**Four Statements Illustrating the Age of Anxiety**

**Erich Maria Remarque: *All Quiet on the Western Front,* 1929**  
“I am young, I am twenty years old; yet I know nothing of life but despair, death, fear, and fatuous superficiality cast over an abyss of sorrow. I see how peoples are set against one another, and in silence, unknowingly, foolishly, obediently, innocently slay one another.”

“We are not youth any longer. We don’t want to take the world by storm. We are fleeing. We fly from ourselves. From our life. We were eighteen and had begun to love life and the world; and we had to shoot it to pieces.”

“We are forlorn like children, and experienced like old men, we are crude and sorrowful and superficial—I believe we are lost.”

“Had we returned home in 1916, out of the suffering and the strength of our experience we might have unleashed a storm. Now if we go back we will be weary, broken, burnt out, rootless and without hope. We will not be able to find our way anymore.”

**Paul Valéry: *The European Mind*, 1922**The storm has died away, and still we are restless, uneasy, as if the storm were about to break. Almost all the affairs of men remain in a terrible uncertainty. We think of what has disappeared, we are almost destroyed by what has been destroyed; we do not know what will be born, and we fear the future, not without reason. We hope vaguely, we dread precisely; our fears are infinitely more precise than our hopes; we confess that the charm of life is behind us, abundance is behind us, but doubt and disorder are in us and with us. There is no thinking man, however shrewd or learned he may be, who can hope to dominate this anxiety, to escape from this impression of darkness, to measure the probable duration of this period when the virtual relations of humanity are disturbed profoundly.

We are a very unfortunate generation, whose lot has been to see the moment of our passage through life coincide with the arrival of great and terrifying events, the echo of which will resound through all our lives.

One can say that all the fundamentals of the world have been affected by the war, or more exactly, by the circumstances of the war; something deeper has been worn away than the renewable parts of the machine. You know how greatly the general economic situation has been disturbed, and the polity of states, and the very life of the individual; you are familiar with the universal discomfort, hesitation, apprehension. But among all these injured things is the Mind. The Mind has indeed been cruelly wounded; its complaint is heard in the hearts of intellectual man; it passes a mournful judgment on itself. It doubts itself profoundly.

**Russell Bertrand: *On Modern Uncertainty,* 20 July 1932**There have been four sorts of ages in the world's history. There have been ages when everybody thought they knew everything, ages when nobody thought they knew anything, ages when clever people thought they knew much and stupid people thought they knew little, and ages when stupid people thought they knew much and clever people thought they knew little. The first sort of age is one of stability, the second of slow decay, the third of progress, the fourth of disaster. All primitive ages belong to the first sort: no one has any doubt as to the tribal religion, the wisdom of ancient customs, or the magic by which good crops are to be secured; consequently everyone is happy in the absence of some tangible reason, such as starvation, for being unhappy.

The second sort of age is exemplified by the ancient world before the rise of Christianity but after decadence had begun. In the Roman Empire, tribal religions lost their exclusiveness and force: in proportion as people came to think that there might be truth in religions of others, they also came to think that there might be falsehood in their own. Eastern necromancy was half believed, half disbelieved; the German barbarians were supposed to possess virtues that the more civilised portions of mankind hand lost. Consequently everybody doubted everything, and doubt paralysed effort.

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, exactly the opposite happened. Science and scientific technique were a novelty, and gave immense self-confidence to those who understood them. Their triumphs were obvious and astonishing. Repeatedly, when the Chinese Emperor had decided to persecute the Jesuits, they would turn out to be right about the date of an expected eclipse when the imperial astronomers were wrong, and the Emperor would decide that such clever men, after all, deserved his favours. In England, those who introduced scientific methods in agriculture obtained visibly larger crops than those who adhered to old-time methods, while in manufactures team and machinery put the conservatives to flight. There came, therefore, to be a general belief in educated intelligence. Those who did not possess it allowed themselves to be guided by those who did, and an era of rapid progress resulted.

In our age, the exact opposite is the case. Men of science like Eddington [Sir Arthur, astrophysicist and philosopher of science] are doubtful whether science really knows anything. Economists perceive that the accepted methods of doing the world's business are making everybody poor. Statesmen cannot find any way of securing international co-operation or preventing war. Philosophers have no guidance to offer mankind. The only people left with positive opinions are those who are too stupid to know when their opinions are absurd. Consequently the world is ruled by fools, and the intelligent count for nothing in the councils of the nations.

This state of affairs, if it continues, must plunge the world more and more deeply into misfortune. The scepticism of the intelligent is the cause of their impotence, and is itself the effect of their laziness: if there is nothing worth doing, that gives an excuse for sitting still. But when disaster is impending, no excuse for sitting still can be valid. The intelligent will have to shed their scepticism, or share responsibility for the evils which all deplore. And they will have to abandon academic grumblings and peevish pedantries, for nothing that they may say will be of any use unless they learn to speak a language that the democracy can appreciate.

**Oswald Spengler: *The Decline of the West*, 1922**  
The idealist of the early democracy regarded popular education as enlightenment pure and simple---but it is precisely this that smooths the path for the coming Caesars of the world. The last century [the 19th] was the winter of the West, the victory of materialism and scepticism, of socialism, parliamentarianism, and money. But in this century blood and instinct will regain their rights against the power of money and intellect. The era of individualism, liberalism and democracy, of humanitarianism and freedom, is nearing its end. The masses will accept with resignation the victory of the *Caesars*, the strong men, and will obey them. Life will descend to a level of general uniformity, a new kind of primitivism, and the world will be better for it...