

Sceptical Optimism? Dealing with the Problems of Our Time Vol. 1, No. 2/ 2023

DOI: 10.46586/eelp.1.2.1-3
ISSN 2940-3065



This work is licensed under [CC Attribution 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Editorial

Sceptical Optimism? Dealing with the Problems of Our Time

Following the launch of the first edition of the Online Journal ETHICS, ECONOMICS, LAW AND POLITICS *Online journal for interdisciplinary discussions on current societal issues* in 2022, in the present issue of 2023, we primarily offer students of the MA study programme Ethics - Economics, Law and Politics (MA EELP) at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum the opportunity to publish selected pertinent.

We seem to live in dark times. War and conflict are evolving, in more and more countries democracy is threatened or autocracies are gaining ground. Environmental problems abound and the prospects of solving the looming climate crisis seem to be meager. On the other hand, there were remarkable improvements during the preceding decades in increasing the global food supply, shielding people from extreme weather events and in tackling child mortality, to name only a few achievements here. Thus, while there are many reasons for being pessimistic, there is at the same time ample ground for optimism. What is needed seems to be a combination of blunt analysis and both realistic and ambitious problem solving.

Maybe something like sceptical optimism is needed. This may seem contradictory. However, it is only contradictory if scepticism is merely understood as doubt and not as critical questioning. The question of whether sceptical optimism or a routine of despair is the appropriate way to react to supposed or justified imbalances in today's societies forms the basis for the discussion in this issue. This discussion is reflected in the essays by Antonio Scarpino, Fabian Vogt, and Dimitrios Oikonomou. Three optimistic perspectives are presented in very different approaches.

Taking up a dictum of Gramsci, in his essay *Pessimism of the Intellect and Optimism of the Will – A Confident Perspective on the Future* "Antonio Scarpino wants "to verify whether there are reasons for a cautious optimism concerning the future." Based on a critical reflection of uncontrolled economic growth and extreme consumer behaviour in times of polycrisis, he

argues both for an intellectual questioning of wrong decisions and misconduct and for the conviction that it is possible to change flawed systems through the power of optimistic will.

In his essay *Effective Altruism to Help Others – and Yourself*, Fabian Vogt attempts to show that effective altruism shows a perspective for remaining optimistic despite all crises. However, according to Vogt, two factors are crucial for this: "action and visible progress".

The title *The Need for a New Enlightenment*, enunciates the basic claim of Dimitrios Oikonomou essay, in which he explores the following questions: "how we are supposed to collectively and individually react to an uncertain future accompanied by the promise of a looming catastrophe? Are we allowed to espouse a sceptical optimism or are we doomed to keep going through the desperation routine?"

The published essays were written as part of the 2023 essay competition of the *Friends and Supporters of Economic and Climate Ethics*, a non-profit organization associated with the MA EELP. The latter promotes economic and climate ethics by fostering the research and teaching in these fields.

The three essays are followed by Shumaila H. Shahani's article "Data Monopolization by the Tech Industry: Implications for Democracy". Based on her central thesis "that the unregulated accumulation of data by the tech industry has led to the consolidation of power among a select few, resulting in the erosion of democratic principles" she first explains the data-driven business model of digital platforms providing. She then explains the risks involved in uncontrolled data collection and in data misuse and highlights threats to democracy and national security concerns.

Table of Contents

Antonio Scarpino: Pessimism of the Intellect and Optimism of the Will – A Confident Perspective on the Future	4–9
Fabian Vogt: Effective Altruism to Help Others – and Yourself	10–14
Dimitrios Georgios Oikonomou: The Need for a New Enlightenment	15–18
Shumaila Hussain Shahani: Data Monopolization by the Tech Industry: Implications for Democracy	19–29