

## The "Age of Anxiety," 1914-1950

- I. World War I resulted in an end to the old order.
- A. Collapse of empires: Hohenzollerns (Germany), Habsburgs (Austria), and Romanovs (Russia)
  - B. Democracies in Europe remained intact or took root.
    - 1. France and Britain remained democratic.
    - 2. Germany became a democracy – the Weimar Republic.
    - 3. The new state of Czechoslovakia was democratic.
  - C. In the 1920s, communist totalitarianism took root in Russia and fascism emerged in Italy; fascism took power in Germany in the 1930s.
  - D. Political crises in the 1920s were followed by the Great Depression beginning in 1929 and then political crises in the 1930s leading to World War II.
  - E. The new world in the aftermath of WWI created an "age of anxiety."
    - 1. World War I was a staggering blow to Western civilization.
    - 2. Many people felt as if the world they knew had been turned upside down and they had little control to change things for the better.
    - 3. People saw themselves living in an age of continual crisis (until at least the early 1950s): WWI, revolutions at the end of the war, political and financial crises in the 1920s, the Great Depression, World War II and the onset of the Cold War.
- II. **Modernism** in philosophy and literature
- A. After the war, new and disturbing ideas began to spread throughout the population.
    - 1. Before 1914 most people still believed in the Enlightenment ideas of progress, reason and the rights of the individual.
    - 2. The optimistic pre-WWI view was the result of significant progress of the past two centuries.
  - B. Critics of the pre-war world anticipated many of the post-war ideas.
    - 1. They rejected the general faith in progress and the power of the rational human mind.
    - 2. **Friedrich Nietzsche** (1844-1900)
      - a. He was one of the most important critics of the rationalism of the Enlightenment.
      - b. In **Thus Spake Zarathustra** (1883-85), he blasted religion and famously claimed "God is Dead."
        - He claimed Christianity embodied a "slave morality," which glorified weakness, envy, and mediocrity.

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- Individualism had been quashed by society.
- c. In *Will to Power* (1888) he wrote that only the creativity of a few supermen—*übermenschen*— could successfully reorder the world.
- d. Though not widely read by his contemporaries, his writings seemed relevant in the atmosphere of post-World War I pessimism.
  - Fascist dictators such as Hitler were strongly influenced by his ideas.
- 3. **Henri Bergson** (1859-1941): In the 1890s, he convinced many young people that immediate experience and intuition were as important as rational and scientific thinking for understanding reality.
- 4. **Georges Sorel** (1847-1922): Syndicalism (a manifestation of anarchism)
  - a. He believed socialism would come to power through a great, violent strike of all working people.
  - b. His ideas foreshadowed the Bolshevik Revolution; control by an elite few.
- 5. **Sigmund Freud** (1856-1939)
  - a. Traditional psychology had assumed a single, unified conscious mind processed sensory experiences in a rational and logical way.
  - b. Freudian psychology seemed to reflect the spirit of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with its emphasis on humans as greedy irrational creatures.
  - c. Freudian thought became an international movement by 1910 and received popular attention after 1918, especially in Protestant countries of northern Europe and the U.S.
  - d. Freud asserted that because the human unconscious (ID) is driven by sexual, aggressive, and pleasure-seeking desires, humans are therefore NOT rational.  
The ID battles the Ego and Superego.
    - **Ego**: Rationalizing conscious mediates what a person *can* do.
    - **Superego**: Ingrained moral values specify what a person *should* do.
    - Freud shattered the Enlightenment view of rationality and progress.
  - e. Freud agreed with Nietzsche that mechanisms of rational thinking and traditional morals values can be too strong on the human psyche.
    - They can repress sexual desires too effectively, crippling individuals and entire peoples with guilt and neurotic fears
    - Many opponents and some enthusiasts interpreted Freud as saying that the first requirement for mental health is an uninhibited sex life.
    - After WWI, the popular interpretation of Freud reflected and encouraged growing sexual experimentation, particularly among middle-class women.

- C. Post-war modernist philosophers and authors expanded on the earlier pessimism.
1. **Paul Valéry** (1871-1945): Poet who spoke of the "cruelly injured mind" besieged by doubts and suffering from anxieties due to economic, political, and social disruptions of the 1920s.
  2. Logical empiricism (logical positivism) -- took root in English-speaking universities
    - a. Developed by Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951), part of the Vienna Circle in the 1920s and 1930s.
    - b. They contended that philosophy is merely the logical clarification of thoughts.
    - c. Abstract concepts regarding God, freedom, morality, etc., are senseless since they can neither be tested by scientific experiments nor demonstrated by the logic of mathematics.
    - d. Only experience is worth analyzing.
  3. Anti-utopian authors reflected a pessimistic uncertain future.
    - a. **Oswald Spengler** (1880-1936) – *The Decline of the West* (1918-22)
      - Every culture experiences a life cycle of growth and decline; Western civilization was in its old age, and death was approaching in the form of conquest by Asians.
    - b. **T. S. Eliot** (1888-1965), "**The Waste Land**" (1922): Depicted a world of growing desolation.
      - Some consider it the greatest long poem of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
    - c. **Franz Kafka** (1883-1924) portrayed helpless individuals destroyed by inexplicably hostile and surreal forces.
      - *The Metamorphosis* (1915), *The Trial* (1925), *The Castle* (1926);
  4. **Erich Maria Remarque: *All Quiet on the Western Front*, 1929**
    - Powerful novel detailing the horrors of trench warfare during World War I.
  5. **Stream of Consciousness** narrative sought to capture a character's entire thought process usually in the form of an interior monologue.
    - a. **James Joyce**, *Ulysses*, 1922
    - b. **Virginia Woolf**, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 1925
  6. Existentialism took root in Continental countries after World War II.
    - a. In the wake of the horrors of World War II and the advent of the atomic age, pessimism and hopelessness were expressed by existentialists.
    - b. Existentialists saw life as absurd, with no inherent meaning.
    - c. They viewed a world where the individual had to find his/her own meaning.
    - d. Most existentialists were atheists.

- e. **Jean-Paul Sartre** (1905-1980) wrote that life had no meaning and that humans simply exist.
    - He was strongly attracted to communism.
  - f. **Albert Camus** (1913-1960)
    - Individuals had to find meaning to life by taking action against those things with which they disagree.
    - One's actions are derived from personal choices that are independent from religion or political ideology.
  - g. Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers were also prominent existentialists.
7. Christian Existentialists shared the loneliness and despair of atheistic existentialists.
- a. Their ideas could be traced back to Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855).
  - b. They stressed human beings' sinful nature, need for faith, and the mystery of God's forgiveness.
  - c. They broke with Christian "modernists" of late 19<sup>th</sup> century who reconciled the Bible and science.
  - d. They believed Christian faith could anchor the individual caught in troubling modern times.
  - e. T. S. Eliot created his work within a perceived traditional Christian framework.
    - He advocated literary allegiance to tradition.
8. **George Orwell** (1903-1950): famous for his dystopian novels
- a. ***Animal Farm*** (1945): allegorical novella about the Russian Revolution
    - Depicts events leading up to the Stalin era in the Soviet Union
    - "All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others."
  - b. **1984** (1949): "Big Brother" (the dictator) and his totalitarian state use a new kind of language, sophisticated technology, and psychological terror to strip a weak individual of his last shred of human dignity.
9. **Ayn Rand** (1905-1982)
- a. *We the Living* (1936) focuses on the struggle between the individual and the state.
  - b. *Anthem* (1938) portrays a dystopian future run by a totalitarian government.
  - c. *The Fountainhead* (1947) championed individualism, perhaps her reaction to having lived in the Soviet Union's totalitarian society.
10. William Golding, *Lord of the Flies* (1954)
- a. The novel deals with the dark side of humanity and how cruelty and murder result among a group of marooned youths.
  - b. Some see the novel as an allegory regarding totalitarianism.

11. "Theater of the absurd" also reflected pessimism after World War II.
  - Samuel Beckett (1906-1989): Irish playwright
    - *Waiting for Godot* (1952): Two characters wait for Godot (perhaps God?) but he never comes. The dialogue is disjointed and convoluted.

### III. Science

- A. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, science was a major pillar supporting Western society's optimistic and rationalistic view of the world (positivism).
  - The Enlightenment and the Newtonian universe remained at the heart of the European world view.
- B. The "**New Physics**," much popularized after WWI, challenged long-held ideas and led to uncertainty.
  1. **Max Planck** (1858-1947) developed the basis for quantum physics in 1900. (*See Unit 16R*)
    - a. He postulated matter and energy might be different forms of the same thing.
    - b. This shook the foundations of 19<sup>th</sup> century physics that had viewed atoms as the stable, basic building blocks of nature, with a different kind of unbreakable atom for each element.
  2. **Albert Einstein** (1879-1955)
    - a. 1905, his **Theory of relativity** of time and space challenged traditional ideas of Newtonian physics ( $E=MC^2$ ).
    - b. He united an apparently infinite universe with the incredibly small, fast-moving subatomic world.
    - c. Matter and energy are interchangeable and even a particle of matter contains enormous levels of potential energy.
  3. **Ernest Rutherford** (1871-1937): In 1919, he demonstrated the atom could be split.
  4. **Werner Heisenberg** (1901-1976) introduced the "principle of uncertainty" in 1927: As it is impossible to know the position and speed of an individual electron, it is therefore impossible to predict its behavior.
    - Heisenberg's principle: The dynamics of an experiment alters the state of the subject.
  5. **Neils Bohr** (1885-1962) developed a model for understanding the atomic structure and made contributions to quantum theory.
  6. **Erwin Schrödinger** (1887-1961): his work in quantum theory formed the basis of wave mechanics.
  7. **Enrico Fermi** (1901-1954) developed the world's first nuclear reactor. His work later led to the development of the atomic bomb.
  8. Impact of "new physics" on the common mind
    - a. The new universe seemed strange and troubling.
    - b. The universe was now "relative," dependent on the observer's frame of reference.

- c. The universe was uncertain and undetermined, without stable building blocks.
- d. Physics no longer provided easy, optimistic answers, or any answers for that matter.

C. **Eugenics** (early 20<sup>th</sup> century)

1. Sought to improve the quality of the human race through higher rates of reproduction among "superior" human societies and lower rates of reproduction (through sterilization) among "inferior" societies.
2. The philosophy began in Britain and quickly spread to other western European countries and the U.S.
3. The policy eventually became associated with Nazi Germany with its mass sterilization (and murder) of physically and mentally handicapped people and later, the Holocaust, the attempt at mass extermination of "undesirable" peoples.

IV. Art and Entertainment

A. Functionalism in architecture

1. Late 19<sup>th</sup> century U.S.: Louis Sullivan pioneered skyscrapers – "form follows function"
2. In 1905, architectural leadership shifted to German-speaking countries (until Hitler in 1930s).
3. **Bauhaus movement—modernism** in architecture
  - a. **Walter Gropius** (1883-1969), broke sharply with the past in his design of the Fagus shoe factory at Alfeld, Germany (1911).
    - Clean, light, elegant building of glass and iron.
    - Represented a jump into the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
    - Later, the movement was subdued by the Nazis as modernism came to be viewed as "degenerate."
  - b. The Bauhaus building (1925-26) in Dessau, Germany, stands as the icon of the movement.



Fagus Shoe Factory, Alfeld, Germany

B. Modern Art

1. **Pablo Picasso** (1881-1973): Perhaps the most important artist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
  - a. He developed **Cubism** along with Georges Braque.
    - Cubism concentrated on a complex geometry of zigzagging lines and sharply angled, overlapping planes.
    - It often tried to portray all perspectives simultaneously.
  - b. **Guernica** (1937) is considered his masterpiece.
    - Huge mural portraying the bombing of a Spanish city by the German *Luftwaffe* during the Spanish Civil War in 1936
    - One of the quintessential art works of the "age of anxiety" for its portrayal of suffering and death.
2. **Dadaism**
  - a. "Dada" was a nonsensical word ("hobby horse") that

- mirrored a post-WWI world that no longer made sense.
- b. It attacked all accepted standards of art and behavior, delighting in outrageous conduct.
  - c. **Marcel Duchamp** (1887-1968) was a leader of the movement.
    - **The Fountain (1917)**: Duchamp took a public bathroom urinal and named it "The Fountain" as a way of mocking traditional artistic standards
    - **"L.H.O.O.Q"**, (1919): Duchamp took a print of Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* and painted a mustache and goatee on the subject.
3. **Futurism** (developed in Italy)
- a. Artistic movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that emphasized speed, technology (e.g. car and airplane), the industrial city, youth, and violence.
  - b. Its founder was Filippo Tommaso Marinetti: *Futurist Manifesto* (1909).
  - c. The movement repudiated the past while glorifying violence and war.
  - d. Futurism influenced Dadaism, Art Deco, and Surrealism.
  - e. The movement influenced the development of fascism in Italy in the years following WWI.
4. **Surrealism**
- a. Developed out of the Dada movement during WWI.
  - b. **Salvador Dali** (1904-1989) was the most important artist of the movement (influenced by Freud's emphasis on dreams).
    - After 1924, painted a fantastic world of wild dreams and complex symbols, where watches melted and giant metronomes beat time in impossible alien landscapes.
    - His most famous painting is "Persistence of Memory," 1931.
5. **Alberto Giacometti** (1901-1966): "Man Pointing" (1947): Tall, emaciated metal sculpture illustrated the anguish of human existence in a world seemingly without meaning.
- C. Music
1. **Igor Stravinsky** (1882-1971): Most important composer of the 20<sup>th</sup> century
    - *Rite of Spring* (1913) experimented with new tonalities (many of them dissonant) and aggressive primitive rhythms.
  2. **Arnold Schönberg** (1874-1951): pioneered atonality (including the "12-tone" technique)
    - This style of music was somewhat akin to Wassily Kandinsky's non-figural painting in his extreme abstract expressionist style.



Marcel Duchamp, *The Fountain*, 1917



Marcel Duchamp, *L.H.O.O.Q.*, (1919)



Salvador Dali, *Persistence of Memory* (1931)



Alberto Giacometti, *Man Pointing* (1947)

#### D. Movies

1. Moving pictures were first shown as a popular novelty in naughty peepshows and penny arcades in the 1890s, especially in Paris.
2. Charlie Chaplin (1889-1978), Englishman, became the king of the "silver screen" in Hollywood during the 1920s.
3. German studios excelled in expressionist dramas—e.g., *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919).
4. The advent of "talkies" (films with sound) in 1927 resulted in a revival of national film industries in 1930s, especially France.
5. Motion pictures became the main entertainment of the masses until after WWII.
6. Motion pictures, like radio, became powerful tools of indoctrination, especially in countries with dictatorial regimes.
  - a. Lenin encouraged development of Soviet film making leading to epic films in the mid-1920s.
    - The most famous films were directed by **Sergei Eisenstein** (1898-1948) who dramatized the communist view of Russian history.
  - b. In Germany, **Leni Riefenstahl** directed a masterpiece of documentary propaganda, *The Triumph of the Will*, based on the Nazi party rally at Nuremberg in 1934.

#### E. Radio

1. **Guglielmo Marconi** developed transatlantic "wireless" communication in 1901.
2. The radio was used for military purposes in WWI.
3. Not until 1920 were the first major public broadcasts of special events made in Great Britain and the U.S.
4. Most countries established direct control of radio by the gov't (only in U.S. was there private ownership).
  - **British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)** is an example.
5. Radio became used effectively for political propaganda (e.g., Hitler and Mussolini).



## Terms to Know

Modernism Friedrich Nietzsche, "God is Dead," <i>"übermensch"</i> Henri Bergson Georges Sorel Sigmund Freud, "ID" Paul Valéry Oswald Spenger, <i>Decline of the West</i> T. S. Eliot, "The Waste Land" Franz Kafka Erich Maria Remarque: <i>All Quiet on the Western Front</i> stream-of-consciousness James Joyce Virginia Woolf existentialism John-Paul Sartre Albert Camus George Orwell, <i>1984</i> ; <i>Animal Farm</i> Ayn Rand "New Physics" Max Planck Albert Einstein, theory of relativity Ernest Rutherford	Werner Heisenberg Neils Bohr Erwin Schrödinger Enrico Fermi Eugenics Bauhaus movement Walter Gropius Pablo Picasso Cubism <i>Guernica</i> Dadaism Marcel Duchamp: <i>The Fountain</i> ; <i>L.H.O.O.Q.</i> Futurism Surrealism Salvador Dali Alberto Giacometti, <i>Man Pointing</i> Igor Stravinsky Arnold Schönberg Sergei Eisenstein Leni Riefenstahl Radio Guglielmo Marconi British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)
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### **Essay Questions**

*Note: This sub-unit is a low probability area for the free-response section of the AP exam. In the past 10 years, 2 questions have come wholly or in part from the material in this chapter. Below are some practice questions that will help you study the topics that have appeared on previous exams or may appear on future exams.*

1. Analyze the ways in which World War I influenced European thought in the years between 1918 and 1939.
2. How is the "age of anxiety" reflected in philosophy, literature and art in the period 1914-1950?
3. How did science and psychology in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries challenge European assumptions of how the universe and society functioned?
4. Contrast art and entertainment during the first half of the twentieth century with art and entertainment in the last half of the nineteenth century.

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