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Optimism : a Systematized Approach to a Challenging Concept

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Introduction

What is optimism ? Positive psychologists struggle to define it.

Optimism is mostly considered as an attitude, and has been explored by psychologists, but also by philosophers, and even historians.

This poster suggests a way to study optimism systematically, through classifying various views on it.

Optimism as considered throughout time and perceptions

Two objects can be considered : self and the world

Four time periods can be contemplated : the past, the present, the near future and, speculatively, the far future

Table: Optimism as a positive attitude towards “objects” in different time periods

Time periods «Objects»	Past	Present	“Near” Future One life time Materialistic* view of human beings	“Far” Future After life Idealistic* view of human beings
Self	Remembers good experience more Psychological optimism	Self-esteem Ontological optimism	Self-confidence in one’s plans Dispositional optimism	Faith in one’s salvation Teleological optimism
The World	Considers the past as more good than bad (history, periods, events)	Seeing the positive rather than the negative Materialism	Trust in the “near” future Meliorism	Faith in creation Eschatology

* The words “materialistic” and “idealistic” have to be understood in their philosophical meanings

Conclusion

Optimism can be seen as a timeless, unbound notion, inserted in time by human attitudes and experience.

Religious optimism, not exclusive of time-bound optimism, could arguably be considered as the safest kind of optimism.

Further research might confirm this hypothesis.

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