

***The Working Group on Economic Philosophy and Ethics in the Deutsche  
Gesellschaft für Philosophie (DG Phil)***

in collaboration with

***The Journal of Philosophical Economics***

## **Call for Papers**

Annual Meeting of The Working Group on Economic Philosophy and Ethics  
September 18–20, 2025, at the University of St. Gallen, Switzerland

and

Symposium on the Economists' Philosophy Day (Online) on November 20, 2025.

### **The Past of the Futures: Inquiries Taking the Lens of Economic Philosophy**

A fundamental assumption underlying many approaches in economics, ethics, and philosophy is that actorship involves taking future-oriented actions and influencing the conditions for the realization of future states. Early empiricism and positivism (Bourdeau 2022; Creath 2021) emphasized the connection between knowledge and action (Bacon 1902 [1620]; for Comte, see Bourdeau 2022) and thus the human capacity to create and manage change, ideally at all levels of society. From this perspective, human action connects the past and the future; and human beings, endowed with scientific knowledge, can achieve some control over future states of affairs. This view has left its mark on many scientific disciplines, as Frank Knight (1885-1972) pointed out: “It is doubtless quite generally true of every science that its study is motivated by both sorts of considerations, the quest for ‘truth for its own sake’ and the desire to utilize truth in improving the conditions of life” (Knight 1922, p. 192).

An epistemic, an ontological, and a pragmatic problem can be associated with Knight’s statement. The *epistemic problem* concerns the relevance and validity of the knowledge that actors have gained or can gain about the social world. Knight saw the problem that our knowledge may not match the changes in the states of affairs that it addresses:

We live in a world full of contradiction and of paradox, a fact of which perhaps the most fundamental illustration is this: that the existence of a problem of knowledge depends on the future being different from the past, while the possibility of the solution of the problem depends on the future being like the past (Knight 1964 [1921], p. 313).

The epistemic problem, as Knight has put it, refers to the reasonableness of projecting knowledge from the past to future states when the conditions for the applicability of that knowledge have eroded because the future is not the past. This is in line with the view of the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl, who argued that the anticipation of something absolutely new in the sense of an ‘unknown unknown’ is impossible for consciousness, since it projects the future as a field of expectations (cf. Husserl 2006 [Hua. VIII]) based on past experiences.

The *ontological problem* is based on assumptions about the nature of the social reality in which we act. Does this reality allow for a connection between past and future based on human action?

The *pragmatic problem* has to do with how our projects change because we act as part of the world, observe how we and others act, and make predictions about future states based on that observation. The common denominator of all problems is that something that is of our making cannot be independent of us.

Through the lens of economic philosophy, the aim of this call for papers is to explore how theories or approaches in disciplines such as economics, philosophy, or ethics have dealt with the three problems mentioned above, and how they could deal with them. What insights can be gained from the lens of economic philosophy? Below are three examples of how the three disciplines have addressed these issues:

**Economics.** Economic models of choice, if the choice is understood as a choice among a set of goods, are not adapted to a world of uncertainty. These models are perhaps the most parsimonious approaches in terms of what they require for explaining economic action (Hirschman 2013 [1977]): Given an actor's budget constraint and "preferences," the desired and (depending on the market process) achievable future state is a direct consequence of the past. The unexpected occurs in the form of unintended consequences of actions, or externalities (Koehn 2010; Neck 2014).

To this day, Austrian economics is perhaps the branch of economics best known for its attention to the role of time, dynamics, and uncertainty in economic action (Lachmann 1959; Menger 1968 [1923]; Shackle 1972; Solari 2022). Post-Keynesian economists, following Keynes (1921) and Knight (1964 [1921]), have investigated the nature of future states. Reading the work of Knight and Keynes "as a call to deal theoretically with unforeseen contingencies" (Svetlova 2021, p. 994), post-Keynesian researchers tried to answer the question of what can be known at all, including future states.

Knight rejected views that collapsed the interest in understanding how actors deal with the connection between future and past, ends-means relationships, and knowledge-based judgment into a timeless, one-dimensional concept of utility (Witt 2016). By portraying "human action ... as a process of aspiration and discovery" (Boyd 1999, p. xxiii), Knight introduced an element of openness into his approach to human or economic action. To deal with uncertainty and risk, Knight's theory brings the entrepreneur and profit to the fore. However, the positive assessment of uncertainty by economic approaches as a source of entrepreneurship, innovation, and freedom is still an exception (Esposito 2013).

**Philosophy.** The challenge of uncertainty in philosophy encompasses epistemological, ontological, and existential dimensions. Epistemologically, uncertainty is addressed in the context of the limits of human knowledge: The ancient skeptics, Agrippan and Cartesian skepticism, Hume's critique of the uniformity principle mark stages in a long-standing debate about the possibility and nature of knowledge (Williams 2001).

According to Husserl, uncertainty emerges in its radical form as *open possibility* (offene Möglichkeit, Husserl 1966 [Hua. XI], p. 43), which is characterized by indeterminacy. This indeterminacy is not due to a specific orientation toward the future, nor to various conflicting orientations toward the future, but rather to a fundamental openness: “Wherever a consciousness has lost the mode of certainty and transitioned into uncertainty, there is also talk of possibilities” (Husserl, XI, 1966, p. 39; our translation). Heidegger considers the anxiety associated with “being-toward-death” as foundational to an awareness of existential openness, whereas Sartre regards uncertainty as a condition of human freedom.

In postmodern philosophy, Derrida and Deleuze highlight the unpredictability of the “event” (Derrida 1988) and its connection to the radical openness of the future. An indirect approach to the new, in the form of the distinction between repetition and recontextualization, is also provided by the concept of the event (Derrida 1988). By emerging unexpectedly, the event disrupts established anticipatory models of the future, defying prediction and control. Its significance only becomes apparent in retrospect, when its causes are reconstructed and thus integrated into familiar structures of understanding. This process reflects a dynamic tension between the event’s disruptive newness and its eventual assimilation into existing contexts.

**Ethics.** In the context of uncertainty, the fruitfulness of ethical approaches must also be assessed. The classical model of responsibility (see references in Haase 2015) can be understood as a paradigmatic example of the interplay of the epistemic, ontological, and pragmatic dimensions of an ethics that links the past and the future. Classical responsibility presupposes a regular connection between action and action consequence, usually treated in terms of causality; an ontology that presupposes agents, actions, and action consequences; a model of the person (for Kant, see Westphal 2019; for Hobbes and Pufendorf, see Holland 2017); and philosophical concepts such as intentionality, volition, and will.

The difficulty of disentangling the interconnectedness and complexities of the socio-economic world has been the source of concern about the applicability of the classical model of responsibility (Jonas 1979; Koehn 2019). Guillaume (2019) reflects on the difference between Knightian risk and uncertainty with reference to Hans Jonas’s (1903-1993) precautionary principle and his ethics of the future. Jonas (1979, p. 7) interpreted humanity’s technological options as “weather lights from the future” (Wetterleuchten aus der Zukunft). Grounding his response in the “anticipation of the threat by the awareness that the worst is possible” (Guillaume 2019, p. 5) or a “heuristics of fear” (p. 8), Jonas developed an “ethics of responsibility (a solicitude recognized as duty) in the direction of the future, which is the horizon of all existence” (p. 5). A path seems to be emerge here that can be further developed by economics and ethics because “in a world of uncertainty, the cognitive faculty of judgment was essential and unavoidable” (Langlois 2024, p. 4). Judgment is not only required when evaluating the options that have already been identified, but also when assessing which path or end should be chosen: Since “(s)ituations and options do not just exist out there in the ether” (Koehn 2020, p. 249), “*we give ourselves options*” (p. 250; italics in original) in a process that, according to Knight (1922), takes time and is governed by knowledge, norms, and values. It is here that contingency, agency, and the human capacity to make judgments become the preconditions for diverse theories and practices of freedom and the points of entry for ethics and moral theory into the debate.

## **Submissions to the Annual Meeting and the Economists' Philosophy Day**

We encourage submissions from scholars across disciplines, including philosophy, economics, ethics, and related fields. Submissions should provide innovative and thought-provoking perspectives that align with the theme of the special issue including but not limited to

- The framing of uncertainty as a productive element in ethical or political decision-making, rather than merely as a limitation,
- The relationship between uncertainty and human existence, and how uncertainty can be the basis for a broader understanding of temporality and meaning,
- How theories or models of action deal with Knightian uncertainty. Do cognitive tools, such as accounting or bookkeeping, help creating business worlds devoid of uncertainty in some respects while obscuring and increasing uncertainty in others?
- How the respective “logics of control” (Clark 1939; Esposito 2013) influence the choice of research questions or theories and thus the embodied ontologies and the knowledge to be gained about processes, practices or social mechanisms (Bunge 2004; Koehn 2020; Sawyer 2004),
- The role of moral theories for the understanding of the epistemic problem,
- The difference that taking the lifeworld perspective can make in understanding and treating the three problems,
- The imagination and desirability of futures. How radical can we imagine possible future? Can we, for example, as Arnould and Helkkula (2024, p. 1) have recently asked, “imagine (...) a future in which the capitalist market economy is dethroned from its dominant position”? How can we fruitfully combine considering the openness of the future with actualizing issues and concepts such as responsibility (Lévinas 1987 [1961]) or hope also in its relation to climate (and other) anxieties (Pelluchon 2023),
- How contemporary challenges (e.g., climate change, technological risk) reshape philosophical approaches to uncertainty,
- The role of technology, such as AI, for the understanding and (im)possibility of possible futures (Svetlova 2021; Rona-Tas 2020).

### *Paper presentations*

We invite paper presentations on the topic of this call for

1. the **Annual Meeting of The Working Group on Economic Philosophy and Ethics**, taking place from September 18–20, 2025, in St. Gallen, Switzerland,
  - Deadline for submissions of either extended abstracts (1500 words) or full papers by April 25, 2025
  - Notifications of acceptance will be communicated by May 31, 2025
  - Extended abstracts or full papers should be sent to: Michaela.Haase@fu-berlin.de, Ingrid.Becker@unisg.ch, Verena.Rauen@unisg.ch

<https://iwe.unisg.ch/en/initiatives/working-group-economic-philosophy-and-ethics/>

and

2. the **Symposium on the Economists' Philosophy Day** (Online), organized by the Journal of Philosophical Economics and the Working Group on Economic Philosophy and Ethics on November 20, 2025.
  - Abstract Submission Deadline: 500 words, by April 25, 2025
  - Abstracts should be sent to: editor@jpe.ro and the Working Group on Economic Philosophy and Ethics ([Michaela.Haase@fu-berlin.de](mailto:Michaela.Haase@fu-berlin.de))
  - Notifications of acceptance will be communicated by May 31, 2025

For more information about the Economist's Philosophy Day, see

[https://jpe.episciences.org/public/Call\\_Economists\\_Philosophy\\_Day\\_4th\\_ed\\_2025.pdf](https://jpe.episciences.org/public/Call_Economists_Philosophy_Day_4th_ed_2025.pdf)

Authors may submit abstracts to both events.

### *Publication*

The **Journal of Philosophical Economics (J Philos Econ)** plans to publish a special section on the two events under the editorship of Michaela Haase, Ingrid Becker and Verena Rauen. All participants and all authors interested in publishing an article on the topic of this call for papers are invited to submit their manuscripts via the **J Philos Econ** submission page. For information on how to submit, visit the website:

<https://jpe.episciences.org/page/guide-to-contributors>

All submissions will be subjected to the journal's regular review process. The submission window closes at **January 18, 2026**.

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