

# The Economic Interconnectedness of Environmental Ethics in Light of Frankl's Triadic Anthropology: Body, Psyche, and Spirit as the Foundation of Human Responsibility

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## ABSTRACT:

This text frames environmental ethics as an interdisciplinary lens connecting ecology, economics, and philosophical anthropology via Viktor E. Frankl's triadic model of human existence—somatic, psychological, and spiritual. It argues that the ecological crisis is primarily ethical, stemming from eroded values, loss of meaning, and weakened moral responsibility. Integrating ethical responsibility with economic action creates a direct pathway from human freedom and purpose to measurable sustainable outcomes, reducing negative externalities and embedding long-term values in decision-making. The spiritual dimension (noös) operationalizes autonomous, value-driven behavior, while the concept of “economic belonging” analytically links freedom, moral accountability, and economic practice. Together, these elements provide a structured framework for translating ethical reflection into actionable, measurable strategies that align environmental sustainability with social and economic objectives

*Keywords: triadic anthropology, environmental externalities, spiritual dimension, sustainable economic behavior*

## 1. Introduction

Environmental ethics constitutes a central field within contemporary philosophy and environmental studies, as it addresses deep structural problems of civilizational development and responds to the multidimensional ecological crisis, including climate change, ecosystem degradation, biodiversity loss, and increasing pressure on natural resources (Norton, 2005; Singer, 2011). These challenges, however, cannot be adequately explained or resolved through technical, economic, or biological models alone (Bookchin, 1990; Callicott, 1999). Their deeper roots lie in the anthropological foundations of human action—specifically, in how individuals and societies understand human existence, values, freedom, and responsibility (Frankl, 2000).

This article is conceived as a theoretical and conceptual paper. Its primary aim is not empirical testing but the development of an interdisciplinary analytical framework that integrates environmental ethics, economic theory, and philosophical anthropology. By

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drawing on established theoretical traditions, the paper seeks to clarify the anthropological assumptions underlying dominant economic models and to explore their implications for sustainability and environmental responsibility.

In this context, Viktor E. Frankl's triadic model of human existence provides a particularly useful conceptual framework. Frankl distinguishes three fundamental dimensions of human life: the somatic (bodily), the psychological (mental), and the spiritual or noetic dimension (Frankl, 2000). While the somatic and psychological dimensions shape everyday behavior and adaptive responses, the spiritual dimension enables freedom, responsibility, and the search for meaning. Frankl famously describes this capacity as the "last of human freedoms," allowing individuals to transcend immediate consumption, habitual adaptation, and biological or psychological determinism in favor of conscious, value-oriented action (Frankl, 2000; Kallio, 2015).

The theoretical premise of this study is that environmental degradation should be understood as an endogenous outcome of economic decision-making within institutionally structured markets rather than as an exogenous or purely technical failure (North, 1990; Ostrom, 2009). From this perspective, environmental ethics is not merely an external normative supplement to economic analysis. Instead, it functions as a critical conceptual lens that exposes the limitations of standard models of rationality—particularly when addressing long-term, systemic, and intergenerational environmental impacts that escape price mechanisms and conventional macroeconomic indicators (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008).

Integrating Frankl's triadic anthropology allows for an extension of the economic model of the actor beyond narrow assumptions of utility maximization and short-term preference satisfaction (Frankl, 2000; Sen, 1999). Within this conceptual framework, the spiritual (noetic) dimension is operationalized as the human capacity for autonomous, value-oriented reflection on the long-term consequences of action - especially those consequences that are not fully captured by market signals or immediate feedback mechanisms (Kahneman, 2011). This dimension is analytically distinct from the psychological dimension, which encompasses cognitive biases, emotional drives, and motivational patterns influencing short-term behavior. While the psychological dimension helps explain decision tendencies, the spiritual dimension enables individuals to critically evaluate these tendencies in light of ethical norms, social responsibility, and long-term ecological considerations.

This conceptual approach aligns with insights from institutional economics and behavioral decision-making theory (North, 1990; Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). It highlights that environmental externalities are not merely technical or regulatory problems but reflect a structural mismatch between short-term economic incentives and long-term social and ecological efficiency (Ostrom, 2009; Stern, 2007). Institutional arrangements—such as regulatory frameworks, market rules, and organizational hierarchies—interact with value-driven human agency by either enabling or constraining the capacity of individuals to act in accordance with long-term ethical and ecological priorities. Clarifying these interactions is essential for the design of governance frameworks and public policies that aim to promote sustainable behavior and the internalization of social and environmental costs.

## 2. Methodological Framework

The methodological foundation of this article is Viktor E. Frankl's triadic anthropology, which distinguishes three dimensions of human existence: somatic (bodily), psychological (mental), and spiritual (noetic) (Frankl, 2000). This framework is used as a heuristic tool to broaden the standard economic view of the actor, situating it within the wider context of contemporary economic theory (Sen, 1999; North, 1990). The goal is to move beyond the narrow model of *homo oeconomicus* and propose a more complete model of the acting subject that integrates biological, psychological, and value-based determinants of decision-making (Kahneman, 2011; Thaler & Sunstein, 2008).

As illustrated in Figure 1, the three dimensions are shown as overlapping areas in a Venn diagram. This visual model helps capture the interactions among biological constraints, psychological processes, and value orientations, and links them systematically to behavioral and institutional economics (Ostrom, 2009; Williamson, 1985).

The somatic dimension covers bodily and biological constraints on human action, which closely relate to behavioral economics concepts like bounded rationality (Kahneman, 2011). Physical condition, fatigue, stress, and time pressure influence decision-making, paralleling Kahneman's distinction between fast, intuitive decisions (System 1) and slow, reflective decisions (System 2). This dimension is represented on the left side of the Venn diagram.

The psychological dimension includes emotions, motivations, and cognitive processes. It aligns with key insights from Kahneman and Tversky's work on heuristics and cognitive biases (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). Richard Thaler further demonstrates that systematic deviations from rationality are structural rather than random, which must be considered in economic models (Thaler, 2015). This dimension explains why actual behavior often diverges from standard utility-maximization models (Kahneman, 2011; Thaler, 2015).

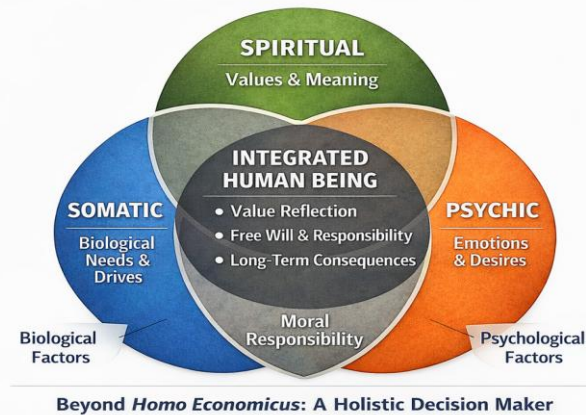
The spiritual dimension represents the capacity to engage with values, meaning, and responsibility, extending the behavioral perspective by introducing a normative and long-term horizon for action (Frankl, 2000; Kallio, 2015). This dimension is particularly relevant to institutional economics, as Douglass North (1990) emphasizes that economic behavior is shaped not only by formal rules but also by shared conventions, norms, and value systems. Oliver Williamson (1985) builds on this by highlighting governance structures, transaction costs, and the institutional embedding of decision-making. In the Venn diagram, the spiritual dimension occupies the upper section, showing that institutions can be interpreted not only as external constraints but also as expressions of internalized values and commitments voluntarily respected by actors (Williamson, 1985; Ostrom, 2009).

At the intersection of all three dimensions lies an integrated acting subject, whose decisions emerge from the interaction of biological constraints, psychological processes, and value-normative orientations (Frankl, 2000; Kahneman, 2011). This subject is capable of reflection on values, exercising free choice, and assuming responsibility for the long-term consequences of action (Kallio, 2015; Sen, 1999). Such a conception aligns with an institutional view of economic behavior, portraying individuals as active co-creators of

their institutional environment rather than passive responders to incentives (North, 1990; Ostrom, 2009).

By linking triadic anthropology with behavioral and institutional economics, this approach creates a holistic framework that transcends the traditional rationality/irrationality divide. Figure 1 demonstrates that economic behavior cannot be fully understood without simultaneously considering the somatic, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of human existence. This perspective provides a solid methodological foundation for analyzing economic behavior in contexts where long-term consequences, ethical responsibility, and institutional embeddedness are central (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008; Williamson, 1985).

**Figure 1. Triadic Anthropology of the Acting Subject**



Sources: Frankl, V. E. (1977). *The Unheard Cry for Meaning*. Pocket Books; Frankl, V. E. E. (1988). *The Will to Meaning*. Penguin Books. Own elaboration based on triadic anthropology.

In this study, the spiritual dimension is understood as the capacity of economic actors to reflect on the long-term environmental impacts of their decisions - impacts that are often not captured by market prices or standard macroeconomic indicators (Frankl, 2000; Kallio, 2015). These impacts, or externalities, are not merely technical problems of market failure; they reflect a deeper structural mismatch between short-term economic incentives and long-term social and ecological outcomes (Stern, 2007; Ostrom, 2009).

Epistemologically, the study is grounded in **critical realism** (Bhaskar, 1975) and combines positive analysis of the economic consequences of environmental degradation with normative reflection on responsibility and intergenerational justice (Sen, 1999; Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). This approach allows environmental ethics to be integrated with economic analysis, supporting an interdisciplinary understanding of the structural causes behind the environmental crisis (Norton, 2005; Callicott, 1999).

To ensure empirical grounding and strengthen validity, the study employs both case-based and **quantitative** methods. Case studies of industrial and agricultural practices illustrate how specific decision-making processes - shaped by institutional constraints and

value orientations - produce measurable environmental outcomes. For example, longitudinal analyses of regional land-use policies show correlations between regulatory frameworks, corporate decision-making, and indicators of ecosystem degradation, such as soil fertility decline and biodiversity loss (Ostrom, 2009; Stern, 2007).

In addition, quantitative modeling, including economic-environmental input-output simulations, allows the estimation of the economic costs of externalities that are not reflected in market prices, providing a concrete measure of the gap between short-term incentives and long-term sustainability (Kahneman, 2011). Combined, these methods validate the theoretical framework and demonstrate how ethical reflection, when operationalized, can guide economic actors toward responsible and sustainable action (North, 1990; Thaler & Sunstein, 2008).

### **3. Existential Vacuum and the Environmental Crisis: An Anthropological Reflection on Sustainability**

The contemporary ecological crisis is not merely the result of technical deficiencies or random environmental shocks, but has deep roots in the value-based and anthropological framework of modern society (Frankl, 2000; Kallio, 2015; Norton, 2005). Excessive consumption, capital-oriented economic growth, the systematic externalization of ecological costs, and the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources cannot be separated from a reductionist conception of the human being (Bookchin, 1990; Stern, 2007).

In traditional economics, the human being is often reduced to *homo oeconomicus* - an agent who maximizes immediate utility and minimizes costs - whose behavior is understood primarily as a somatic-psychological process driven by needs, emotions, and adaptive strategies (Kahneman, 2011; Thaler, 2015). This reductionism neglects the spiritual dimension of human existence, which, according to Frankl's triadic anthropology, provides the space for value reflection, the search for meaning, and free choice - elements essential for ethically responsible and environmentally sustainable behavior (Frankl, 2000; Kallio, 2015).

True human freedom, as defined by Frankl, lies in the ability to adopt an attitude toward any situation (Frankl, 2000). This capacity is fundamental to environmental ethics, since sustainable economic and social decisions often require self-limitation, the prioritization of long-term values, responsibility toward future generations, and the overcoming of immediate motivations (Sen, 1999; Norton, 2005). Such transcendence of spontaneous and impulsive reactions is possible only through the spiritual dimension (*noos*), which enables individuals to reflect on the consequences of their actions and to decide beyond the immediate pressures of biological and psychological dimensions (Frankl, 2000; Kallio, 2015).

Frankl also identified the phenomenon of the existential vacuum, understood as a loss of meaning that characterizes modern society and its cultural context (Frankl, 2000). This deficit of values and meaning contributes to the rise of consumerism, addictions, aggression, and irresponsible behavior (Bauman, 2007). Environmental degradation can thus be interpreted as a collective manifestation of this existential vacuum: individuals who fail to find deeper meaning seek substitutes in material consumption and the

instrumentalization of natural capital, thereby generating pressure on ecosystems and producing structural environmental externalities (Norton, 2005; Stern, 2007).

In this sense, environmental ethics signifies both a moral obligation and an anthropological as well as epistemological challenge. It highlights that economic and political strategies which ignore the spiritual and value-based dimensions of human decision-making are intrinsically unsustainable (Frankl, 2000; Kallio, 2015). Frankl's triadic anthropology therefore provides a framework for integrating ethics, economics, and sociology, in which environmental responsibility is understood not merely as a matter of resource regulation, but as a deeply rooted human capacity to reflect, deliberate, and bear the consequences of action across generational horizons (Frankl, 2000; Sen, 1999; Norton, 2005).

#### **4. The Environmental Crisis as an Economic–Anthropological Problem: Empirical Data, Systemic Externalities, and a Crisis of Meaning**

From an epistemological perspective, it is important to recognize that the contemporary environmental crisis is no longer merely a theoretically postulated risk—it is an empirically measurable reality, with economic impacts comparable to major global economic crises (Stern, 2007; IPBES, 2019). Modern environmental economics and institutional analysis provide robust data that allow environmental degradation to be understood as a systemic externality of the global economy (Ostrom, 2009; North, 1990).

Empirical assessments, such as those conducted by the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, indicate that climate change alone could cause annual economic losses of up to USD 38 trillion by mid-century due to reduced labor productivity, infrastructure damage, destabilized agriculture, and rising health costs (PIK, 2021). From a macroeconomic perspective, Stern (2007) notes that, without anthropogenic climate change, global GDP would be roughly 17% higher. Long-term projections suggest that inaction could reduce global GDP by as much as 50% between 2070 and 2090, representing a civilizationally transformative risk (IPBES, 2019).

Similarly, biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation carry enormous unaccounted economic costs. IPBES estimates that the economic consequences of inadequate policies in biodiversity, climate, water, health, and food security range from USD 10 to 25 trillion per year (IPBES, 2019). Invasive alien species provide a concrete example: accelerated by globalization and climate change, they generate over USD 423 billion in annual damages (IPBES, 2019). From the perspective of institutional economics, these global externalities highlight the structural inability of current market and regulatory mechanisms to internalize long-term ecological costs (North, 1990; Ostrom, 2009).

The dependence of the global economy on healthy ecosystems is equally striking. Analyses by the World Economic Forum show that roughly USD 44 trillion—over half of global GDP—depends directly on functioning ecosystems and biodiversity (WEF, 2020). The World Bank warns that the collapse of key ecosystem services, such as pollination, fisheries, or forestry, could reduce global GDP by USD 2.7 trillion annually as early as 2030 (World Bank, 2020).

Taken together, the scale of environmental damage - tens of trillions of dollars annually - cannot be explained simply as isolated regulatory failures or technological shortcomings (Stern, 2007; IPBES, 2019). It reflects a deeper epistemological and anthropological crisis, in which economic knowledge tends to reduce reality to measurable capital flows while neglecting value-based, social, and long-term consequences of human action (Frankl, 2000; Kallio, 2015).

Here, the heuristic value of Frankl's triadic anthropology becomes clear. The widespread externalization of environmental costs corresponds to economic behavior focused predominantly on somatic and psychological dimensions—on performance, adaptation, and immediate utility. In growth-oriented economic models, humans are implicitly reduced to rational optimizers or consumers, whose worth is measured in productivity, purchasing power, and adaptability. Meaning is replaced by efficiency, and responsibility by calculability (Frankl, 2000; Kallio, 2015). The absence of the spiritual dimension—a space for responsibility, meaning, and transcendent perspective—manifests at the macroeconomic level as society's structural inability to act sustainably.

A similar deficit appears in institutional models of sustainability that rely mainly on regulations, governance frameworks, or technocratic solutions. While institutionally robust, such approaches assume that behavior can be externally enforced without internal transformation of values and motivations (Meadowcroft, 2011; O'Neill, 2007). From Frankl's perspective, these models remain confined to the psychological and social dimensions, neglecting the spiritual (noetic) dimension, where moral responsibility, self-transcendence, and orientation toward meaning are formed (Frankl, 2000). Consequently, sustainability risks becoming mere compliance, and resilience is reduced to systemic adaptability rather than ethical and existential responsibility.

This anthropological reductionism is closely linked to the dominance of anthropocentrism in mainstream sustainability discourse. Traditional anthropocentric frameworks treat nature primarily as a resource for human well-being, economic growth, or intergenerational equity (Dobson, 1998; Norton, 2005). While these approaches may acknowledge environmental limits, they remain human-centered and risk reproducing the same logic of domination and externalization that drives ecological degradation (Plumwood, 2002). Competing paradigms - such as ecocentrism, biocentrism, relational ontology, and post-humanist ethics - challenge human exclusivity and emphasize the intrinsic value, agency, and vulnerability of non-human beings and ecosystems (Naess, 1989; Braidotti, 2013).

From this pluralistic perspective, sustainability cannot rely solely on “enlightened” anthropocentrism. Instead, it requires a reconfiguration of human self-understanding. Frankl's concept of self-transcendence offers a critical bridge, showing that meaning is realized not through domination or accumulation but through responsibility toward something beyond the self - another person, a community, future generations, or the natural world as a shared horizon of life (Frankl, 2000; Jonas, 1984). The spiritual dimension, therefore, does not reinforce anthropocentrism but relativizes it, opening space for an ethics of care, humility, and relational coexistence. Only through such an anthropologically integrated approach can sustainability move beyond technocratic management and growth imperatives toward a genuinely transformative societal paradigm.

## 5. Viktor E. Frankl and Triadic Anthropology in the Context of Environmental Ethics and Economics

The theoretical framework of this study is based on Viktor Emil Frankl's (1905–1997) conceptualization of human existence. Frankl, an Austrian psychiatrist, neurologist, and founder of logotherapy, grounded his approach in existential psychology and a philosophy of meaning (Frankl, 1959/2006; Frankl, 1969/1997). His experience of extreme suffering during the Second World War, particularly in concentration camps, fundamentally shaped his understanding of human freedom, responsibility, and the capacity to find meaning even under adverse conditions (Frankl, 1946/2019).

Frankl's triadic anthropology distinguishes three dimensions of human existence: somatic, psychological, and spiritual (Frankl, 1969/1997). The somatic dimension, the body, encompasses biological processes, physiological needs, and limitations that determine the basic conditions of human life. The psychological dimension (*psyche*) includes emotions, motivations, and mental processes which, although conditioned, can to a certain extent be reflected upon and regulated. The spiritual dimension (*noos*) represents a uniquely human sphere in which the capacity for free choice, value reflection, and the search for meaning is realized—what Frankl describes as the “last of human freedoms” (Frankl, 1946/2019).

In the context of environmental ethics and economics, Frankl's conception is methodologically significant. Environmental degradation and related economic externalities—such as losses caused by climate change, biodiversity decline, or the collapse of ecosystem services—are often interpreted primarily through the lens of short-term economic rationality and technocratic regulatory instruments (Daly & Farley, 2011; Stern, 2007). Frankl's framework allows this reduction to be overcome by demonstrating that human action cannot be fully understood without reference to the spiritual dimension, which enables individuals to adopt a stance toward the consequences of their decisions and to assume responsibility for their long-term and intergenerational impacts (Frankl, 1969/1997).

From an epistemological perspective, this approach complements classical environmental economics by explicitly integrating the value-based and meaning-oriented dimensions of human decision-making. It enables environmental externalities to be operationalized not only as measurable costs, but also as manifestations of a structural anthropological and ethical crisis of modern society (Daly, 1996; Jonas, 1984). At the same time, it connects empirical data on environmental damage with normative reflection, thereby providing an interdisciplinary framework for sustainable development policy, institutional reform, and ethical evaluation of economic decisions (Raworth, 2017).

In this way, Frankl's triadic anthropology can be employed not only as a theoretical but also as a methodological tool, enabling environmental degradation to be interpreted as a phenomenon that is simultaneously economic, socio-psychological, and ethically relevant, thus overcoming the traditional fragmentation of knowledge across economics, sociology, and philosophy (Jonas, 1984; Daly & Farley, 2011). By integrating the somatic, psychological, and spiritual dimensions, scholars and policymakers are better equipped to recognize the complex interplay between human behavior, institutional structures, and ecological outcomes, highlighting that sustainable development requires

more than technological fixes or economic incentives (Frankl, 1969/1997; Raworth, 2017). Extending this integrative framework presents a methodological challenge: how to empirically investigate spiritual influence and meaning-oriented decision-making without reducing them to simplified proxy indicators or instrumentalized metrics. Rather than attempting to quantify spirituality as a discrete variable, an anthropologically grounded approach conceptualizes the spiritual dimension as a field of orientation—manifested in responsibility, value commitments, and self-transcendent motivation—which becomes observable through patterns of decision-making, deliberative processes, and long-term strategic coherence (Frankl, 1969/1997; Raworth, 2017).

From this perspective, the measurement of spiritual influence does not rely on direct quantification but on relational and process-oriented indicators that capture the consistency between declared values, institutional practices, and outcomes over time. Qualitative methods—such as in-depth interviews, narrative analysis, ethical audits, and longitudinal case studies—are particularly suited to tracing how meaning-oriented rationalities inform governance decisions, risk assessments, and trade-offs between short-term efficiency and long-term resilience (Meadowcroft, 2011; O’Neill, 2007). These approaches allow researchers to identify whether decision-makers explicitly reference responsibility toward future generations, ecological integrity, or non-instrumental values when shaping policies and organizational strategies.

At the same time, mixed-methods research designs offer a promising pathway for empirically testing whether meaning-oriented decision-making yields measurable improvements in long-term environmental and economic outcomes. Quantitative analyses can be employed to examine correlations between governance frameworks characterized by value-driven orientation—such as extended planning horizons, precautionary principles, or stakeholder-inclusive processes—and observable outcomes, including resource efficiency, ecological regeneration, fiscal stability, and reduced volatility over time. When integrated into mixed-methods designs, these quantitative findings gain interpretive depth through qualitative insights that clarify why and how spiritual and ethical orientations shape institutional behavior, rather than merely whether they correlate with positive outcomes (Meadowcroft, 2011; O’Neill, 2007).

In governance contexts, this methodological pluralism enables a shift from evaluating sustainability solely through output metrics toward assessing the quality of decision-making processes themselves. Meaning-oriented governance can thus be operationalized not as an abstract moral ideal but as an empirically investigable orientation that enhances institutional learning, anticipatory capacity, and adaptive resilience. By avoiding reductive measurement while maintaining methodological rigor, this approach strengthens the empirical credibility of anthropologically integrated sustainability models and provides a viable bridge between normative theory and evidence-based policy design (Frankl, 1969/1997; Raworth, 2017; Meadowcroft, 2011; O’Neill, 2007).

The somatic dimension emphasizes the material and biological constraints that shape human interaction with natural resources. Recognition of these physical limits underlines the necessity of aligning economic activity with environmental thresholds, ensuring that societal progress does not compromise the integrity of ecosystems essential for human survival (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005; Rockström *et al.*, 2009). From an economic standpoint, this perspective aligns with the concept of natural capital,

whose degradation generates external costs borne by society and future generations (Daly, 1996; Pigou, 1920/2013).

The psychological dimension provides insight into the cognitive and motivational factors influencing environmentally relevant behavior. By acknowledging the roles of perception, biases, and long-term planning, this dimension allows for a better understanding of why humans often act against their ethical and ecological interests, despite awareness of environmental risks (Kahneman, 2011; Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). Finally, the spiritual dimension, or noos, situates responsibility and freedom at the core of ecological decision-making, emphasizing that meaningful engagement with sustainability involves the conscious integration of values, ethical reflection, and moral responsibility beyond immediate self-interest (Frankl, 1946/2019; Jonas, 1984; Kallio, 2015).

## **6. Viktor Frankl's Triadic Anthropology as a Framework for Environmental Ethics and Economic Responsibility**

The bodily dimension of the human being, the somatic sphere, represents the material and biological foundation of human existence. Frankl notes that at this level, humans are “captives” of natural laws, physiological needs, and biological limitations that determine their survival and functioning (Frankl, 1969/1997). From environmental, social, and economic perspectives, this dimension demonstrates that human existence is inseparably linked to ecosystems and that the availability and quality of natural resources directly affect living conditions, health, and productivity (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005). Economic activities that ignore ecological limits - such as soil degradation, biodiversity loss, climate change, or water pollution - have direct somatic impacts and threaten not only individuals but also the stability of entire societies (Rockström et al., 2009; Stern, 2007).

The biological grounding of humans sets the boundaries of economic activity and emphasizes the necessity of linking economic rationality with environmental rationality (Daly, 1996). Protecting natural systems is therefore not merely an ethical choice but a pragmatic condition for preserving human health, maintaining labor productivity, and ensuring long-term economic stability (Šetek et al., 2025; Siruček & Šetek, 2025). From an economic perspective, this entails recognizing natural capital as a key factor of production, the degradation of which generates external costs borne by society, markets, and states (Daly & Farley, 2011). These costs manifest, for example, in declining agricultural productivity, the loss of fisheries and forest resources, increased healthcare expenditures, or infrastructure damage caused by extreme climatic events (IPCC, 2023).

The psychic dimension of humans, the psyche, encompasses emotions, motivations, thinking, and cognitive processes. These mental mechanisms, although partly biologically and socially determined, provide space for reflection, planning, and adaptation (Frankl, 1969/1997). In an environmental context, the psychic dimension allows individuals and societies to evaluate the risks of environmental degradation, anticipate the long-term impacts of economic decisions, and regulate impulsive behavior that could lead to unsustainable exploitation of natural resources (Kahneman, 2011).

Psychic reflection serves as an essential bridge between biological needs and spiritual choices: a person becomes aware of their limits, values, and goals and, on this basis, can make decisions that minimize environmental harm, optimize the use of natural capital, and support long-term economic sustainability (OECD, 2019). From an economic standpoint, this dimension enables the internalization of environmental externalities, which is crucial to achieving an efficient distribution of resources and preventing systematic market failures (Pigou, 1920/2013).

The spiritual dimension, the noos, represents a uniquely human space of free choice, the search for meaning, and the adoption of attitudes that transcend immediate biological or psychic motivations. Frankl emphasizes that this “last human freedom” is essential for environmental ethics, as it allows consideration of values, responsibility toward future generations, and the long-term consequences of economic decisions (Frankl, 1946/2019). Environmentally sustainable behavior often requires overcoming immediate self-interest, taking into account broader social and ecological consequences, and prioritizing long-term values over short-term gains (Jonas, 1984).

The spiritual dimension enables humans to assume responsibility for environmental externalities, internalize their costs in decision-making processes, and recognize nature not only as a resource but as a value whose protection is morally, epistemologically, and economically binding (Raworth, 2017). This approach supports the development of sustainable business strategies, environmental accounting, green financing, and long-term investments in ecosystem restoration, which directly relate to macroeconomic stability and the competitiveness of states and enterprises (UNEP, 2021).

The integration of somatic, psychic, and spiritual dimensions provides a comprehensive framework for interpreting environmental degradation and economic externalities. The somatic dimension sets the limits and material conditions of life; the psychic dimension enables reflection, planning, and adaptation; and the spiritual dimension offers a space for value orientation, meaningful decision-making, and responsible action. This tripartite approach overcomes the reductionism of traditional economics, which often views humans merely as *homo oeconomicus* oriented toward maximizing short-term utility (Daly, 1996).

Environmental externalities, biodiversity loss, the collapse of ecosystem services, or the impacts of climate change are thus not merely technical or economic problems but manifestations of an imbalanced development of human existence (Rockström *et al.*, 2009). Ignoring the spiritual dimension and reducing humans to biological and psychic processes leads to a structural inability of society to act sustainably. Frankl’s triadic anthropology therefore provides a methodological and epistemological framework that allows environmental and economic issues to be understood as a complex phenomenon linking biological conditioning, psychic reflection, and spiritual freedom, offering an interdisciplinary foundation for environmental policy, institutional reforms, ethical economic governance, and the evaluation of long-term investments in sustainable development (Frankl, 1969/1997; Jonas, 1984).

## 7. Environmental Ethics and Economics – Applying Frankl’s Triadic Anthropology to Sustainable Decision-Making

Based on this triadic structure, environmental ethics can be interpreted not only as a theoretical framework but also as a practical tool for assessing economic behavior and promoting sustainable decision-making (Frankl, 1969/1997; Jonas, 1984). Frankl’s anthropology positions environmental ethics as integral to economic action, rather than an external normative correction. It cannot be reduced to legal regulations, technical measures, or market instruments; instead, it reflects the deep anthropological interconnection of economic, cultural, institutional, and spiritual factors (Daly, 1996; Raworth, 2017).

Economic systems are not value-neutral mechanisms; they embody specific conceptions of human needs, goals, and responsibilities toward society and the environment (Polanyi, 1944/2001). Individual and institutional economic behavior represents a set of implicit ethical choices. Consumption, investment, production, or lifestyle decisions carry economic, environmental, and social consequences that affect natural capital, risk distribution, and intergenerational justice (Stern, 2007; Daly & Farley, 2011). Frankl’s spiritual dimension enables actors to reflect on these consequences, adopt a responsible stance, and internalize environmental costs (Frankl, 1946/2019).

The economic actor is thus seen as capable of prioritizing sustainable products and services, supporting circular economy principles, and favoring long-term societal benefits over short-term individual gain (Pigou, 1920/2013; UNEP, 2021). This approach challenges the reduction of economics to utility maximization and introduces the concept of a meaning-centered economy. Economic activity becomes a means of fulfilling human dignity and maintaining balance between humans and the environment (Frankl, 1959/2006; Sen, 2009). The protection of natural resources does not constitute an obstacle to development, but rather a fundamental prerequisite for long-term stability, resilience, and quality of life. From the perspective of Frankl’s triadic anthropology, such protection reflects the human capacity to relate to values, meaning, and responsibility, enabling actions that internalize environmental externalities, respect ecological limits, and promote sustainable coexistence with nature. This approach integrates ethical, economic, and institutional dimensions, thereby creating a framework for decision-making that is not only resource-efficient but also morally and value-based (Rockström et al., 2009; Raworth, 2017; Frankl, 2000; North, 1990).

Frankl’s concept of *noetic freedom* emphasizes that sustainability is not an automatic outcome of regulation or market incentives but a conscious, value-based choice (Frankl, 1969/1997; Jonas, 1984). Environmentally responsible economic behavior must be supported by cultural and ethical conditions enabling internalization of environmental costs at both individual and collective levels (Sen, 2009; UNEP, 2021). Economic action thus becomes a space of ethical possibilities, shaping not only resource allocation efficiency but also the human relationship with society and nature. Frankl’s triadic anthropology provides an interdisciplinary foundation for a sustainability ethics that links economic rationality with responsibility, meaning, and long-term perspective (Frankl, 1946/2019; Daly & Farley, 2011).

## 8. Sustainability and Ethics in Inclusive Capitalism – A Franklian Perspective

Viktor Frankl's triadic anthropology offers a methodological and ethical framework that allows the operationalization of the principles of inclusive capitalism—an economic system aiming to align economic performance with social justice and environmental sustainability (Frankl, 1969/1997; Zadek et al., 2015). The somatic dimension provides a scientific basis for quantifying natural resources, their limits, and the environmental impacts of economic activity, corresponding to concepts of natural capital and ecological limits to growth (Daly, 1996; Raworth, 2017). The psychological dimension incorporates insights from behavioral economics, human motivation, and systematic deviations from rationality, which are key to understanding why even ethically oriented actors may act contrary to sustainability principles in practice (Kahneman, 2011). The spiritual dimension enables the internalization of social and environmental externalities, promoting decision-making guided by long-term meaning, responsibility, and value-based orientation (Frankl, 1946/2019; Jonas, 1984). This framework thus allows economic actors to be defined not merely as carriers of preferences, but as responsible agents capable of implementing sustainable and socially just strategies (Sen, 2009).

For businesses, governmental institutions, and the nonprofit sector, the integration of Frankl's anthropology with inclusive capitalism provides concrete analytical and normative tools. Strategic decision-making extends beyond immediate financial gains to incorporate long-term environmental and social consequences, aligning with contemporary approaches to ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance), sustainable finance, and responsible investing (UNEP, 2021). Corporate culture and governance systems embed values and ethical principles into decision-making and employee motivation, strengthening long-term organizational stability and legitimacy (Porter & Kramer, 2011). Sustainable development policies promote regulations and economic incentives that reflect intergenerational responsibility, natural capital preservation, and social cohesion (OECD, 2019). Such practices create synergy between economic efficiency and social-environmental responsibility, forming the core of inclusive capitalism (Zadek et al., 2015).

Frankl's triadic anthropology provides a unique analytical and normative framework for inclusive capitalism. By integrating the somatic, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of human existence, it permits economic behavior to be understood not merely as a matter of efficiency, but also as an expression of meaning, values, and responsibility (Frankl, 1959/2006). The spiritual dimension, crucial for reflecting on the long-term impacts of economic decisions, facilitates the internalization of social and environmental externalities, enabling economic actors to make choices consistent with sustainability, justice, and ethical responsibility (Jonas, 1984; Raworth, 2017). The integration of Frankl's anthropology with inclusive capitalism thus opens the space for a “meaning-centered economy,” in which economic activity is not an end in itself for accumulation, but a means to uphold human dignity and promote sustainable development for society and the planet.

## **9. Viktor Frankl's Triadic Anthropology and Pope Francis's Integral Ecology - A Social-Scientific Framework for Ecological Responsibility**

A comparative analysis of Viktor E. Frankl's triadic anthropology and Pope Francis's concept of integral ecology reveals significant convergence in their critique of reductionist approaches that, in late-modern societies, profoundly shape both conceptions of human nature and approaches to environmental issues (Frankl, 1946/2019; Francis, 2015). From a social-scientific perspective, these reductionisms can be interpreted as structural features of modernity, characterized by the fragmentation of reality and the separation of social, economic, cultural, and environmental dimensions, which are in fact deeply interrelated (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991).

Frankl's anthropology consistently rejects the reduction of humans to biological or psychological determinants, emphasizing that such perspectives weaken autonomy, responsibility, and the capacity for meaningful action (Frankl, 1959/2006). Social-scientifically, this can be read as a critique of behavioral, technocratic, and utilitarian models of human behavior (Kahneman, 2011), which explain actions primarily through stimuli, preferences, or adaptive strategies. Similarly, Pope Francis's integral ecology rejects framing the ecological crisis as an isolated technical problem solvable without addressing social inequalities, cultural patterns, and value orientations (Francis, 2015). Both approaches critique paradigms that reduce complex social reality to discrete, instrumentally manageable elements.

These perspectives converge on the premise that contemporary ecological problems cannot be separated from broader crises of meaning and responsibility in modern societies. Frankl describes this condition as the "existential vacuum," manifested in a loss of orientation, weakened value frameworks, and the rise of consumerist and instrumental approaches to the world (Frankl, 1946/2019). Integral ecology interprets the same phenomenon as a consequence of technocratic paradigms that foster individualistic and utilitarian behavioral patterns while weakening the capacity for collective action toward long-term goals, including environmental protection and social cohesion (Francis, 2015; Jonas, 1984).

From a social-theoretical standpoint, the key link is Frankl's concept of meaning with responsibility for the so-called "common home." Meaning is understood not merely as a subjective construct but as a relational and socially mediated category, realized in institutional and cultural contexts (Sen, 2009). Environmental stewardship is thus not only a normative requirement but part of a broader process of social integration, in which individuals find significance through contributions to community, society, and future generations (Francis, 2015). Integral ecology extends traditional environmental ethics by explicitly including a social dimension, emphasizing that ecologically responsible behavior depends on structures of solidarity, trust, and shared values (Beck, 1992; Bauman, 2000).

Frankl's anthropology provides a micro-social foundation, showing that motivation for responsible action is rooted in the human capacity for self-transcendence and orientation toward values that exceed narrowly defined self-interest (Frankl, 1959/2006). This capacity is crucial for understanding prosocial and pro-environmental behavior, which cannot be fully explained by rational choice or economic calculation alone (Kahneman, 2011; Giddens, 1991).

A further point of convergence is the treatment of suffering and social vulnerability. Frankl's understanding of suffering as a potential source of meaning offers an analytical framework to understand crisis management strategies at individual and collective levels (Frankl, 1946/2019). Integral ecology extends this to a structural dimension, highlighting the uneven distribution of environmental risks and their disproportionate impact on socially disadvantaged groups (Francis, 2015; Jonas, 1984). From the perspective of social policy and environmental sociology, integral ecology thus provides not only a normative appeal but also an analytical framework for studying the relationships among ecological crises, social inequality, and institutional responsibility (Beck, 1992; Bauman, 2000).

This analytical framework can be deepened through dialogue with late-modernity theories, particularly the works of Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, Zygmunt Bauman, and Hans Jonas. Beck's risk society theory frames the ecological crisis as a "manufactured risk" whose consequences transcend national borders, social groups, and generations (Beck, 1992). Integral ecology aligns with this perspective by emphasizing global interconnections among ecological, social, and economic problems, while Frankl's anthropology complements this macro-analysis by showing how individuals interpret risks and how their responses depend on the meaning they assign to their actions (Frankl, 1959/2006).

Giddens's concept of reflexive modernity highlights that actors must make decisions under conditions of uncertainty and expert knowledge (Giddens, 1991), particularly regarding environmental threats. Frankl's notion of responsibility, anchored in the spiritual dimension, frames ecological action as an expression of existential orientation, not merely a reaction to expert discourse (Frankl, 1946/2019). Integral ecology complements this reflexivity with a normative dimension, emphasizing the need for value-based decision-making that transcends individual risk calculations (Francis, 2015).

Bauman's analyses of liquid modernity and consumer society help to understand the cultural conditions exacerbating the ecological crisis. Consumerism emerges as a cultural pattern promoting short-term thinking, instant gratification, and instrumentalization of the world (Bauman, 2000). Frankl's diagnosis of the existential vacuum resonates closely with this critique (Frankl, 1946/2019). Integral ecology responds by rejecting a "culture of discarding," which affects both people and nature (Francis, 2015).

Hans Jonas provides an ethical and social framework connecting technological development, ecological responsibility, and intergenerational solidarity (Jonas, 1984). His principle of responsibility overlaps with integral ecology's emphasis on protecting future generations, while Frankl's anthropology offers an anthropological justification for this ethical imperative (Frankl, 1959/2006). Only humans capable of transcending immediate self-interest and assuming responsibility for what exceeds them can act in accordance with ecological sustainability in technologically advanced societies (Jonas, 1984).

From a social-scientific perspective, linking Frankl's triadic anthropology, Pope Francis's integral ecology, and the above sociological theories enables the formulation of a comprehensive framework for ecological responsibility, connecting individual motivation with institutional, cultural, and structural conditions of action (Beck, 1992; Francis, 2015; Giddens, 1991). Rather than being solely an environmental or technical challenge, the ecological crisis constitutes a complex social phenomenon in which questions of meaning, identity, power, and responsibility intersect (Bauman, 2000; Frankl,

1946/2019). This approach provides a theoretical basis for analyzing value orientations, cultural change, and institutional frameworks that shape the possibilities for sustainable development in late-modern societies (Francis, 2015; Jonas, 1984).

## 10. Conclusion

The analysis shows that the contemporary environmental crisis cannot be fully understood as merely a technical, economic, or regulatory problem. Instead, it reflects a profound anthropological challenge, rooted in the dimensions of meaning, freedom, and responsibility inherent in human existence (Frankl, 1946/2019; Francis, 2015; Jonas, 1984). Mainstream economic models, based on reductionist views of humanity, often interpret human behavior primarily as utility maximization, short-term preferences, and adaptive strategies (Kahneman, 2011; Sen, 2009). These approaches fail to adequately account for ethical responsibility, long-term thinking, and value-based decision-making—qualities essential for genuine sustainable development. In this sense, the failure to achieve sustainability is as much an anthropological issue as it is a technical or economic one.

Viktor E. Frankl's triadic anthropology offers an integrative framework to understand sustainability as a challenge that encompasses the somatic, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of human existence (Frankl, 1959/2006). The spiritual dimension (noos) provides a source of meaning, moral responsibility, and self-transcendence, which are essential for internalizing social and environmental externalities that markets or regulatory frameworks alone cannot address (Frankl, 1946/2019; Francis, 2015). Sustainability therefore requires the human capacity for conscious ethical choice, in which freedom is not just the ability to select among alternatives but the power to reflect on one's conditions, responsibilities, and values (Frankl, 1959/2006; Kahneman, 2011).

From this perspective, sustainable decision-making integrates ethical reflection with economic reasoning. Long-term economic planning, resource efficiency, and intergenerational equity are meaningful only when embedded in ethical commitments and responsibility toward future generations (Jonas, 1984; Francis, 2015; Sen, 2009). Such decisions involve voluntary self-restraint and the prioritization of collective benefits over immediate individual gains, reflecting the human capacity for self-overcoming and value-driven action (Frankl, 1946/2019; Beck, 1992). Triadic anthropology thus provides a conceptual bridge connecting macro-level institutional reforms with micro-level human motivation, enabling policies that promote both structural change and ethically informed behavior.

Frankl's concept of the existential vacuum - the loss of meaning in modern societies - can help explain unsustainable consumption, resource exploitation, and short-termism (Frankl, 1946/2019; Bauman, 2000). Environmental degradation, in this view, reflects systemic deficits in meaning, orientation, and solidarity. Achieving sustainability therefore requires cultural and normative transformations: shifts in values, lifestyles, and collective perceptions of success, inseparable from ethical reflection and institutional design (United Nations, 2015; Giddens, 1991).

Integrating Frankl's anthropological insights into economic reasoning expands the concept of rationality beyond short-term efficiency, utility maximization, or GDP growth (Sen, 2009; Kahneman, 2011). Sustainable economic models increasingly emphasize long-

term value creation, inclusive growth, and the internalization of environmental and social costs (Francis, 2015). By framing economic actors as responsible agents capable of ethically informed decisions, triadic anthropology aligns **human motivation with sustainability objectives**, linking micro-level choices with macro-level outcomes (Frankl, 1959/2006; Jonas, 1984).

In governance and policy contexts, this perspective supports intergenerational responsibility, anticipatory action, and adaptive resilience. Mixed approaches combining ethical reflection with institutional reform foster transformative processes, bridging the gap between short-term economic incentives and long-term societal benefits (Beck, 1992; Francis, 2015). By framing sustainability as an anthropological challenge, this framework underscores that technological or regulatory measures alone are insufficient: lasting change depends on the human capacity for meaning, self-transcendence, and responsible freedom.

Overall, integrating Frankl's triadic anthropology into sustainability discourse provides a conceptual framework uniting normative reflektivní, ethical responsibility, and economic rationality (Frankl, 1959/2006; Francis, 2015). It positions sustainable development as a transformative process rooted in human freedom and the capacity to act responsibly toward both present and future generations. By linking micro-level human motivation, macro-level institutional change, and intergenerational ethical obligations, this perspective promotes a holistic understanding of sustainability, integrating environmental integrity, social well-being, and value-driven economic decision-making (United Nations, 2015; Jonas, 1984; Bauman, 2000).

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