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Viktor Frankl's Thought and Its Potential to Enrich Humanistic Management from a Personalist Perspective

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Abstract
Viktor E. Frankl's logotherapy is grounded in experience and in an explicit philosophical anthropology influenced by existentialist thinkers such as Søren Kierkegaard and Gabriel Marcel, by Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue, Max Scheler's phenomenology, and Aristotelian-Thomistic ontology. Frankl's conception of the person recognises the human being as an indivisible unity, irreducible to larger wholes, unique in existence, endowed with a spiritual dimension, oriented toward meaning, and essentially relational—entailing existence-with-others. The person is also endowed with freedom and the corresponding responsibility, characterised by a transcendent orientation (not closed in on self), and possesses inherent dignity rather than mere utility value. Although Frankl is often described as an existentialist psychiatrist, this article argues that he is more accurately situated within the tradition of personalism. His conception of the human being can contribute to enriching the philosophical foundations of the contemporary Humanistic Management movement by providing new horizons for a humanistic-personalist approach that places the person and his or her existential characteristics at the centre of management.

Keywords Humanistic psychology · Will to meaning · V. E. frank · Personalism · Humanistic management

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Introduction

Humanistic Management (HM) has gained increasing prominence since the second decade of the 21 st century (Spitzeck et al. 2009; Melé 2009; Dierksmeier 2016b; Pirson 2017a,b; Dion et al. 2022; Scalzo et al. 2023; Akrivou et al. 2023). This movement champions the centrality of the human being in business management, in contrast to economism, which reduces management to the pursuit of economic outcomes as the exclusive or primary criterion. This emerging approach it seems a promising framework for rethinking business practice. However, this proposal is far from a finished edifice, and new insights are welcome. One fruitful direction may be to revisit *Humanistic Psychology* (HP) (Swart 1973), which was influential during the first wave of Humanistic Management (Melé 2003), in middle of the last century, though it is rarely referenced in contemporary discourse of this qualified management.

Prominent figures of Humanistic Psychology, such as Abraham Maslow and Frederick Herzberg, introduced a psychological lens to management in opposition to the dominant mechanistic and organicist models of their time (Gibson and Teasley 1973; Kovalenko 2020). These thinkers emphasised the uniqueness of the individual and the motivational dimensions of work, highlighting self-actualisation and higher-order needs as key drivers of engagement.

Yet their contributions—in particular that by Maslow who probablily was the most prominent psychological insight for HM in the 20th century—have been criticised for lacking sufficient philosophical and ethical grounding in their conception of the human person (Acevedo 2018). Other notable humanistic psychologists, such as Carl Rogers and Viktor Frankl, have seldom been explored in management studies. This paper addresses this gap by focusing on Viktor E. Frankl (1905–1997), Austrian psychiatrist and founder of *Logotherapy*—a therapeutic approach that contrasted with both psychoanalysis and behaviourism, the dominant paradigms at the time of its emergence.

As will be discussed, the worldview underlying Frankl's anthropology finds expression in his philosophical training, his psychiatric practice, and his personal stance toward life. His post-war writings integrate psychiatry and philosophy into a unique synthesis grounded in both his biography and his intellectual formation. Despite Frankl's wide recognition in psychiatry, his philosophical thought remains underexplored in the field of management.

Although Frankl is often described as an existentialist psychiatrist, this article contends that his philosophical anthropology is more accurately situated within the tradition of *personalism*. As it will be discussed below, Frankl's thought reflects the influence of key personalist thinkers—broadly understood—including existentialists such as Søren Kierkegaard and Gabriel Marcel, dialogical philosophers such as Martin Buber, together with Max Scheler's phenomenology and Thomistic ontology.

Our aim is to demonstrate that Frankl's conception of the human person holds significant potential to contribute to the development of humanistic management, and, in particular, to enrich the emerging field of *Humanistic-Personalist Management*—a strand of humanistic management grounded in personalist philosophy. This orientation is implicit in the recently articulated *humanistic person-centred view of the firm* (Melé 2024), although it has not yet been systematically elaborated at the conceptual level.

The paper is structured in four sections. Sect."Introducing Viktor Frank and Logotherapy" briefly introduces Viktor Frankl within his historical context, outlining the essential elements

of logotherapy and explaining how it differs from other psychological and philosophical approaches. Sect. "Frankl's Conception of the Human Being" examines Frankl's philosophical conception of the human being as articulated in his writings and through the logotherapy method, with special attention to the *Ten Theses on the Human Person* formulated by Frankl. Sect. "Influence of Personalist Thinkers on Frank's Conception of the Person" analyses the influence of well-known personalist thinkers on Frankl's philosophical anthropology. In light of the preceding sections, Sect. "Enrichment of Humanistic Management from Frankl's Thought" discusses how Frankl's philosophical anthropology can enrich contemporary philosophical approaches to Humanistic Management from a personalist perspective. This discussion opens the door to further research on Humanistic-Personalist Management, particularly by exploring specific insights from Frankl that can be applied to the practice of management and leadership.

Introducing Viktor Frank and Logotherapy

Viktor Frank in his Context

Viktor Emil Frankl's existence has been categorized as *A Life Worth Living* (Redsand 2006). Several sources provide biographical information of him[1]. He was born in Vienna to a Jewish family, and from an early age, he showed an interest in psychology and philosophy. He studied medicine at the University of Vienna, specializing in psychiatry and neurology, with a focus on depression and suicide prevention. After earning a doctorate in medicine in 1930, Frankl joined the staff of the Am Steinhof psychiatric hospital in Vienna, where he headed the female suicide prevention program from 1933 to 1937. Later, he established a private psychiatric practice.

Frankl's early professional formation took place within a rich circle of psychoanalysts. At the turn of the 20th century, Vienna's *Psychoanalytic Society* was founded and became the most influential hub for global psychoanalytic theories and theorists, including Alfred Adler, Sigmund Freud, Wilhelm Stekel, and later, Viktor Frankl himself. During the 1920s and 1930 s, both Freud and Adler were major influences on Frankl. However, he later developed his own approach, *Logotherapy*, which became one of the most prominent schools of modern psychology, often referred to as the "Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy."

In 1938, following the annexation of Austria into Nazi Germany (the *Anschluss*), Frankl, as a Jew, was deported and imprisoned to Nazi concentration camps during World War II; during this experience Frankl developed a profound personal experience of the depths of suffering, and the resilience of the human spirit despite unimaginable adversity, which were central to his existential therapy approach. Following the end of the War he originally published in German in 1946 the work: *...trotzdem Ja zum Leben sagen: Ein Psychologe erlebt das Konzentrationslager*, which translates to *Nevertheless*, *Say Yes to Life: A Psychologist Experiences the Concentration Camp.* That book was translated into English in 1959, with the title *Man's Search for Meaning* to better capture its universal philosophical and psychological themes. This book (Frankl 1984 [1959]) introduces *Logotherapy*, *his approach to psychotherapy*.

[1] Basically, we have used as sources Britannica, Viktor Frankl: https://www.britannica.com/biography/Viktor-Frankl, and Viktor Frankl Institute: https://viktorfrankl.org/lifeandwork.html.

After the war, Frankl also completed his Philosophy dissertation *Der unbewusste Gott* (*The Unconscious God)*, which later became a book (Frankl 1975 [1948]), which finally was republished as *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning* (Frankl 1997). Other remarkable books by Frankl are *The Doctor and the Soul* (1973 [1946]), *The Will to Meaning* (2014 [1969]) and *The Unheard Cry for Meaning: Psychotherapy and Humanism* (2011 [1979]). He also published several articles on philosophical aspects of his thought, most of them reprinted in *The feeling of meaninglessness: A challenge to psychotherapy and philosophy* (Frankl 2010), edited by A. Batthyány.

Viktor Frank's Logotherapy

Logotherapy is known as existential approach to psychotherapy (Diamond 2014). It is a philosophically routed response to the two dominant schools of psychiatry at the time, the Freudian psychoanalysis, which emphasized pleasure and the influence of unconscious sexual and aggressive drives on human behaviour, and the Adlerian psychotherapy (Individual Psychology), which focused on the inferiority complex and the will to power (Klingberg 2020). Logotherapy's anthropology stems from a rejection of modern scientific psychology's tendency to dehumanize individuals by treating them as mere objects of study; in his words, "The de-neuroticization of humanity requires a re-humanization of psychotherapy" says Frankl (1975 [1948]): 104).

Logotherapy, as Frankl explains, is "a humanized psychiatry" (1984 [1959]: 135). It is not an "existential psychiatry" (1965: 171) but its anthropology as Frankl explains is rooted in the Greek term Logos— which is capturing the notions of *word* and *reason*," but also "higher meaning" or "spirit" (Frankl 1975 [1948]). As such the logotherapy brings to psychiatry an explicit recognition of the spiritual dimension of the human person as anthropological root. From this spiritual existence suggests Frankl the human purpose orienting a personal deeper need and prerogative of searching for and finding meaning (Frankl 1975 [1948]; 2014[1969]).

Logotherapy accepts the innate, existential desire of each human being as a distinct person to discover a purpose linked with their spiritual being linked with an unconscious God and the notion of will to meaning as uniquely human accounting for the resilience of the human spirit: one which is a buffer against dehumanisation (Frankl 1984 [1946]), even amidst pain or being treated as an object to be exterminated", (Frankl 1984 [1959]: 111). Such understanding of roots of purpose driving meaning allows Logotherapy to suggest an alternative anthropology vis a vis a worldview in philosophy "which no longer recognised the value of human life and human dignity" (1984 [1959]: 111).This is such a strong foundation which, beyond the particular existential approach of Logotherapy renders its philosophical anthropology oriented toward the aim for it to be in the service of the human beings, aiming towards the bold "*re-humanization of psychotherapy."* (Frankl 1975 [1948], p. 104). Frankl's work elevates purpose and the spiritual existence of the human being as sources for meaning against an existential vacuum (Frankl 1984 [1959]: 111). This recovers the purpose driving the human spirit's resilience and human meaning (1962; 1964; 1965; Klingberg 2020). Indeed, for Frankl (1984 [1946]); 1965; 1966), existential frustration—a sense of emptiness or futility—is often a symptom not of pathology, but of the absence of human beings' connection to our spiritual existence and purpose driving true meaning in life and everyday activity. As Lukas and Hirsch (2002) point out, logotherapy distinguishes

itself from conventional existential analysis precisely in this regard: it does not concern itself merely with the structure of existence, but it asserts that "man is in search of meaning" as a defining anthropological and therapeutic claim.

Logotherapy, therefore, is not primarily symptom-focused, but an existential personalist psychiatry approach which aims to help individuals discover meaning in their lives, particularly through suffering, responsibility, and freedom (Frankl 1984 [1946]; 1966). Importantly for Frankl these are Logotherapy's "theory underlying its practice-a Theoria, i.e. a vision, a *Weltanschauung*." (Frankl 1964:171).

Frankl's Conception of the Human Being

In Frankl's writings, one finds a vision of the human being that reflects a philosophical anthropology. A first approach to this vision is expressed in what he calls *three pillars of logotherapy* (1962; 1964; 1965; 2010 [1964]). More explicitly, Frankl also bequeathed a set of *theses on the person*, which provide a concise synthesis of his understanding of the human person. This section reviews both of these key contributions.

Three Pillars of Logotherapy

Frankl explains that logotherapy is based on three pillars, which form a chain of links interconnected with one another: (1) *freedom of will*; (2) *will to meaning*; and (3) *meaning of life*." (1966:171).

Freedom of Will

Logotherapy links the personal freedom of will to the connection to who we are, the spiritual roots of the human being, while the loss of the will to meaning brings about in Frankl's words "*dehumanization and depersonalization"* (1984 [1959]: 60–61). Freedom of will therefore are not linked with individualist self-expression but to meaning, and superior meaning and purpose (1959; 2010 [1961]; 1962) linked with self- transcendence.

For Frankl, the freedom of will is a specifically human phenomena, even if the human being man is never free from these conditions (biology, psychology, sociology) "he always remains free to take a stand toward these conditions… capable of taking a stand, not only toward the world but also toward himself,…(as) man is capable of reflecting and even rejecting himself" (1966: 172). For Frankl, humans are not entirely determined by biology or environment. Frankl (1965; 1966) emphasised that even in the worst circumstances, individuals retain the freedom to choose their attitude as a new dimension open to the human beings, the noetic dimension of will, which allows rising above the somatic, psychic and social phenomena. Also, according to Frankl, freedom of will is integral to human dignity and being forced or subjected to its denial means a push toward hopelessness by the denial of the inner spiritual freedom, which ultimately objectifies a human being, as if one is part of an enormous mass, or a flock of sheep, forcing an idealization of an "enforced community life in which attention is being paid to everything one does all the time, (which) may result in an irresistible urge to get away, at least for a short while" (1984 [1959]: p. 61).

Will to Meaning

Frankl argues "the tension between being and meaning is ineradicable in man. It is inherent in being human" (Frankl 1966:178) as being human is being oriented towards meaning. Being human means "being confronted with" meaning and ultimate meaning (1966: 178); which for Frankl requires transcendence; and this goes beyond values which may be seen as defence or rationalisation of instinctually driven (Frankl 1966). According to Frankl, the *will to meaning* expresses the fundamental human motivation to find purpose in life. This orientation toward meaning underpins human dignity, endows life with value, and affirms the person's spiritual dimension (Frankl 1984 [1959]). Frankl's understanding of the will to meaning differs from more individualist other kinds of willing (hedonic or power) and self-actualisation which are for Frankl oversimplifications of who is the human being (Frankl 1966, 2010 [1960]).

Logotherapy aims to help with personal discovery of meaning (Frankl 1984 [1959]; 1965; 1966) linked to self-transcendences but to this aim it involves a spiritual and transcendent pursuit and quest (Frankl 1984 [1959]; 1965; 1966). This approach involves "therapy, …, which dares to enter the specifically human dimension" (1984[1959]:107). According to Frankl primary human drive is to find purpose. Thus, "will to meaning" is seen as the primary motivation of human beings; and when it's lost there is a personal experience of meaninglessness, existential frustration or apathy in life (Frankl 1984 [1959]).

Meaning of Life

This tenet of logotherapy aims in confronting the problem of existential frustration, for which Frankl opines a new height psychology is going to replace the old fashioned "depth psychology" (1966:184). To rise above one's individualistic self, Frankl emphasizes that meaning is not given but must be discovered (1966: 183) but requires purpose in life as driver, beyond self-actualisation and expression instead aiming for the "self-transcendence of existence towards the world as an objective reality….To speak of the world as a mere 'design' of the cognitive subject is to do injustice to the full phenomenon of the cognitive act which is *the self-transcendence of existence toward the world as an objective reality*. It is true that man…. Can only make a subjective selection from the full spectrum of the world: nevertheless, he is always making a subjective selection of an objective world" (Frankl 2010 [1967]:102).

Fundamentally, therefore any man can, decide what shall become of him- mentally and spiritually" (Frankl 1984 [1959]: 75). Frankl thinks this, the *spiritual freedom*, represents the last inner human freedom which can neither be taken away, nor be lost and therefore always allows connection to purpose and keeping one's inner liberty and freedom and moral compass and with faith and hope (1984 [1959]: 84). Logotherapy is suggesting that taking this stance towards one's own life conditions characterises being human and personal discovery of life meaning allows responsibleness (2010 [1967]:117), a responsible meaningful life. Therefore, Frankl (2010 [1967]:171) suggests that "man's mind is free to make choices" as each "man is responsible for the fulfilment of the specific meaning of his personal life" say Frankl (2010 [1967]):116). Meaning "cannot be prescribed as a drag" (2010 [1967]):126) but must be linked with a higher purpose or cause (Frankl 1975 [1948]).

Frankl explains that Logotherapy creates hope in the resilience of the human spirit, supporting human beings to succeed in their deeply rooted spiritual need of purpose and meaning "getting them to realize that life was still expecting something from them; something in the future was expected of them" (Frankl 1984 [1959]: 87). So for Frankl "even in unavoidable pain, one can choose how to respond out of their freedom and dignity" (Frankl 1985; 2005 [1984]) Hence purpose in life is "through what we give to life (…our creative works), second what we take from the world (…values be it in nature or culture); and third through the stand we take toward a fate we no longer can change….However, even apart from this, man is not spared facing his human condition which includes what I call the tragic triad of human existence, namely pain, death and guilt" (Frankl 2010 [1967]:118)

Meaning in life also comes with deeper interpersonal encounters: "man necessarily appears to be a closed system in the lower dimensions, although he, as a human being, is and remains open to meanings to fulfil and toward other beings to encounter." (2010 [1967]):155). But in Frankl's words, "in a monadologistic view of man there is no place for any true encounter." (Frankl 2010 [1967]):94) The interpersonal encounter is whereby "one confronts the other with …the meaning of being" (Frankl 2010 [1967]: 125), "insofar as meaning is found in "another human being to encounter lovingly" (idem)…However, : "The encounter between I and Thou cannot be the whole story. Due to the essentially self-transcendent quality of human existence, man is a being reaching out beyond himself… we must recognise that this dialogue [between I and Thou] defeats itself unless I and Thou transcend themselves." (Frankl 2010 [1967]: 124–125). Insofar this idea is understood, finding meaning in life for Logotherapy is personal but not an autonomous quest but values intersubjective experience (Frankl 1984 [1959]).

For Frankl (2010), an essentially and only human dimension is the spiritual one; linked with the deeper anthropology in Frankl's logotherapy God is seen as a source linked to finding personal supra-meaning, ultimate meaning for Frankl (2011 [1948]), which offers a personalised theistic foundation: an "unconscious god" can never be misunderstood as impersonal abstract force operation in the human beings (Frankl,1975 [1948]).

Frankl's Philosophical Anthropology Synthetised in Ten Theses

A concise synthesis of Frankl's conception of the human being can be found in his *Ten Theses about the Person*. These theses were first presented by Viktor Frankl in a keynote lecture at a summer seminar at the University of Salzburg in 1950. The text of this lecture, later revised around 1972, was subsequently incorporated into some of his books and is now available through the Viktor Frankl Foundation (viktorfrankl.org) (Frankl 2021 [1950]). Sellés (2015) has analysed these theses in considerable depth, so it is unnecessary for our purposes to extend that analysis here. It will suffice to present a slightly summarised version of the theses, accompanied by brief explanations highlighting their main ideas.

1. *The person is an individuum*: The person is *in-dividuum*—indivisible. A person cannot be subdivided or fragmented, because a person is a unity. This indivisibility is intrinsic to its nature as a person.
2. *The person is a whole (In-summabile)*: The person is not only indivisible but also in-summabile, that is a wholeness. The mystery of the person as a Whole also means we can neither "fuse" a person into a collective nor reduce someone to a higher entity or parts, nor

replace someone with another. Each person exists as a complete, irreducible centre who cannot be fused into a larger collective nor reducible or dissolvable into higher entities.

3. *Every person is an absolute novelty*: With every new person, someone entirely unique comes into being. While physical and genetic traits may be passed down via biological genetic inheritance, the spiritual person is original and unrepeatable. Spiritual existence is non-transferable—it cannot be inherited.
4. *The person is spiritual and possesses dignity*: The person stands in contrast to a merely psychophysical organism as the person is spiritual. While the body is necessary for action and expression, it serves merely as an instrument—a means to an end. The value of utility belongs to the body; dignity, by contrast, belongs exclusively and inherently to the person.
5. *The person is existential—capable of self-determination and responsibility*: The person is not merely factual but optional, always deciding who one will become. For Frankl, freedom is fulfilled in responsibility. The essence of personhood lies not only in being free, but in being free for something or someone—i.e. free for values, for loving others, for meaning. Each "man is responsible for the fulfilment of the specific meaning of his personal life" say Frankl (2010 [1967]):116).
6. *The person is an "ego" (ichhaft)—not an "id" (es-haft).* That means that the person's actions come not only from instinct but also from self-awareness and choice. This is in contrast with Freud, who had described the human mind as driven mainly by unconscious forces — especially the "id", which represents our instinctual desires and impulses. According to Freud, the "ego" (our conscious self) is largely a servant of these inner drives, trying to manage them in a realistic way. Frankl disagreed. He argued that the person is not ruled by the "id" but is instead an "ego" or "I" — a self that can reflect, make choices, and take responsibility. Our instincts are part of us, but they do not define who we are. The person cannot be "explained" as a product of drives or reduced to them.

Frankl also recognised that we have unconscious elements, both physical (like impulses or instincts) and spiritual (like hidden values or longings for meaning). Yet, even with these unconscious layers, the *person* remains the conscious, free centre — capable of awareness, decision, and moral responsibility.

7. *The person unifies physical*, *psychological*, *and spiritual*: The person is not only a unity and a whole, but the person is very source that establishes unity and wholeness within the human being. The human being exists as the intersection of three dimensions—physical, psychological, and spiritual—not as a mechanical sum, but as a living unity shaped by the personal centre. According to Frankl, "within the planes of both scientific approaches [somatic and psychological], we are facing diversity but missing the *unity in man*, because this unity is available only in the human dimension and must necessarily disappear within the cross-sections through the human reality as they are used by biology and psychology" (Frankl 2010 [1971]: 158).
8. *The person is dynamic*: The spiritual dimension of the person becomes visible in its ability to distance itself from its psychophysical nature. As dynamic and self-transcending, the person cannot be hypostatised as a static substance. To exist (ex-sist) means to "stand outside" oneself—to face oneself. This is what the human person does: the spiritual self-confronts the psychophysical self.

9. *Animals are not persons.* Animals lack the capacity for self-transcendence; they cannot stand above themselves or engage in existential reflection. Hence, they do not possess a "world" in the human sense, but only an environment. Drawing on a metaphor, Frankl likens the relation between animal environment and human world—and between human world and meta-world—to the golden ratio: each step forms a deeper, more expansive horizon. In contrast, the person's being in the world is strikingly different from other animate beings. This is related to the existential vacuum that some people suffer. For Frankl, "the existential vacuum seems to be due to the fact that in contrast to an animal, no instincts tell man what he *must* do, nor do traditions today tell man what he *should* do" (2010 [1966]: 140).
10. *The person understands oneself only through transcendence.* "Human existence—says Frankl—is not characterised by self-actualization but rather by what I call *self-transcendence* – pointing beyond itself" (Frankl 2010 [1966]:144). He means that persons truly understand themselves only by looking beyond themselves — by reaching toward something greater, which he calls transcendence. This can be God or something mystical or religious, but not necessarily. It means that we discover who we are by responding to something outside of us — a call to meaning, goodness, truth, love, or responsibility. Frankl says that this call of transcendence is heard through our *conscience* — that inner sense that asks, *what is the right thing to do? What does life expect from me now?* When we listen to that call and freely decide how to respond, we become truly personal — we "exist as a person." Thus, for Frankl, self-understanding comes through self-transcendence. We don't find our true selves by turning inward in isolation, but by responding to life — through conscience, love, service, and commitment to values.

Through these propositions, Frankl presents a compelling vision of the human person as a spiritual being, whose anthropology is not just the same as the rest of nature, and one of being a person who is indivisible, responsible, and meaning-seeking being—capable of love, sacrifice, and response to transcendence.

These ten theses reflect the deeper anthropology of logotherapy and moreover, Frankl's deeply personalist anthropology, rooted in the uniqueness, dignity, and self-transcending nature of the human being consistently with these theses.

In these theses, as well as in the three foundational pillars mentioned above, Frankl weaves together insights drawn from his own life and psychiatric practice. But his work is not limited to lived experience; it also bears the imprint of several philosophical traditions (Klingberg 2020). The following section examines these influences, each highlighting the central role of the person and the unique attributes of the human being as such.

Influence of Personalist Thinkers on Frank's Conception of the Person

Viktor E. Frankl's vision of the human being is, indeed, deeply shaped by several philosophers that, in different ways, emphasise the *wholeness*, *uniqueness*, and *dignity* and other features of the human person. Frankl's understanding of the person as an integrated being—endowed with freedom, responsibility, and the capacity for transcendence—draws upon diverse yet convergent influences. Existentialist thinkers such as Søren Kierkegaard and Gabriel Marcel, phenomenologists like Max Scheler, dialogical philosophers such as Martin Buber,

and the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition each contributed to the development of Frankl's *Logotherapy* and his broader philosophical anthropology. Together, these sources form a coherent framework that views the human person as an indivisible unity of body, mind, and spirit, oriented toward meaning and moral fulfilment.

Søren Kierkegaard and the Theistic Foundation of Existential Freedom

Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), often regarded as the father of existentialism. As Lippitt and Evans (2024) note, Kierkegaard's approach constitutes not only a philosophy but also a form of psychology (Ostenfeld 1972), offering deep insight into the personal inner life. He exercised a profound influence on Frankl's conception of the human person.

Like Kierkegaard, Frankl rejected abstract systems and emphasised concrete existence, subjectivity, and personal responsibility (Lippitt and Evans, 2024). Both thinkers saw human life as a task of *self-realisation* through freedom and commitment rather than a predetermined process.

Kierkegaard's focus on *subjectivity* as truth resonates in Frankl's insistence that meaning arises through personal engagement, not detached observation. Against the objectivism of positivist psychology, Frankl maintained that human beings always retain the freedom to choose their attitude, even in extreme situations such as the concentration camps. This practical affirmation of inward freedom parallels Kierkegaard's belief that existence demands personal decision and faith.

Both thinkers also stress *freedom in responsibility*. Kierkegaard regarded despair as alienation from one's true self and from God; Frankl understood despair as a loss of meaning that can only be overcome through faith, conscience, and responsibility (Ruetenik, 2014). Freedom, for both, is fulfilled not in arbitrary choice but in dedication to what is right and meaningful.

A third point of affinity lies in *transcendence and faith.* Kierkegaard's "leap of faith" expresses humanity's need to entrust existence to a higher order. Frankl, while avoiding theological formalism, likewise recognised a transcendent dimension of meaning—the *supra-meaning*—that connects human dignity with the divine (Wong and Reilly, 2017). Faith thus becomes an existential orientation rather than a dogmatic belief, enabling individuals to endure suffering and affirm purpose (Klingberg 2020).

Søren Kierkegaard delineated three stages of life (1988 [1845]). This echoed in Frankl's logotherapy, which encompasses similar themes: moving from a focus on immediate pleasure, through personal responsibility, to finding profound meaning, often in a spiritual or transcendent context.

Finally, both thinkers regard *suffering as transformative*. For Kierkegaard, suffering refines the self and opens it to God; for Frankl, it becomes an opportunity to discover meaning. In *Logotherapy*, this insight assumes practical form: individuals can find purpose even amid pain, thereby affirming freedom and dignity. In contrast to nihilistic existentialism, both see suffering not as absurd but as a pathway to authenticity and spiritual depth.

Gabriel Marcel and the Mystery of the Person

Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973), a leading personalist existentialist, also influenced Frankl's vision of the human being. Both grounded their anthropologies in mystery, relationality, and transcendence (Treanor and Sweetman, 2021).

Marcel distinguished between *problems*—which can be solved objectively—and *mysteries*, which engage the whole person and defy reduction. The human being, for Marcel, is a mystery: unique, irreducible, and open to transcendence. Frankl echoed this understanding, acknowledging that aspects of human existence—such as love, conscience, and spiritual freedom—cannot be fully grasped by rational analysis. His therapeutic practice aimed to respect this depth rather than explain it away.

Both philosophers highlight *freedom and transcendence* as defining characteristics of the person. Marcel described the human being as one with dignity, a seeker of meaning beyond material existence (Marcel 1963); Frankl's *will to meaning* similarly presupposes self-transcendence, the capacity to reach beyond oneself toward higher values (Wong 2015). This orientation grounds Frankl's implicit connection with virtue ethics, in which moral excellence and meaning are intertwined (Wong and Reilly, 2017).

Marcel also insisted on *relational existence*. Human beings, he argued, are constituted through relationships—with others, the world, and God. Frankl, though focused on individual responsibility, recognised that meaning is discovered through encounter and service. Both view the self as fulfilled only in communion with others.

Finally, both thinkers see *encounter* and *love* as the essence of personal existence. Marcel's notion of genuine encounter, the "Thou," finds therapeutic expression in Frankl's idea of the existential meeting between therapist and patient. In both, "encounter" transcends technique and becomes a revelation of meaning.

Martin Buber and the Dialogical Encounter

Frankl's conception of therapy as encounter owes much to Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue. For Buber 1923 [1996] human existence unfolds in two fundamental modes: *I–It* (the utilitarian relation) and *I–Thou* (the relation of mutual presence). Frankl applied this structure to psychotherapy, arguing that healing occurs through authentic relationship, rather than manipulation of techniques (Frankl 2010 [1967]).

He noted in conversation with Buber his concern about superficial interpretations of "encounter" in American psychology (Frankl 2010 [1967]). For both, dialogue is not mere communication but *presence and responsiveness.* Frankl expanded Buber's model by integrating his own notion of *self-transcendence*: the *I–Thou* relation points beyond itself toward an ultimate horizon of meaning.

In *Logotherapy*, this relational dynamic becomes both ethical and spiritual. Life continually "interrogates" the person, demanding a responsible answer (Frankl 2010 [1966]). The human being thus exists in dialogue—with others, with conscience, and with God. By uniting Buber's dialogical insight with his own anthropology, Frankl presents the person as fundamentally relational and answerable.

Max Scheler and the Phenomenology of Values

Phenomenology, particularly through Max Scheler (1874–1928), provided Frankl with a conceptual foundation for understanding the person as a spiritual and valuing being. Scheler's *material ethics of values* and his idea of emotional intuition profoundly shaped Frankl's psychology.

Scheler criticised the *reductionism of scientific rationalism*, arguing that it neglects the spiritual and emotional dimensions of human life. Frankl adopted this critique, contending that modern psychology's focus on drives and conditioning dehumanises the person. For both, the essence of humanity lies in the capacity for freedom, responsibility, and value orientation (Frankl 2010 [1971]).

They also share the concept of *self-transcendence*. Scheler argued that humans are oriented toward values and love beyond self-interest. Frankl developed this idea into the cornerstone of *Logotherapy*, affirming that existence falters when self-transcendence is denied (Frankl 2010 [1971]).

Another major influence is Scheler's *hierarchy of values*. Scheler (1973 [1913–1916]) developed an ethical hierarchy of values, ranking them from the lowest (sensory pleasures) to the highest (spiritual values such as love, truth, and holiness). Frankl echoed this idea into his logotherapy by arguing that humans find meaning through values, particularly through *creative values* (work, artistic expression), *experiential values* (love, beauty) and *attitudinal values* (how one faces suffering).

Both philosophers regarded *suffering as revelatory*. Scheler saw it as a disclosure of higher values; Frankl applied this insight therapeutically, asserting that meaning can transform suffering into growth. This theme is central to *Man's Search for Meaning* (Frankl 1959 [1984]) and exemplifies Frankl's humanistic appropriation of phenomenology.

Finally, Scheler's exploration of *religious experience* influenced Frankl's conviction that love and faith are essential to human fulfilment. For both, the spiritual dimension is not an add-on but the core of personhood. Through Scheler, Frankl found philosophical grounding for re-introducing the spiritual into psychology without abandoning scientific rigour.

Thomas Aquinas, Aristotle and the Teleological Unity of the Person

While Scheler's phenomenology shaped Frankl's method, the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition provided his metaphysical grounding. Frankl rejected any stratified view of the person as a composite of separate layers—somatic, psychic, and spiritual—and instead affirmed an *integrated wholeness*, or *unitas multiplex* (Frankl, 1965). Here he follows Thomas Aquinas, who described the human being as a unified yet differentiated whole, oriented toward a final cause.

Frankl argued that scientific disciplines such as biology and psychology capture only partial "cross-sections" of human reality. True unity appears only in the spiritual dimension, where the diverse aspects of being converge (Frankl 2010 [1971]). This holistic anthropology grounds human dignity in the irreducible worth of the person as a spiritual being.

In Frankl's view, the teleological orientation of the person denotes an inner tendency toward self-fulfilment. This notion echoes Aristotle's concept of *entelechy*—from the Greek *en* ("in"), *telos* ("end, goal"), and *echein* ("to have"), literally "having the end within oneself"—which expresses the idea that every living being carries within itself a principle of one's telos to actualise, directing someone toward the realisation of one's inherent purpose.

According to Frank, the *will to meaning* functions as a teleological drive guiding the person toward moral maturity and self-transcendence (Wong and Reilly, 2017). Meaning is not self-created but discovered through transcendence which guides a responsible engagement with life's tasks (Wong 2016a, b).

Frankl's integration of *virtue ethics* reinforces this connection. Virtues such as courage, magnanimity, responsibility, and practical wisdom (*phronesis*) appear throughout his writings as existential expressions of human freedom. Courage sustains perseverance in adversity; magnanimity reflects moral greatness; responsibility orders freedom toward the good; and practical wisdom guides discernment. These virtues link *Logotherapy* with the classical idea of flourishing (*eudaimonia*), showing that moral growth and psychological health are inseparable.

For Frankl, virtue is not imposed externally but arises from the very structure of human existence. Ethical life emerges through fidelity to meaning, echoing Aristotle's and Aquinas's understanding of moral life as participation in a transcendent order. His humanistic-spiritual existentialism thus transforms classical teleology into an *ethics of transcendence*, wherein love and responsibility express the deepest freedom of the human spirit.

Enrichment of Humanistic Management from Frankl's Thought

As noted in the introduction, current proposals for Humanistic Management and for humanizing business are mainly based on philosophical perspectives and rarely consider the contribution of Humanistic Psychology. Instead, relevant proponents of HM in practice take a few formal principles as guidelines for humanistic management, which are often aligned with a Kantian rationalist tradition of respecting human dignity without considering persons as mere means, because they have autonomy to decide an end in themselves. Thus, Kimakowitz et al. (2011, p. 4), in the introduction of *Humanistic Management in Practice*, explain: "We understand humanistic management on the basis of three interrelated dimensions. First, that unconditional respect for the dignity of every person is the foundation for interpersonal interaction, including any interactions taking place in business contexts. Second, ethical reflection must form an integrated part of all business decisions. Third, that seeking normative legitimacy for corporate activities is crucial for assuming corporate responsibilities." Other authors provide more philosophical grounds to HM. One of the first was Nida-Rümelin (2009), who affirmed that "In its most elaborated form ethical humanism becomes the theory and practice of autonomy" adding that "Kantian philosophy understood in this sense mark the most elaborate form of ethical humanism." (p. 21). This Kantian foundation based on human autonomy and respect for human dignity of every person is also suggested by Dierksmeier (2016a) combining this with other humanistic traditions. In this line of thought, Bowie (2022) suggests a Kantian narrative for humanizing business which leads us to consider business as a moral community grounded in the dignity of business stakeholders. Another approach which isn't so common is one based on the Utilitarian principle. In this sense, Gustafson (2022) defends the idea that "utilitarianism's concern for the greatest happiness for the most, if properly understood through the lens of John Stuart Mill, is in fact a great source for humanizing business." (p. 58). Pirson's approach to humanistic management (2017a; b) focuses on protecting human dignity and promoting well-being with both Kantian and Utilitarian elements.

Other approaches, however, consider humanistic business should focus, not only on abstract universal principles, but mainly on people and their development as human beings, which includes developing virtues. In this sense, drawing from the ancient notion of *humanitas*, Melé defines humanistic management as one "that emphasizes the human condition and is

oriented to the development of human virtue, in all its forms, to its fullest extent." (2003: 79). More recently, Hartman (2022) has proposed an Aristotelian conception of humanistic business, emphasizing the relevance of virtues in managing business particularly friendship, not as a means for organizational effectiveness but because friendship is "among the greatest benefits of human life." (2022: 29) Moore (2022), who is aligned with the Neo-Aristotelian Macintyre, argues that "the realization of human flourishing in organizations (…) would be likely be best achieved by the pursuit of meaningful work" (2022, p. 41). Other approaches for humanizing business, based on some philosophical systems and religious perspectives, are also cantered on the persons and their real existence (Dion 2022).

Although the preceding outline on the foundations of Humanistic Management (HM) would require more extensive analysis, as a preliminary approximation two perspectives can be distinguished. The first is grounded in ethical principles, mainly of Kantian inspiration, to be applied in managing organizations and designing structures. The second centres on the promotion of human flourishing through virtue. Both represent significant progress in the humanization of management; however, the centrality and richness of the human person are still only partially addressed, even though some promising attempts toward a humanistic-personalist approach to management and leadership have already been made (Whetstone 2002; Melé 2009, 2024; Scalzo et al. 2023; Wdowin 2023; Gallo and Melé 2025).

There is no doubt that respect for human dignity and the innate rights of the person are essential to HM. This is a necessary condition, yet not sufficient for a sound humanistic management theory. The consideration of virtue and the management of personal growth is also crucial; however, even these approaches—together with valuable insights such as providing meaningful work (Moore 2022)—remain incomplete for a deeper understanding of HM, as they leave aside other fundamental aspects of the human being.

Humanistic-Personalist Management (HPM) seeks to avoid both individualism—a reductionist view of the person as a self-interested rational agent—and collectivism, which dissolves individuality within larger social structures. HPM focuses instead on essential features of the person: dignity, wholeness, and uniqueness. The person is endowed with reason and freedom as self-determination, is relational and social, and possesses the capacity for cooperation and community-building. Furthermore, the human being is open to transcendence and called to personal development through virtues, contributing to the common good, and adopting an attitude of stewardship and sustainability (Melé 2012, 2016, 2024).

Frankl's thought is consistent with these principles, particularly in its grounding of human dignity and the role of virtues in personal growth. For Frankl, human dignity is intrinsic and unconditional, rooted in the spiritual and free core of the person, and radically opposed to any utilitarian reduction of the individual. Although Frankl does not explicitly use the term *virtue*, moral habits are implicitly embedded in his thought and form a crucial dimension of personal growth and flourishing.

As shown in previous sections, Frankl aligns closely with personalist thinkers, and many of the features proposed in Humanistic-Personalist Management are found, sometimes with greater depth, in his anthropology. Certain aspects of HPM are extended or refined by Frankl, while others are genuinely Franklian. This can be shown through his Three Pillars of Logotherapy and the Ten Theses previously discussed.

Frankl clearly upholds the wholeness and uniqueness of the person, endowed with freedom—understood as the ability to take a stand toward inner and outer conditions—and the corresponding responsibility. He views the person as a relational being, irreducible to larger

wholes, and advocates a culture of personal vocation rather than role conformity, where work becomes a medium for the expression of one's singular contribution.

Frankl locates the essence of personhood and human dignity in the spiritual core of the person—the realm of conscience, freedom, and value orientation. Central to this is his emphasis on self-transcendence, the capacity to go beyond oneself toward values, others, and ultimate meaning. In articulating these dimensions, Frankl deepens and enriches the anthropological foundations of HPM more profoundly than many other proponents.

At the heart of Frankl's anthropology lies the *will to meaning*—the primary human motivation to find purpose, which endows life with dignity and spiritual depth, transcending pleasure or power as motives. Logotherapy thus seeks to help persons rediscover meaning through self-transcendence, directing their attention beyond themselves toward values, others, and the objective world. For Frankl, *meaning is discovered*, not created; and genuine fulfilment arises not from self-actualization but from *self-transcendence.* The loss of this orientation leads to emptiness and existential frustration.

Conclusion

For Humanistic Management to be fully human, it must address the whole reality of the human person, embracing a comprehensive understanding that integrates both psychological and philosophical perspectives. In this regard, Frankl's approach builds a bridge between lived psychiatric experience and philosophical reflection—a bridge capable of guiding future developments in HM and inspiring new pathways for humanising business with genuine attention to personhood. Although Frankl was primarily a psychiatrist, he also held a doctorate in philosophy, and his thinking reflects a consistent philosophical depth informed by empirical observation. This interdisciplinary grounding makes his contribution particularly significant as a foundation for HM.

In Frankl's work, we find both a penetrating observation of the human condition—including extreme situations such as the Nazi concentration camps—and a philosophical reflection influenced by relevant personalist thinkers. His thought revolves around the person as a whole and as a unique being endowed with intrinsic dignity. Frankl underscores the inner richness of every person: the spiritual dimension, freedom and responsibility, orientation toward meaning, and openness to transcendence.

In this way, Frankl introduces a profound anthropological dimension into humanistic management, setting it apart from approaches that are primarily grounded in economic rationality or restricted to generic ethical categories. By embracing the complexity of human existence and the pursuit of meaning, HM informed by Frankl's insights can emerge as a more holistic and person-centred paradigm.

Further research is needed to explore the practical implications of Frankl's insights for management. Although this paper does not aim to discuss in any depth such implications, it is evident that Frankl's thought calls for workplaces that support individuals in their search for higher purpose, personal wholeness, and transcendence. This points to the need for a deeper managerial concern for the person, grounded in an overarching moral framework guiding ethical decision-making.

Integrating such a framework as a core principle of humanistic management implies cultivating a managerial ethos that places ethical responsibility at the centre of leadership. Man-

agers are called to foster environments that nurture meaning-seeking and personal growth, irrespective of employees' status, agency, or performance, recognising their human dignity above instrumental value. This entails shifting managerial attention from the efficient management of resources toward a deeper safeguarding of human persons under their care.

A complementary and significant insight is that Frankl's philosophy applies not only to those who are managed but also to managers themselves. His humanistic–existential anthropology invites leaders to understand management as a vocational profession, grounded in a profound ethical ethos and committed to the integral development of the person.

In conclusion, the arguments presented here suggest that Frankl's perspectives have substantial potential to enrich the anthropological foundations of humanistic management, orienting it toward a more explicit humanistic-personalist paradigm—one that recognises meaning, dignity, and transcendence as essential dimensions of the human being and of management itself.

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Declarations

Research ethics This is a conceptual paper and involves no data collection but only desk research, nor it involves any data about human or other living creatures.

Human data Authors declare that this is a conceptual paper and involves no data collection about human or other living creatures.

Disclosure statement on conflicting interests and funding The authors report there are no competing interests to declare. Authors declare that there is nothing to disclose linked with financial or non-financial interests that are directly or indirectly linked to this submission.

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