuitable (harmful)	hate, dislike	aversion, recoil	sorrow, sadness	negative

<b>CONTENDING EMOTIONS</b>	Difficulty in attaining or rejecting object	vs object not present (tendency vs or away from)	vs object present (rest in possession)	Kind of (based on direction)
Object suitable (beneficial)	if judged attainable	hope	---	positive
	if judged unattainable	hopelessness, despair	---	negative
Object unsuitable (harmful)	if to be overcome	daring, courage (rashness)	anger (desperation)	positive
	if to be avoided	fear (terror)	dejection	negative

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<sup>27</sup> In the Table, “vs” stays for “Towards”. In the presentation we will use a graphic and dynamic version of the classification.

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