

# The Age of Anxiety



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## I. Uncertainty in Modern Thought

### A. Modern Philosophy

1. Before World War I Friedrich Nietzsche proclaimed that the optimistic Christian order of the West was obsolete, and that it stifled creativity and excellence. He called for superior individuals to recognize the emptiness of social convention and the meaninglessness of individual life.
2. The Frenchman Henri Bergson argued that immediate experience and intuition were at least as important as rational thinking and science.
3. Georges Sorel described Marxian socialism as an inspiring religion, not a scientific truth. He believed that after the workers' revolution a small revolutionary elite would have to run society.
4. World War I accelerated change in philosophical thought. Change took two main directions.
5. In English-speaking countries logical empiricism dominated.
  - a. Ludwig Wittgenstein reduced philosophy to the study of language, arguing that philosophers could not make meaningful statements about God, freedom, morality, and so on.
6. On the Continent existentialism dominated.
  - a. Existentialists generally were atheists, but they sought moral values in a world of terror and uncertainty.
  - b. Jean-Paul Sartre argued that human beings are forced to define themselves by their choices. If they do so consciously, they can overcome life's meaninglessness.
  - c. Existentialism first gained popularity in Germany in the 1920s as Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers attracted followers.
  - d. Existentialism flowered during and right after World War II. The existentialists Sartre and Albert Camus were both active in the French resistance against Hitler.

### B. The Revival of Christianity

1. Loss of faith in human reason and progress led to renewed interest in Christianity.
  2. Among the theologians and thinkers who turned toward faith in God as the only answer to the loneliness and anxiety of the world after the Great War were Karl Barth, Gabriel Marcel, T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, Evelyn Waugh, Aldous Huxley, Max Planck, and many others.
- C. The New Physics
1. The research of Marie Curie and Max Planck showed that atoms were not simple hard balls.
  2. Albert Einstein undermined Newtonian physics by postulating the equivalence of mass and energy and by demonstrating that space and time are relative to the viewpoint of the observer.
  3. Werner Heisenberg hypothesized that it was impossible to know precisely the position and speed of an individual electron.
  4. The stable, rational world of Newtonian physics dissolved into a universe of tendencies and probabilities.
- D. Freudian Psychology
1. Prior to Freud most professional psychologists believed that human behavior was the result of rational calculation by the conscious mind.
  2. Beginning in the late 1880s, Sigmund Freud argued that unconscious and instinctual drives were important factors in determining human behavior.
  3. After 1918 Freudian psychology was popularized in the U.S. and Europe.
- E. Twentieth-Century Literature
1. Nineteenth-century authors had written typically as all-knowing narrators describing characters and their relationships.
  2. In the early twentieth century authors such as Marcel Proust, Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner, and James Joyce wrote from the point of view of a single, confused individual or multiple individuals.
- II. Modern Art and Music
- A. Architecture and Design
1. From the 1890s onward, architects in Europe and the U.S. pioneered new building styles that stressed functionalism and efficiency of design and used cheap steel and reinforced concrete.
  2. In Germany the Bauhaus school of architecture developed this trend in the 1920s and 1930s.
- B. Modern Painting
1. Modern painting developed as a reaction to the “surrealism” of Impressionism.
  2. After 1905 art became increasingly nonrepresentational/abstract.
  3. Modern art began by painting real objects but with primary attention to the arrangement of color, line, and form (Cézanne, Picasso).
  4. It developed toward the representation of pure form without reference to real objects (Kandinsky) and to attacks on all accepted conventions of art and behavior (the surrealists and the Dadaists).
- C. Modern Music

1. Composers moved in the direction of dissonance and entirely atonal music without recognizable harmonies (Schönberg).
- III. Movies and Radio
- A. Movies
    1. Movies became a form of mass entertainment that replaced traditional arts and amusement for rural people.
    2. By the 1930s, movies were weekly entertainment for much of the population in Europe and North America.
  - B. Radio
    1. Radio became commercially viable in the 1920s.
    2. By the late 1930s, most households in Britain and Germany had inexpensive individual sets.
    3. Radio was an extremely powerful outlet for political propaganda.
- IV. The Search for Peace and Political Stability
- A. Germany and the Western Powers
    1. After Versailles the British were ready for conciliation with Germany, while the French took a hard line.
    2. In April 1921 the Allied reparations commission ordered Germany to pay huge reparations.
    3. In 1922 the German (Weimar) Republic refused to pay, prompting Franco-Belgian occupation of the Ruhr. As the German government printed money to pay striking Ruhr workers unemployment benefits, runaway inflation destroyed the savings of retirees and the middle class.
    4. The Dawes Plan stabilized the situation, cutting reparations and providing private American loans to pay for what remained.
  - B. Hope in Foreign Affairs, 1924–1929
    1. Agreements signed among European nations at Locarno, Switzerland, in 1925 gave Europeans a sense of growing international security.
  - C. Hope in Democratic Government
    1. After 1923, democracy seemed to take root in Weimar Germany.
    2. In Britain, the rise of the Labour party and passage of welfare measures guaranteed social peace and maintained relative equality among the classes.
- V. The Great Depression, 1929-1939
- A. The Economic Crisis
    1. In the late 1920s, American investment in the stock market boomed as direct investment in factories, farms, equipment, and so on fell.
    2. Much of the stock market investment was “on margin”; that is, bought with loans. As the stock market began to fall in October 1929, investors began a mass sell-off which caused the market to collapse.
    3. Recall of private loans by American banks caused the world banking system to fall apart.
    4. The financial crisis caused world production of goods to fall by more than one-third between 1929 and 1933.

5. Traditional economic theory did not recognize that government deficit spending to stimulate the economy was a possible solution in this situation.
- B. Mass Unemployment
1. The need for large-scale government spending was tied to mass unemployment.
  2. Unemployment posed grave social problems.
- C. The New Deal in the United States
1. In 1933 newly elected U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt began using government intervention in the economy to fight the Depression.
  2. Roosevelt's administration passed the Agricultural Adjustment Act that aimed to raise prices and farm income by limiting production.
  3. Roosevelt's National Recovery Administration was supposed to fix wages and prices for the benefit of all, but the Supreme Court declared it unconstitutional in 1935.
  4. Under Roosevelt, the U.S. government hired many unemployed workers through the Works Progress Administration.
  5. The United States also created a national social security system and legalized collective bargaining by unions in this period.
- D. The Scandinavian Response to the Depression
1. The Swedish Social Democratic party had great success dealing with the Depression by increasing social welfare benefits and using government deficit spending to finance big public works projects.
- E. Recovery and Reform in Britain and France
1. British manufacturing's reorientation from international to national markets for consumer goods alleviated the worst of the Depression.
  2. In France, political disunity prevented effective action to deal with the economic crisis. The only attempt to do so was that of Leon Blum's Popular Front government, a coalition of communist and moderate left parties.