

# The Dialectic of Freedom and Necessity: Individuality, Norms and Creativity in the Structure of Sustainable Development

**Nguyen Anh Quoc**

*University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City 70000, Vietnam*

**(Corresponding author's e-mail: [nguyenanhquoc@hcmussh.edu.vn](mailto:nguyenanhquoc@hcmussh.edu.vn))**

*Received: 26 April 2025, Revised: 31 August 2025, Accepted: 4 September 2025, Published: 5 September 2025*

## Abstract

This scientific article aims to clarify the dialectical relationship between freedom and necessity in individual and social life, thereby repositioning the individual as a creative subject in economic development for sustainable goals. Based on the approaches of human philosophy, social philosophy, and critical political economy, the author aims to develop a new theoretical system to explain freedom as a state of enjoyment, characterized by the ability to choose, take responsibility, and be creative. The results of the study show that, in the context of globalization and social crisis: One, freedom cannot be understood as a separate privilege or individual right but as a result of the development of harmonious abilities and needs; Second, the individual is the product of social institutions and the creative fulcrum for human evolution; Third, when freedom is linked to responsibility, the individual becomes the foundation of sustainable development. The content of this article also concluded that economic growth for sustainable goals requires rebuilding life from its fundamental roots - where freedom cannot be separated from necessity, and the individual becomes the center of a creative, humane society responsible for the present and future of humanity.

**Keywords:** Sustainable development, Necessity, Freedom, Individual, Responsibility, Subject, Product, Ownership

## Introduction

Humanity faces the fundamental questions of liberty, duty, and sustainable growth at the world meeting and rapid change in society and trade. The ecological crisis, social inequality, and individual alienation in the market economy relationship have raised the need to reconsider the fundamentals between people, institutions, and moral standards – not only at the policy level but from the philosophical roots of life. Freedom, which is considered the highest aspiration of modern people, is being limited by the very institutions that people have created: law, religion, money, family, state, and business. Meanwhile, necessity – as a manifestation of natural and social laws – is increasingly imposed on individual life in sophisticated forms such as artificial moral standards, economic power, or data technology. This topic raises a central question: Where can individuals, with the ability to create and think, find true freedom in sustainable development? The

distinction between “being free” and “having freedom” is a difference in the state of enjoyment and initiative and the boundary between an irresponsible and conscious life. Analyzing the relationship between freedom and necessity involves understanding people as moral, cultural, and evolving beings. It also has to do with the fact that a person is not only a result of society but also its fulcrum. This way, society would be more humane and resilient. The article aims to clarify the dialectical relationship between *freedom* and *necessity* in individual and social life, and to pose the central question: *How can the individual exercise substantive freedom within the context of natural and social constraints, thereby contributing to sustainable development?* In response, the research directly connects to the literature on sustainable development, particularly the competency theory, which emphasizes the role of freedom as the ability to perform valuable

functions. At the same time, a framework for environmental ethics analysis is included to consider intergenerational responsibility and the relationship between humans and ecosystems. This helps to show that freedom is not just something people have, but it is also a basic requirement needed to achieve goals that are beneficial for everyone and will last.

### Overview of the research situation of the project

The concepts of *freedom* and *necessity* have long been central themes in human philosophy. To highlight the role of these concepts in the context of sustainable development, this overview is organized into three groups of thought that have a significant influence: classical philosophy, Marx and Hegel's dialectic, and postmodern criticism. In addition, recent interdisciplinary research, particularly in the field of sustainable science, has been integrated to connect the philosophical heritage with contemporary practical and policy issues.

In ancient Western philosophy, the relationship between *freedom* and *necessity* is reflected in the interaction between humanity and the universe. In Heraclitus (2010), the world is a steady flow of opposing pairs. It does not set limits but is based on inescapability. It demonstrates how inescapability is a guiding principle that encourages humanity to be wise in their actions. In *The Republic*, Plato (2008) supports this idea by placing freedom in the correct order. When a person is free, it is only when reason rules over desire. Aristotle (2009), in *Nicomachean Ethics*, has put the concept of freedom into the moral foundation: human beings are free when they can choose the good through the training of reason and moral habits. In the classical philosophical system, freedom is not liberation from necessity, but moral action by rational nature. The inevitability here takes the form of nature, cosmic order, and destiny, and freedom is realized through the individual's attachment to the moral role and community function. Although it has not separated the subject and society as in modern thought, classical philosophy has laid the foundation for the concept of *freedom as a morally oriented internal development process*, while also emphasizing the harmony between the individual and the whole.

Entering modern times, the dialectic of Hegel and Marx brought a new approach to freedom – no longer a state, but a historical process. Hegel (1975) argues that

freedom does not lie in being free from necessity, but in *being aware of necessity* and acting by universal truth. True freedom is when the individual does not live by instinct. However, by spirit – that is, the ability to integrate into the universal will through rational institutions such as the family, the law, and the moral state. Marx (1867) inherited and modified this thesis in the direction of materialism. In *Das Kapital*, he emphasized that freedom cannot be separated from material conditions. According to Marx, people only achieve freedom when they master the process of production, overcoming the alienation caused by exploitative labor. Inevitability – in economic and social forms – is not a permanent destiny but can be transformed through class struggle and revolution. Unlike classical philosophy, which emphasizes harmony, Marx and Hegel established the historicity and dynamism of freedom, seeing it as the result of the individual's process of becoming aware of social circumstances, institutions, and contradictions, and then acting to transform them. In sustainable growth, this way of thinking suggests that to liberate people and protect nature, they need to change the way things are made, which currently holds them back, and that allows human minds to function as they should.

In the twentieth century, existential philosophy and postmodern critical thought continued to deepen the concept of freedom by emphasizing subjectivity and resistance to institutional power. Jean-Paul Sartre (2007) asserts: "condemned man must be free" – that is, no one can invoke circumstances to abdicate the responsibility of choice. Necessity is no longer an external law, but an internal existential limit that forces man to decide for himself. Simone de Beauvoir (2011) relates feminism and the ethics of responsibility, sketching freedom as the ability not only to make choices for oneself but also to acknowledge the freedom of others – a form of intersubjective freedom. Meanwhile, Foucault (1975) and Arendt (1958) clarify the roles of institutions, power, and discourse in constructing – and distorting – subjectivity. Foucault points out that freedom is not "without power" but the ability to *resist and transform power*. Arendt emphasized that genuine political action is an expression of freedom, where people act in public spaces with a spirit of creativity and responsibility. Postmodern thought helps to clarify how invisible

mechanisms (norms, morals, laws, economics) have shaped – or limited – individual creativity. It begs the question: can freedom in sustainable development be achieved when people are assimilated into a system of normative behavior and value identification through

profit or power? These observations complement the central theme of the manuscript: the restoration of freedom as the foundation of creativity, not just as a granted right.

**Table 1** Summary table comparing philosophy and application of sustainable development

Era/School	The Concept of Freedom – Necessity	Contact Responsibility	Creative Role	Applications for sustainable development
Ancient philosophy (Heraclitus, Plato, Aristotle)	Freedom is associated with <i>the cosmic order</i> and <i>rational ethics</i> ; What is needed is the law of nature and fate.	Responsibility is to act according to the “good” and the duty of the community.	Creativity is limited, mainly within the framework of the ethics.	Introducing the concept of harmony between people and the whole, the foundation for ecological ethics.
Modern Dialectical Philosophy (Hegel, Marx)	Freedom = <i>awareness of necessity</i> and action in the course of history.	Responsibility associated with social change and improvement of production relations.	Creativity = revolution, institutional improvement of transformation.	Provide a model of socio-economic structural transformation towards justice and sustainability.
Existential & critical philosophy (Sartre, Beauvoir, Foucault, Arendt)	Freedom is the burden of choice; What is needed is the existential limit and power mechanism.	Responsibility: cannot be withdrawn, attached to others and the community.	Creativity: resistance, opening up new possibilities of life.	Promote a democratic society – solidarity, where individuals can participate creatively.
Competency Access (Sen, Nussbaum)	Freedom = the ability to perform a valuable function; What is necessary is social and environmental conditions.	Responsibility: building institutions to ensure the capacity of everyone.	Creativity = developing new competencies, expanding opportunities.	Directly associated with the SDGs: education, equality, environment, health.

Although rich in philosophical depth, the aforementioned approaches need to be more explicitly connected to theories and practices in the field of *sustainable development*. In particular, the capability approach of Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2011) stands out as an ideal bridge. Unlike the idea of freedom as an abstract “right to choose,” this theory defines freedom as the *ability to perform functions that people have*

*reason to cherish*. Freedom is not just a condition, but the cumulative result of capacity, living conditions, social institutions, and environmental factors – where the individual can realize his or her potential in a meaningful way. For example, the paper by Dhar et al. (2025) suggests that *local creative* power, such as traditional work, local ways, and local ways of life, can help improve things. “Policies should be developed to

mitigate the impact of political instability, ensure consistent government support, and protect artisans from exploitation" (Dhar et al., 2025, p. 3040). The authors point out that when individuals and communities can be creative and independent in shaping their local environment and economy, they not only increase their well-being but also maintain biodiversity, a healthy lifestyle, and a thriving society. This thesis adds a strong practical dimension to the philosophical conception of "freedom as creativity" in the article. It suggests that development policies should encourage self-organizing, preserve local knowledge, and enable individuals and communities to actively participate in the production process – rather than just consuming or complying with it. At the same time, it also highlights the danger of equating development with homogenization, where freedom is compromised by globalized standardization.

The division into three major groups of thought – classical, dialectical, and postmodern – not only helps to systematize the philosophical foundation of the concept of *freedom and necessity*, but also facilitates the connection of this thought with contemporary interdisciplinary trends. When approached from the perspective of philosophy, society, and sustainable science, freedom is no longer an abstract concept, but a capacity structure that can shape policy, design education, and innovative institutions. The integration of these theses will help the manuscript move beyond the limitations of a descriptive approach towards an action-oriented system, where philosophy becomes a truly liberating tool for people and society in the twenty-first century.

### Research methods

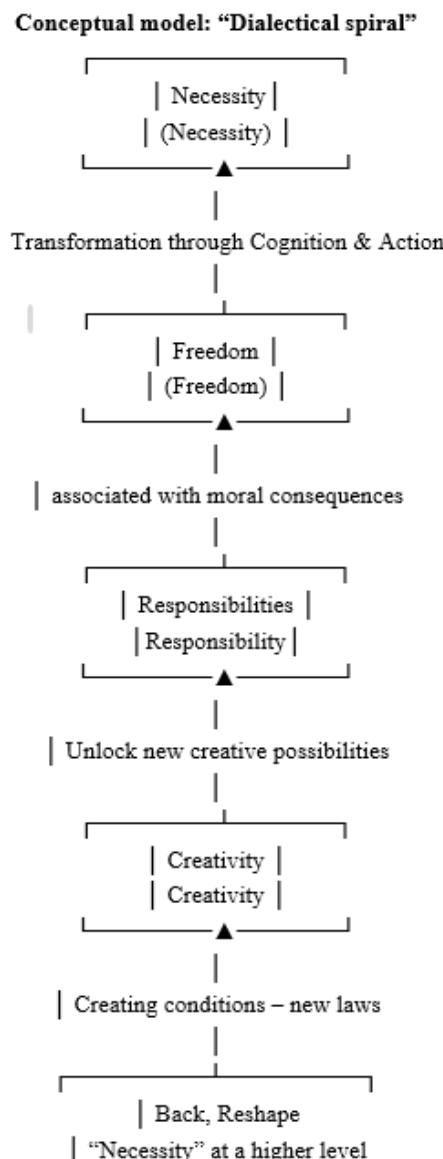
The topic is approached using the qualitative method, specifically analyzing, synthesizing, comparing, and contrasting the transformation process of real life. With the qualitative method, the author identifies the object of science in general and the science of man in particular. Science generally clarifies the inevitability of objects outside man, expressed through the direct, linear cause-and-effect relationship: the cause comes. First, and the result comes later - that is inevitable. However, with the reverse method - determining the result comes first, the cause comes later - we touch on freedom. Freedom is the object of research

in the science of man, specifically the philosophy of man. From the qualitative method, the topic identifies and clarifies the relationship between "inside and outside," "cause and effect", "ability and need", "will and knowledge", "means and purpose", "subject and product", that is, applying the reverse method to clarify the issue of ownership: "owning oneself" and "owning others". Similarly, the transformation between the means and the purpose becomes the reversal between the subject and the product. Products are created when they become their purpose, becoming the dominant subject. "Own yourself" is the creative subject who makes the product; when the product (standard, money) is possessed, "other people's ownership" appears. At that time, the owner of the standard, who owns a substantial amount of money (owned by others), employs workers (who are owned by him) to produce products and goods that meet market demand. In addition, the topic is also approached from the perspective of human philosophy and social philosophy as a consistent basis for presenting, analyzing, and exploiting more documents, information, results, and conclusions from articles published in prestigious specialized and multidisciplinary journals. The conclusions of reference documents and published scientific works are considered comments and evidence, which can replace specific data and cases, and are presented throughout the content of this article.

In this system of arguments, it is necessary to clearly distinguish between the concepts of "free", "free", and "free" in order to avoid confusion about their philosophical depth. "Freedom" is understood as a state in which individuals not only eliminate external constraints but also actively choose and shape their lives with knowledge, willpower, and creativity. It is not merely a release, but the ability to act responsibly, which is tied to an awareness of oneself and others. Meanwhile, "having freedom" indicates a higher degree: it is when the individual is not only freed from limitations but also masters himself, orients himself in his purpose in life, and transforms objective conditions into opportunities for subjective development. In contrast, "being free" is passive. It suggests that a person is in a state that appears to grant them power, but in truth, they still depend on the outside world, on rules and established ways of doing things. He acts within the allowed lines without the power to alter or break through them. The distinction

between “owning oneself” and “owning others” also reveals the varying levels of humanity in social relations. “Owning oneself” is the state in which an individual perceives and masters one’s own needs, abilities, body, and spirit, and directs them to meaningful actions. It is an expression of genuine self-determination and freedom. On the contrary, “owning others” reflects the appropriation of other subjects as a means, depriving them of their creativity and independence, turning them into objects that serve

external purposes. When ownership of others becomes the principle of social organization—through money, power, or institutions—it diminishes the freedom of both the subject and the community. Knowing and distinguishing these ideas apart is the foundation of the discussion about green growth, as it helps people escape the illusion of formal liberty and attain true liberty, which is the ability to do things, built on knowledge and art.



**Figure 1** Depicts a spiral: Necessity sets limits; Freedom is the ability to choose within those limits; Responsibility is the awareness of consequences; Creativity is the escape to open up new conditions, which then become the “necessity” of the next stage.

## Discussion

### Necessity and freedom in the process of sustainable development

Human life is a dialectical unity between “internal” and “external” factors in economic development towards sustainability. The objective world operates according to inevitable laws – especially the law of linear causality, in which the cause comes first, and the result appears later. This is the direct object of research in natural sciences: to discover and generalize universal laws that go beyond human individuality. In contrast, the human sciences – especially the philosophy of man – approach life in the opposite direction: here, the result can be established in advance as a goal, while the cause appears later as a means to achieve that goal. From this structure, “freedom” emerges – freedom is understood as the ability to self-determine and exist independently. Freedom is not only an inevitable consequence of life but also the ability to choose, create, and assert oneself in specific conditions. Freedom – the right to life and the pursuit of happiness – is at the heart of understanding the unity of capabilities and needs. When these two elements are in harmony, people achieve satisfaction. Conversely, the disparity between capabilities and needs leads to alienation, loss of freedom, and suffering. Having capabilities without needs is a form of empty unhappiness; having needs without capabilities represents impotence. This situation disrupts the connection between truth and falsehood, causing division and disorientation in social life, and undermines “daily life satisfaction” (Mielińczuk, 2014, p. 203). This division encompasses a wide range of life forms – from individual lifestyles and family structures to social institutions such as religion, the state, and business in the commodity economy. In the context of sustainable development, this diversity is inevitable because people must constantly adapt to the living environment and social structures that are constantly changing. The concept of “*satisfaction with everyday life*” should be placed in the context of well-being frameworks related to sustainability, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Human Development Index (HDI). This is not only a subjective state, but it also reflects the relationship between individual competence and social conditions. The dialectical space of the

individual – where needs and possibilities meet – becomes the driving force for transforming constraints into creativity, thereby creating change at the institutional level. Individual agency needs to be articulated through a competency approach, which views freedom as the ability to perform valuable functions. This helps to understand that the responsibility and creativity of the individual are not separate from the social system. In particular, *moral responsibility* can intersect with institutional inevitability, highlighting the importance of responsible leadership in high-risk systems. Freedom is realized not through isolation, but through the reshaping of social relations in the context of sustainable development.

The transition between internal and external factors, cause and effect, necessity, and freedom, is expressed through communication, where individuals assert themselves through relationships with others. Therefore, freedom is not separation but existence in specific relationships between social subjects; it is “an essential skill in interpersonal relations” (Świątek & Leonardi, 2024, p. 89). An individual isolated from the community loses his human identity and is no longer an object of philosophical cognition – existing as a fragment, not whole, not human. However, the individual is not only a biological product of nature but also a creative subject, belonging to the community, with independent thinking, capable of thinking, choosing, and acting. This is what makes humanity, the individual, the fulcrum of social life and the core need of humanity for sustainable development.

When individuals lose contact with their actual abilities, they fall into a state of temporariness – not tied to the past, present, or future – and thus lose their subjectivity. However, individuals can still recreate themselves by creatively realizing their needs – expressing freedom, which is “innovative potential” (Garbarova & Vartiak, 2024, p. 10). Freedom shapes an individual’s lifetime, but it is expressed in the living space – the lifestyle associated with work, status, and social role. The living environment is necessary, but the way individuals behave expresses freedom. Individuals choose suitable objects for their existence and development based on their abilities and appropriate needs. When necessity and freedom come together, they

transform each other: necessity becomes the means of freedom, and freedom becomes the goal of necessity.

The difference between individuals results from a constant transition between necessity and freedom. The individual's free space is where possibilities are realized under objective conditions and where the individual feels the meaning of existence. The individual needs an object to express himself. Music is not just a sound but a human expression. Thanks to the object, the individual expresses his fellow nature richly. The differences between objects create differences in abilities and needs, which in turn shape personality—that is, the uniqueness of each person. In life, the object is an objective need; for the individual, the need reflects the individual's creative capacity. The free space - wide or narrow - depends on the correlation between abilities and needs. These two factors determine whether the individual approaches or moves away from the object, forming their own living space. Individuals have the conditions for developing the richness of their abilities and the need for objects, which is the basic condition for creativity. However, to truly live, the necessary condition is ability; the sufficient condition is the free satisfaction of that need in the standard development of humanity. In sustainable economic development, awareness of needs fosters an understanding of the objective relationships between things.

Conversely, awareness of freedom provides insight into the relationships between individuals within the community. When individuals communicate with each other through the exchange of products - that is, the process of buying and selling - society is formed. However, when the individual is no longer a free and creative subject, social life becomes objective and inevitable, and the awareness of humanity loses its meaning. Each object in life has a different role, corresponding to the ability to meet the needs of each person - this is expressed through the function, responsibility, and social position that become "attributions of the institutions responsible" (Santos & Lima, 2023, p. 84). Birth - aging - illness - and death are inevitable processes of biological life, but suffering and torment of conscience are the depths of existence - only humans are capable of feeling through communication with others. Humans do not fill their time only with biological existence but with freedom and creativity.

Personal freedom reaches its highest level not when it is separated, but when it is integrated into relationships with others, especially love. Love is the freedom to live with others, not only to satisfy needs but also to share and develop abilities - that is, to live a meaningful life. Without humanity, all other objects become meaningless. Therefore, life loses meaning if the individual is eternalized or removed from reality. Humanity is both the starting point and the endpoint of the process of world cognition. Objects other than humans can be explained by necessity, but the depth of individual life can only be understood through freedom.

The connection between the inside and the outside of humans is the basis for establishing the relationship between necessity and freedom in sustainable development. When united, these two categories make everything "in itself" exist. Therefore, freedom only has meaning when attached to concrete life and specific relationships. When separated from objects and circumstances, absolute freedom is meaningless. Freedom cannot exist without the ability and need to strive for life satisfaction. When people need freedom, it becomes the object of cognition and action, and is realized through the process of "individual cognition and social relationships" (Salej Higgins et al., 2023, p. 164) . Ultimately, each era with its unique socioeconomic conditions will give rise to different understandings of freedom. Therefore, freedom is a historical category - closely linked to economic development for the sustainable development of humanity.

### **The process of transformation between necessity and freedom in human life**

The unity of individual capacities and needs is the mutual transition between necessity and freedom – the basis of human life. In animals, behavior is primarily governed by the survival instinct – the typical expression of the need for necessities. A lion cannot choose to eat grass because it is contrary to its biological structure. Therefore, it has no choice and freedom – its behavior is a product of nature, not individual responsibility. In this case, "responsibility" belongs to biological laws, not the acting subject. Hunger is a need. The animal's eating behavior arises from hunger and ends with satiety – a temporary state of "freedom" that occurs when the need is satisfied. In a state of satiety,

the lion does not hunt – a form of “passive responsibility” brought about by biological security. However, this is not true freedom; it is a passive, dependent state - it is “being free. “However, freedom is the premise for forming a responsible life at higher levels of life, where freedom becomes the condition for conscious choice and “social responsibility” (Monteiro et al., 2025, p. 21).

In animals, there is no separation between life and instinct. Humans are distinguished by the ability to perceive, think, and act according to needs. Humans overcome nature through a way of life – knowledge – expressed through tools, symbols, language, abstract thinking, creativity, and production. Biological functions, such as eating, drinking, sex, and work, when guided by knowledge and will, become the basis for a responsible life. Living “freely” - not being dominated by immediate needs - is the premise for people to “have freedom”, that is, choosing a lifestyle that suits their skills and needs. Freedom is no longer a state of enjoyment but the result of training, awareness, and action. “Freedom is the condition for the individual to ‘invariably enhance self-awareness’” (Ogba et al., 2025, p. 587). Freedom is the condition for responsible living, especially in sustainable development, where every action has community consequences.

Capacity is the concrete expression of need in the world of survival, thus bearing the mark of necessity. However, it is also an ability that is trained and accumulated through interaction with life - that is the tool that helps people overcome the necessity to move towards freedom. When the individual assimilates the object into an internal capacity, the ability is not only a means of existence but becomes the creative foundation, the expression of the free subject. The development of capacity leads to new needs. Increasingly diverse needs lead to open thinking, innovation, and production - three essential elements for sustainable development in an increasingly populous world, and when the conditions of survival change. When the object meets the need to survive, it becomes limited, and the ability to adapt will readjust the need, creating new forms of need, not only to survive but also to become something different. In particular, when trained, the regulation of desire— which is not innate— becomes an ability, even an internal need. The right ability is intentionally developed, becomes a habit, or is turned into a hobby,

and then becomes deeply ingrained in the subconscious. At that time, the ability is not just a tool but becomes a purpose - the expression of a free life that has gone beyond necessity. The individual is the product of the development of the ability to realize freedom. Human evolution is not simply a transformation of biological ability, but a transition from instinctive needs to existential freedom, where people actively choose a lifestyle that suits their nature and adapts to the survival situation, which is one form of creativity.

Individual creativity is a vital driving force in the evolutionary process, contributing to the sustainable development of humanity. In economic development, for sustainability, the relationship between individuals in life, through capabilities, gradually changes into the relationship between individuals and needs, in which capabilities are both means and goals. The right to life is the basis for basic needs: eating, drinking, sleeping, resting, hearing, speaking, seeing, sex, and working. When objects serving needs become scarce, individuals are forced to develop the ability to adapt or change their living conditions to adapt to the community. Serving the needs of others becomes the basis for sustainable development. The behaviors of eating, sleeping, sex, and working are still within the necessary range. However, abilities such as moderation of desires, eating less, sleeping less, listening selectively, speaking moderately, looking attentively, and working purposefully become essential. These abilities sustain life and bring about existential joy, enabling humans to perform their natural functions responsibly.

If the individual does not consider himself a subject, he cannot distinguish between ability and need, in which “satisfying the ability is creativity” (Lam & Quoc, 2025, p. 877). Satisfying the ability is not only an expression of freedom but also a result of creativity, where the individual is the one who chooses and acts. That choice takes place in thinking and predicting – it is a matter of spiritual freedom. Ability is the inevitable result of spiritual freedom. Therefore, a “free” person must take responsibility for their life choices. Freedom is not a privilege but the result of knowledge and will – two capacities that help man overcome the need to act responsibly. The abundance of knowledge turns necessity into freedom and the will to act under constraints. In all cases, however, lifestyle reflects choice – freedom as a subject. Eating, sleeping, sex, and

working are necessary. However, the choice of what to eat, what to do, whom to love, and how to live is freedom.

A “free” person acts responsibly – even in the face of risk. Success or failure is secondary; the core is consciously directed action towards the community. Conversely, a lifestyle becomes irresponsible if a person acts solely on instinct without considering the consequences. When freedom means choosing the inevitable, the individual must take responsibility, which is the condition for sustainable development. Each individual – whether healthy or sick, rich or poor – is the product of choice. The division of individuals reflects both external and internal imbalances. Which object is the ability the individual is created for; which object is the need the individual is driven to possess? When an individual is not responsible for themselves, they fall into a state of evasion, blame, dependence, greed, and lies – manifestations of an irresponsible life. Although such behaviors may bring short-term benefits, they are condemned by society because they violate common principles, undermining the foundation of sustainable development.

When individuals relinquish their right to self-judgment and entrust it to society, they live passively in a mold. They are no longer “free” but only “freed” – that is, they act only within the framework that society allows. Ethical standards such as love, gratitude, and a “sense of self-worth and self-respect” (Sarlata et al., 2022, p. 9) of helping lose personal responsibility if they are followed without choice. At that point, individuals become secure in traditional values but lose their freedom; they are no longer creative subjects. Animals are often perceived as irresponsible because their behavior is primarily governed by instinct. Humans – if they let standards determine their lifestyle instead of choosing – also become irresponsible. In sustainable development, the line between “having freedom” and “being free” is between creative and dependent life. When acting based on freedom, with clear motivation, will, and awareness, the responsibility lies with the individual. Conversely, repeating patterns without choice and creativity represents an instinctive life closer to biology than social responsibility. Adherence to norms may create a feeling of “being free” from the responsibility of choice. However, it is a passive form of life – contrary to the spirit of sustainable development,

where the individual is both the product and the agent of life, creativity, and evolution.

### **Individuals, freedom, and property in the process of economic development for sustainable goals**

In pursuing sustainable economic development, humanity has created institutions such as the family, religion, state, and corporation, with preconceptions of tradition, law, morality, and money, to stabilize and organize daily life. However, these very institutions, when absolutized and detached from their specific historical context, can undermine human creativity, individuality, and autonomy. Blind adherence to traditions or rules may bring a sense of “security”, but it is a security that comes at the cost of freedom and personal responsibility – losing one’s creative subjectivity. A person is “free” when he acts according to instinct, habit, and pattern – like other creatures. On the contrary, a “free” person can dare to face risks and make choices in perception, action, and creativity. The individual is a subject with the capacity for will and knowledge, while freedom is a manifestation of reason and intelligence. Recognizing the fallacy and absurdity of standards represents rationality, showing that the individual has gone beyond instinctive constraints to perceive their needs and abilities. This “fosters critical thinking” (Ayay-Arita et al., 2025, p. 466). Freedom, without knowledge, cannot become a need; when it is not necessary, it cannot be realized. In that unconscious state, compliance with standards is akin to obedience, an instinct. As long as the standards are “common sense” and injustice is not revealed, truth has not become a common need, and individuals do not need freedom as a condition of life. The distinction between “freedom” and “freedom,” between “instinct” and “creativity,” and between “irresponsibility” and “responsibility” is evidence of the transition from the instinct to social man, from individual to individual. When an individual develops the ability to create new needs and capabilities, freedom becomes necessary for that individual to be realized. In this process, the individual is the subject of cognition, creativity, and the development of various capabilities to meet the needs of fellow human beings, from which personal values are socialized.

Through primitive labor and communication, inherent personal values become social values. Society

within the individual is knowledge; society outside the individual is property. Although they manifest differently, knowledge and property are essential elements in social life and form the foundation for sustainable development. While still dependent on nature, humans are only “free” to the extent that necessary compliance is required. When life becomes socially structured, humans are considered “free” through their compliance with institutions such as law, morality, and the economy. In both cases, “being free” remains a passive state. In contrast, “having freedom” is the intrusion of a responsible subject who decides how to live and act. The three categories of “freedom,” “being free,” and “having freedom” reflect three levels of human development in the process of social differentiation.

Freedom is the process of transition between capabilities and needs - in which each individual is both a resource and an object of mutual satisfaction; thus, “human resource management has a direct impact on social capital” (Cachón-Rodríguez et al., 2024, p. 8). The need for money, for example, can activate the ability to work, create, and produce, while one person’s ability becomes another’s need. This interaction makes social life an interesting network of relationships, where each person becomes a fellow human being through their ability, while recognizing the need for a sustainable life for humanity. The connection between ability and need forms the basis of humanity in society. However, coercion and appropriation will appear when incompatibility arises between them - when needs are no longer satisfied by the corresponding abilities. From there, social stratification gradually takes shape according to income and living standards, with money becoming a tool for measuring these differences.

Possession of money means possessing others - transforming coexistence from a human process into an inhuman process, where objects, not people, become the destination of satisfaction. Possession between people can be expressed through the body, abilities, qualities, or wealth of labor. In the family, possession is a symbol of both biological and social connection. However, when life is dominated by money, possessions lose their humanity and become a means to achieve material goals. Sex, as a form of material possession, can be a harmony between the needs and abilities of two individuals. However, when dominated by material

interests, sex becomes a tool and a product - leading to phenomena such as prostitution or formal moral standards such as fidelity and betrayal. Sexual lifestyle and labor price become two aspects that regulate forms of ownership. Qualities such as loyalty, diligence, and dedication are expressions of a person possessing - or being possessed - by another person. When people use them, the exchange of subject and product positions becomes common, and “owning others” - the possession of people as individuals - appears. When legitimized by money and norms, common ownership becomes common. Labor becomes a product that can be bought and sold; work becomes a commodity; prices are determined by supply and demand, the law of value, and competition. In this context, professional standards are measured in terms of monetary costs and become the standard reference system for economic and social relations.

Sex and work are expressions of “freedom” to the extent that they are socially permitted. However, when individuals lose the ability to perform these two activities, they are considered deviant - exceptional cases. When all abilities become universal, the classification criteria also lose their meaning. If universalized, basic needs such as eating, sleeping, procreation, and working also become legal. Only in specific circumstances do norms and money become universal means of life. Human nature does not need norms or money at birth – it only needs to be honest with itself. However, cash and norms are at the forefront of modern society because of specific living conditions. If individuals do not maintain their autonomy and creativity, they become tools of the system – turning their abilities into power, like the state’s right to issue money. When freedom is a rational capacity, “having freedom” represents responsibility; in particular, “Civil liability is vital” (Mousinho de Figueiredo, I., 2024, p. 95).

Responsibility is the free satisfaction of the individual in sustainable economic development. However, when norms and money dominate, labor and sex – two basic activities – are forced and dehumanized. Individuals, when influenced, will act according to their instincts, while norms and financial gain are considered sources of happiness. Then, “owning others” does not mean living for fellow human beings but living to operate the system of norms and money, willing to do

good if paid fairly and do badly if not constrained by this power. Ultimately, labor creates wealth in sustainable development, and sex perpetuates the species – both are manifestations of “owning oneself”. When labor uses the means of production, sex uses the body of the opposite sex – both are easily exploited. Traditionally, prostitution is the means of livelihood of prostitutes; abstinence is the profession of monks – two extremes reflecting the deviation in the concept of life. Some individuals combine sex and labor to create new ways of living - an expression of true freedom. Conversely, forced, unimaginative, and rigid occupations only stagnate society. When norms are legitimized in the language of morality, life becomes artificial, and development cannot be achieved unless freedom, responsibility, and humanity are truly restored to the individual—the central subject of all development.

### **Individuals in economic institutions for sustainable development**

In economic development for sustainable goals, when traditional means of production become scarce, new means of production are created and become the dominant objects of social life. In this context, the capacity and needs of individuals are easily transformed into exploitable resources. The exchange between labor and sex deeply reflects the relationship between property and people – means and ends. As the population increases, new means of production are created by creative individuals – often resulting in monopolies. In this relationship, individuals can sacrifice their lives to serve economic interests, while assets are devalued to maximize profits. Wealth becomes scarce when the population increases, but when goods are abundant, they are despised, and human values are honored. The fluctuation of these values reveals the injustice and artificiality inherent in the mechanisms of commodity exchange and global monetary operations. Under specific historical conditions, norms and money are established to demonstrate equivalence in social exchange. However, when they become ends in themselves rather than means, they increase the artificiality and injustice of social relations. Every expression of loyalty or betrayal between people can be implied through norms or money. At that point, they are no longer moral means or money; they become tools of possession to control each

other. Individual life is thus externalized: from the inner to the material, from self-consciousness to explicit norms. People become business objects by investing in norms and money to enhance social value. In a commodity economy, norms and money merge, acting as a mechanism for transforming individual capacities and needs. Norms become a measure of earning capacity, and money becomes a symbol of achieving those norms. Individuals invest in themselves to survive, while others become objects of ownership and exploitation, depending on the specific social institutions in place. However, the unity of norms and money “contributes to the sustainability of the financial sector” (Abbas et al., 2025, p. 1011).

Creative activity, when “owning oneself” is “self-made”, creates a form of “owning others”. The emergence of “owning others” – the result of creativity – and “death huu” – the right to own property – has created conditions for developing the ownership regime, becoming an institution that legitimizes ownership. At that time, the right to “owning others” became legal, while the right to “owning oneself” established ownership relations between people. Family, religion, state, and business – social institutions – appear to coordinate and regulate these relationships. However, competition for money or normative cooperation becomes irrational and meaningless when institutions can no longer regulate. Norms such as loyalty, filial piety, gratitude, hope, and obedience become obsessive forms between individuals. In the family, possession is expressed through kinship and fidelity. In religion, through the assignment of positions and ecclesiastical law. In the state, through administrative decisions and laws.

Through contracts and economic conventions, mutual possession becomes a new business model. People invest in themselves to achieve standards in exchange for jobs and income. They sell standards to earn money, sell their lifestyles to secure jobs, and sell jobs to hire labor - their entire lives are commodified in the commodity economy. However, sustainable development requires that social life be a process of mutual satisfaction between individuals, not coercion. Coercion arises only within historical institutions, so freedom is inevitable. When there is no more coercion, freedom becomes redundant; therefore, it needs to be expressed in the form of professional competence,

creativity, and an independent life. People who do not rely on family, religion, the state, or business do not require freedom within the framework of these institutions. For them, moral standards, laws, and money are worthless. Freedom becomes necessary in the professional space, where individuals must utilize their abilities, talents, and creativity to thrive. When labor and sex take place outside the institution, freedom is no longer necessary because coercion does not exist. Professional standards and the ability to live within the institution only have meaning for those who have not achieved the standards. Standards exist to exclude those judged to be incompetent or deviant.

When an individual who does not meet the standards remains in the institution, it is either a sign of weakness or a demand for freedom, to change the nature of the institution in the process of sustainable development. The institution is a means of survival, a condition for individuals to have “the reputation and welfare” (McGregor, 2023, p. 18). Some people assimilate themselves into the institution, becoming its embodiment. Some people are imposed upon by the institution, losing their freedom. Some people live fake lives according to the standards of hiding their imperfections. Some people seek freedom within institutions, not to escape but to create and discover themselves. However, the stability of the institution requires honesty and responsibility. When individuals no longer need the institution to survive, the freedom within them becomes meaningless, and the institution itself loses its reason for existence. In sustainable development, loyalty is the norm of ownership - individuals use others to achieve common goals. When this common ownership occurs, freedom is no longer an expression of creativity but a distorted form of freedom - living according to a pattern in a state of irresponsibility, protected by institutions. To obey institutions is to obey norms established by history.

When norms replace people in determining values, mistakes in life come not from ignorance but from prejudice. Love is wrong because norms govern it. Suffering is not only caused by injustice but also by strict norms. Modesty can become cowardice when the norm of tolerance is misdirected. Hard work is not a result of a lack, but rather a greed for norms. Happiness does not come from diligence but from obedience to noble professional prejudices. Therefore, happiness is

“satisfaction with life” (Gul et al., 2025, p. 945). Therefore, happiness in sustainable development is the ability to limit unhappiness. A rich life is not about complexity, but rather a return to simplicity in abundance. Much love is not worth the truth. Freedom is understanding - not believing in nonsense and lies, but keeping an honest heart. When people love and help each other, love, loyalty, tolerance, and charity become redundant. Then, the family has only historical value. Religion loses its role when there is no longer belief in the afterlife. When laws are obeyed for a reason, the state no longer has a coercive function. When labor exchange is of quality, money loses its meaning. Corporations and businesses no longer have a reason to exist.

The existence of institutional norms creates the need for institutional freedom. However, when norms replace people, freedom— even when granted—is an irresponsible form of life. Individual rights are seen as an expression of human liberation, so the implementation of individual life is about knowing how to “make use of emerging technologies to optimize its design” (Wang et al., 2025, p. 455). However, when technology, science, robots, and AI become the new means of production, freedom to work becomes the common form - the freedom to sell labor power. Then, labor becomes a commodity, and money becomes the subject of control. People are reduced to “resources” - investment factors to maximize profits. As investment and business spread, inflation increases, and human values are affirmed not by money but by truth, creativity, and freedom about new means of production. Without humanity, I would also be meaningless - just as cows need grass, lions need meat, and humanity needs new means of production. Does humanity’s creation of AI depend on AI? The question is: What is the subject and what is the product? Means and goals? Will and knowledge? Ability and need? Necessity and freedom? Cause and effect? Internal and external? These are the central issues in economic development that contribute to humanity’s sustainable goal in the context of AI globalization.

## Results

The study’s results demonstrate that, in the context of globalization and the current social crisis, concepts such as freedom, individuality, and sustainable

development require reevaluation based on interdisciplinary philosophy.

First, freedom cannot be understood as an absolute privilege or power of the individual, but as a result of the development of capacity, cognition, and harmony between individual needs and social conditions. Freedom is the ability to transform the inevitable elements – through knowledge, reflection, and action – into the subjective ability to shape the world in a meaningful way.

Second, research and develop the concept of “creative individual” as the center of social life. The individual is not only a product of institutions and history, but also a point of occurrence of creativity, willpower, and innovation. However, when the institution crosses legitimate limits, it can suppress self-determination and weaken human creativity. Therefore, freedom requires the limitation of institutional power by moral and humanistic norms in order to protect the creativity and subjectivity of each individual.

Third, when freedom is associated with responsibility – understood as the ability to suffer moral and social consequences from one’s behavior – the individual is not only a goal but also an endogenous driver of sustainable development. On that basis, the study proposes an interdisciplinary philosophical framework that connects freedom, need, ability, and sustainable development, opening up an application-oriented approach in education, policy, and social design based on humanistic, equitable, and liberal values.

## Conclusion

The article has thoroughly analyzed the dialectical relationship between necessity and freedom, demonstrating that freedom is not a negation of necessity but rather the result of perceiving and transforming objective conditions into subjective opportunities for individuals to realize themselves. In economic development for sustainable goals, people cannot be just products of institutions. They must be seen as creative individuals who can make their own choices and take responsibility for their actions. They have to restore the value of their life. In this way, freedom is closely tied to knowledge, will, and the ability to consciously look for a good way. The article calls for repos to turn the individual into a social being,

not as a tool subject to the system, but as the moral and creative center for a more humane and sustainable future.

This study affirms that *freedom* is not the opposite of *necessity*, but rather the result of the process by which objective conditions are transformed into subjective abilities, enabling individuals to play a creative role in society. Aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (quality education), reveals that fostering the capacity for freedom and creativity is the foundation for developing generations of citizens with a sense of responsibility and the ability to innovate. Meanwhile, SDG 16 (equal groups) emphasizes the importance of systems that enable people to choose for themselves and get involved. They are not like the inhuman limits that are forced on people. These ties make the simple idea of the plan seem real. They provide clues on how to apply the idea in various fields, such as academic work, social interactions, or creating equal groups in society.

## Value, limitations, and directions for further research

The ideas in the article have both theoretical and practical uses. They can help build a system of human-scientific philosophy. They can help study the ties between necessity and freedom. They can help clarify the central role played by the individual in achieving sustainable economic growth. The article opens up the possibility of rethinking the concepts of norms, ownership, and responsibility in modern life by exploring the philosophy of humanity, knowledge, and critical political economy. However, a limitation of the study is that it has not conducted specific situational analyses or empirical surveys to illustrate the feasibility of philosophical arguments. In the future, the research direction can focus on connecting theory with practice in civic education, social policy, and innovation, to concretize philosophical concepts in more diverse and specific areas of life.

The theoretical framework of freedom and responsibility not only has philosophical value, but also opens up important practical directions. This can be useful in education, where it helps to design curricula that ignite students’ creativity and sense of autonomy, rather than simply imparting passive knowledge. The same approach can serve as the basis in the corporate

world for creating CSR programs that facilitate employees taking a more active role, rather than just doing. It can also emphasize the linkage between individual freedom and societal responsibility, as seen in environmental policy, thereby fostering a sustainable way of life in which each person's impact on their community and environment is clearly understood. These implications contribute to the formation of liberal institutions in ways that promote sustainable development.

## References

Abbas, M., Mahmood, H., & Qaralleh, T. J. (2025). Financial sector performance and environmental sustainability: Assessing the moderating effect of social responsibility. *International Journal of Sustainable Development and Planning*, 20(3), 1005-1013.

Arendt, H. (1958). *The human condition*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Aristotle. (2009). *Nicomachean ethics* (D. Ross, Trans.). Oxford, England: Oxford University Press. (Original work published c. 350 BCE)

Ayay-Arita, G., Huaman-Romani, Y.-L., Coronel-Chugden, J.-W., Uceda, F. M. F., & Julon-Sánchez, M. M. (2025). The construction of mental images as a cognitive strategy to improve comprehension of expository texts in children. *International Journal of Innovative Research and Scientific Studies*, 8(1), 458-468.

Cachón-Rodríguez, G., Blanco-González, A., Prado-Román, C., & Del-Castillo-Feito, C. (2024). Studying the pattern of employee loyalty based on social capital and sustainable human resource management. *Journal of Organizational Behavior Research*, 9(2), 1-11.

de Beauvoir, S. (2011). *The second sex* (C. Börde & S. Malovany-Chevallier, Trans.). New York, NY: Vintage Books. (Original work published 1949)

Dhar, B. K., Chawla, U. & Mulchandani, D. (2025). Sustainable Craft Culture: Socio-Cultural Drivers and Economic Impact on Sustainable Development. *Sustainable Development*, 33, 3023-3042.

Foucault, M. (1975). *Discipline and punishment: The birth of the prison*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books. (Original work published 1975)

Garbarova, M., & Vartiak, L. (2024). Support of human entrepreneurial capital in creative industries. *Journal of Organizational Behavior Research*, 9(1), 1-14.

Gul, H., Das, B. K., & Shafique, A. (2025). Happiness under haze: A study on the moderating effect of air quality and mental well-being in New Delhi. *International Journal of Sustainable Development and Planning*, 20(3), 937-947.

Hegel, G. W. F. (1975). *The philosophy of right* (T. M. Knox, Trans.). Oxford, England: Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1820)

Heraclitus. (2010). *Fragnents* (D. C. Lamberton, Trans.). Oxford, England: Oxford University Press. (Original work published c. 500 CE)

Hobbes, T. (1994). *Leviathan* (R. Tuck, Ed.). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1651)

Lam, N. M., & Quoc, N. A. (2025). The abundance of needs and the role of creativity in human evolution in a commodity economy. *Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology*, 9(4), 866-879.

Locke, J. (1980). *Two treatises of government* (P. Laslett, Ed.). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1689)

Marcuse, H. (1964). *One-dimensional man: Studies in the ideology of advanced industrial society*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Marx, K. (1867). *Das Kapital* (B. Hawkes, Trans.). London, England: Penguin Classics. (Original work published 1867)

McGregor, S. L. T. (2023). Ethical considerations in research about organizations: Compendium of strategies. *Ethics in Progress*, 14(2), 4-23.

Mielniczuk, E. (2014). The Daily Life Satisfaction Scale: Initial validation of a new measure for assessing the cognitive component of well-being. *Advances in Cognitive Psychology*, 20(3), 197-206.

Monteiro, A. K. S., Lima, F. dos S., Mesquita, R. F. de, Campelo Filho, E. G., & Matos, F. R. N. (2025). Barriers and Drivers of the Relationship between Gender Diversity and Innovation in Organizations. *International Journal of Innovation*, 13(1), e26351.

Mousinho de Figueiredo, I. (2024). Erros do poder público e responsabilidade civil. *A&C - Revista*

*de Direito Administrativo & Constitucional*,  
24(96), 79-100.

Nussbaum, M. C. (2011). *Creating capabilities: The human development approach*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Ogba, K., Atime, P. L., Onyia, F. O., Anyoko-Shaba, O., Obasi, I. C., & Ibongudo, B. U. (2025). Developing Security Consciousness among Nigerian Youths: Do Self-Esteem and Self-Awareness Matter? *Ianna Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 7(1), 580-590.

Plato. (2008). *The Republic* (B. Jowett, Trans.). Mineola, NY: Dover Publications. (Original work published c. 380 BCE)

Rousseau, J. J. (2004). *The social contract* (C. G. D. H. Cole, Trans.). Mineola, NY: Dover Publications. (Original work published 1762)

Salej Higgins, S., Vega Sanabria, G., Unger Raphael Bataglia, P., Fontenele Gonçalves, E., & Ferreira da Silva Carmo, L. (2023). A social network approach to the dual aspect of moral competence. *Ethics in Progress*, 14(1), 144-168.

Santos, M. P. dos, & Lima, M. M. C. (2023). Escolhas públicas, compliance e juridicidade administrativa. *A&C - Revista de Direito Administrativo & Constitucional*, 23(94), 61-84.

Sarlata, S., Dlużewicz, A., & Napwodzka, K. (2022). Ars Moriendi: Ethical challenges of the ultimate realities of life. *Ethics in Progress*, 13(2), 4-10.

Sartre, J. P. (2007). *Being and Nothingness* (H. E. Barnes, Trans.). Abingdon, England: Routledge. (Original work published 1943)

Sen, A. (1999). Development as freedom. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Świątek, A., & Leonardi, G. (2024). Learning and Communication Strategies in Verbal Perlocutionary Aptitude. *Advances in Cognitive Psychology*, 20(2), 80-91.

Wang, H., Hamid, J. A., & Tham, J. (2025). A study of flipped classrooms in higher education. *Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology*, 9(3), 443-458.