

**A PHENOMENOLOGY OF UNCERTAINTY:
ON THE CRISIS OF MODERNITY AND THE AGE OF ANXIETY**

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Abstract. *This article examines the contemporary epoch through the lens of existential anxiety and philosophical inquiry, aiming to identify the defining traits of our historical moment. Engaging with a wide array of thinkers—from Kierkegaard and Heidegger to Foucault, Galimberti, and Byung-Chul Han—the essay traces a shared diagnosis of civilizational dislocation, marked by epistemic fragmentation, institutional erosion, and the collapse of normative frameworks. Drawing on phenomenology, existentialism, and critical theory, it develops a “phenomenology of uncertainty” that foregrounds anxiety not as pathology but as a structural and affective expression of our time. Far from being reducible to individual psychological distress, anxiety emerges as a response to the pervasive loss of metaphysical, political, and symbolic orientation in late modernity. The work challenges reductionist narratives that seek to define an era through a single dominant category, arguing instead for methodological pluralism and ontological humility. It critically assesses the legacy of Western modernity, revealing how the ideals of rational autonomy and historical progress have been undermined by their own contradictions, leading to a heightened condition of interpretive suspension. Ultimately, the essay contends that uncertainty—rather than signaling cultural decline—should be understood as the condition of possibility for philosophical renewal, a collective inhabitation of ambiguity that demands new symbolic, ethical, and political articulations of human existence.*

Key words: *phenomenology, nihilism, anxiety, uncertainty, existentialism, western modernity*

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Introduction

Writing an article does not only require time—indeed, time is perhaps the most pragmatic aspect of the entire process, as it involves the necessity of producing an articulated work in precise terms. When I was presented the theme of this volume—namely, our confrontation with an epochal shift, the possible dawn of a new era, and the challenge of discerning, within the complexity of the present, the emerging architectures of our future society—I began to consider from which point it might be best to approach this topic. Which question concerning this era seems the most significant or the most urgent to address? Which feature, whether overt or hidden, could most accurately define it?

In a deeply personal way, I believe that philosophy excels in the distinct activity of asking questions. From this initial epistemological step—this innate human desire to understand the world—emerges the search for answers that satisfy a need for meaning, a desire for understanding, even if only provisional, of reality.

The essence of the critical spirit—so frequently invoked today—I believe lies in the capacity to question. A question is a demand for clarification that should never be underestimated. It has the power to illuminate neglected spaces—those left in shadow, forgotten, or intentionally omitted—as well as to expose partiality, choices, and errors embedded in the reasoning and discourses that shape our public sphere. A well-formulated question prompts revision, inspires new lines of thought, and reveals previously unnoticed weaknesses. Philosophy is uniquely equipped to ask poignant and incisive questions, as it is fundamentally concerned with examining the foundations of meaning and prioritizing the pursuit of deeper understanding. Philosophers engage in questioning assumptions and explore the implications of ideas from a multitude of perspectives. This rigorous and reflective approach enables philosophy to uncover hidden complexities and, as previously mentioned, to pose questions that are not only intellectually precise but also profoundly relevant.

The Italian philosopher Umberto Galimberti once joked, during a public lecture, about the naïveté of expecting philosophers to provide definitive answers. He made this remark, paradoxically, while responding to a question concerning the future of the Western world and what lies ahead in the coming decades. His answer was not entirely new—he had spoken openly on this topic before: the West, in his view, is heading toward its decline. What he could not answer, however, was what would come next, or whether anything could be done to prevent it. From this brief reflection emerges a first fundamental question concerning the state of affairs: does what lies before us truly represent an epochal shift, or is it merely one of the many transitional moments that comprise the modern history of humanity? What, in fact, defines the *Zeitgeist*—the spirit of an age—and how can we apprehend it in its full complexity?

This volume seeks to gather the diverse perspectives from which the contributing authors have chosen to engage with this question. My own effort is to offer a fragment—an interpretative contribution—that may help to complete, or at least enrich, the broader picture.

The West in Crisis: Philosophical Diagnoses of Civilizational Decline

The notion of *epochal change* designates not merely historical events but profound transformations that reconfigure the fundamental structures, values, and trajectories of civilizations. In the context of the contemporary Western world, the question arises whether the political fragmentation, cultural volatility, and technological acceleration that define our time signify such a transformation—one that is not simply transitional but foundationally disruptive. This question cannot be approached through a single disciplinary lens; rather, it demands a synthesis of historical consciousness and philosophical reflection, capable of discerning not only surface-level shifts but the deeper ontological and metaphysical currents that underlie them.

The present global conjuncture is increasingly characterized by the disintegration of normative frameworks, the erosion of institutional legitimacy, and a growing dissonance between inherited ideals and lived realities. The contemporary unraveling of Western liberal democracies could exemplify what Thomas Kuhn (1962) characterized as a paradigm crisis: a historical moment where anomalies accumulate to the point of undermining the foundational assumptions of a dominant worldview. The neoliberal order, built on rationalist premises of market self-regulation and the teleological progress of democratic governance, now encounters contradictions it cannot assimilate. The democratic consensus heralded by the post-Cold War euphoria has eroded under the weight of populist insurgencies. The proliferation of illiberal democracies are less aberrations than manifestations of a deep epistemological and political rupture. What Francis Fukuyama (1992) hailed as the “end of history” was, in retrospect, merely the high watermark of a paradigm whose contradictions had not yet fully materialized. The resurgent right and the emergent radical left signal the collapse of the centrist hegemony, echoing Gramsci’s (1971) observation that in times of crisis, “the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum, a great variety of morbid symptoms appear” (Gramsci 1971: 276). The failure of existing institutions to contain or even meaningfully address these challenges signals not merely policy shortcomings but a deeper exhaustion of the ontological assumptions of modernity itself.

At the heart of this turbulence lies the Western world—not merely as a geopolitical category but as a civilizational form whose coherence was historically articulated through a constellation of philosophical, cultural, and political traditions rooted in Europe. What is unfolding today is not only a crisis of geopolitical hegemony but a more radical rupture: a dislocation of the West’s own self-understanding, its identity, and its claim to universality.

Historically, the idea of the West has never been a stable or purely geographic concept. It has functioned as a philosophical imaginary—a teleological narrative in which European modernity was seen as the apex of historical development. This vision finds one of its most influential formulations in Hegel’s dialectical philosophy. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), Hegel presents world history as the progressive realization of *Geist* (Spirit), culminating in the rational state, where freedom becomes actualized. In this schema, the West—particularly in its modern, liberal, and scientific incarnation—embodied the realization of reason in history. Hegel’s narrative endowed

European civilization with a metaphysical justification for its global expansion, a claim not merely of political dominance but of historical necessity.

However, this narrative of rational progress began to unravel by the late 19th century, most profoundly with Friedrich Nietzsche, who challenged the metaphysical assumptions underpinning Western culture. In *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887), Nietzsche famously declared the “death of God”—a metaphor for the collapse of the transcendental values that once anchored Western thought. For Nietzsche, the Western claim to universal truth was not a neutral epistemological stance but a manifestation of a deeper nihilism: a will to power masked by the language of morality and reason. The Enlightenment, rather than being the triumph of reason, represented for Nietzsche the final stage in a long degeneration, in which life-affirming values were replaced by abstraction and moral hypocrisy. Oswald Spengler further radicalized this critique in *The Decline of the West* (1923), in which he proposed a morphological theory of civilizations. According to Spengler, cultures undergo organic cycles of birth, growth, and inevitable decline. Western civilization, in his analysis, had entered its “civilizational winter”—a phase not marked by creative renewal but by exhaustion, technocracy, and the hollowing out of cultural vitality. Spengler argued that the spiritual and artistic energies that once defined the West had ossified into a sterile rationalism, governed by calculation and bureaucratic control. He wrote:

We are not at the summit of a historical process, but at its conclusion. (Spengler 1991: 106)

We may argue that those ideas were formulated in a different context and more than a century ago, but the current state of the world is not a sudden transformation but the historical product of the 20th century and its ideologies.

Martin Heidegger offered a still more ontologically fundamental critique. In his *Letter on Humanism* (1946), Heidegger argued that Western metaphysics had, since Plato, forgotten the question of Being itself, reducing the world to a mere object of manipulation and control. This forgetfulness culminated in the technological enframing of modernity—what he called *Gestell*—in which all beings are rendered as standing-reserve (*Bestand*), exploitable for human ends. Heidegger did not merely reject technology per se but interpreted it as the ultimate consequence of the West’s metaphysical trajectory, a trajectory that had lost its openness to Being. In this framework, technological modernity is not the apex of progress but the fulfillment of a nihilistic metaphysics, where meaning is displaced by function and presence by representation.

The intellectual legacy of the late 20th century offers contrasting responses to the perceived exhaustion of the Western project. Jean-François Lyotard, in *The Postmodern Condition* (1979), famously diagnosed the “incredulity toward metanarratives” as the defining feature of postmodernity. For Lyotard, the legitimating frameworks of modernity—be they those of Enlightenment rationality, historical progress, or emancipatory politics—have lost their binding force. In their place, a fragmented epistemological landscape emerges, one characterized by localized “language games” and a plurality of irreducible discourses. This is not merely a crisis of reason but a

transformation in the very conditions under which knowledge and legitimacy are constituted. Lyotard does not lament this fragmentation but sees in it a possibility for a more pluralistic and open-ended cultural condition.

Zygmunt Bauman extends this diagnosis into the domain of social and cultural life through his concept of *liquid modernity* (Bauman 2000). In contrast to the “solid” institutions and identities of classical modernity, Bauman characterizes contemporary Western societies by their instability, precarity, and fluidity. Social bonds, once anchored in enduring institutions—such as family, class, and state—are now transient and negotiable. This liquidity, Bauman argues, generates both freedom and anxiety: individuals are unmoored from traditional structures but burdened with the responsibility for self-definition in a world lacking shared coordinates. Bauman thus illustrates how Lyotard’s epistemological fragmentation is mirrored in the existential and affective life of the modern subject. Where Lyotard sees postmodernity as a condition of pluralistic emancipation, Bauman underscores its ambivalent psychological and moral consequences.

This line of thought is taken further by contemporary philosopher Byung-Chul Han, whose work—especially in *The Burnout Society* (2015) and *Psychopolitics* (2017)—updates and radicalizes the critique of Western modernity for the digital age. Han argues that contemporary Western societies have transitioned from disciplinary regimes, described by Foucault, to regimes of performance and self-exploitation. In a world governed not by prohibition but by compulsive positivity—“Yes we can”—individuals internalize the imperative to optimize, perform, and self-brand, leading to new pathologies such as burnout, depression, and anxiety. In Han’s analysis, the neoliberal subject is no longer repressed but over-exposed, no longer alienated from labor but hyper-identified with it. “The neoliberal regime,” he writes, “replaces the disciplinary paradigm with the achievement-subject, which exploits itself until it collapses” (Han 2015: 9). Han’s critique dovetails with Bauman’s in revealing the existential costs of a world in which the old foundations have crumbled, but new ethical forms have yet to emerge.

Thus, the philosophical crisis of the West is not a sudden collapse, but the unfolding of a longstanding internal tension—a civilizational form that questions its own legitimacy and is increasingly unable to produce shared normative horizons. Parallel to its philosophical self-critique, the West faces intensifying structural pressures within the international system. What once appeared as a stable “rules-based order” is now strained by crises that are systemic, nonlinear, and transnational. The 2008 financial collapse, the COVID-19 pandemic, and widespread migration flows have exposed deep institutional fragilities. These events signal not anomalies but the systemic normalization of uncertainty, an irreducible form of volatility. Populist leaders and authoritarian regimes capitalize on this discontent, promising stability in the midst of chaos. Meanwhile, public trust in democratic institutions erodes, undermined by widespread and structural disinformation. This convergence of philosophical and political breakdowns reveals not two separate crises but a mutually reinforcing loop. Heidegger’s diagnosis of metaphysical exhaustion finds empirical form in the institutional disarray and epistemic confusion of the West. The retreat from multilateralism, the erosion of the rule of law,

and the collapse of shared notions of truth and legitimacy point to a civilization that no longer believes in its own narratives.

Defining an Era: Methodological Limits and Ontological Risks

Having drawn these general lines, I was presented with another kind of problem: how one might observe and interpret an era—what methodological process should be employed in attempting to define it, and what risks such an undertaking may involve. This initial step was immediately confronted by a critique, namely, the risk of attempting to “grasp an era” through a single category of thought. Such an approach poses a significant challenge to historical and cultural methodologies that strive for explanatory coherence through conceptual reduction.

The issue at stake is not only epistemological but also ontological. It involves the problematic reification—or hypostatization—of abstract categories into pseudo-subjects imbued with agency, thereby distorting the complex nature of historical reality.

Michel Foucault’s historiographical approach offers again a sustained and rigorous challenge to such methodological reductionism. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), Foucault argues against the unifying principles often employed to stitch disparate elements of a historical period into a single intelligible narrative. He writes:

We must not imagine that words are like keys opening doors to definite meanings; they form a dense fabric of discourses, practices, institutions, and strategic positions. (Foucault 1972: 131)

This perspective underscores the danger of reducing an era to a central concept—such as “rationality” or “romanticism”—and then interpreting all cultural and intellectual phenomena in light of that master category. Instead, Foucault advocates for a genealogical method that resists totalizing frameworks by tracing the contingent, often disjointed emergence of discourses, allowing for the irreducible multiplicity of social practices and epistemes.

Genealogy, in Foucault’s formulation, does not seek origins or unified foundations but rather interrogates the conditions of possibility for the formation of knowledge, power, and subjectivity within specific historical configurations. It emphasizes discontinuity, power relations, and the tactical deployment of truth claims, dismantling the illusion of linear progress or intrinsic coherence across historical time. In this sense, his critique suggests that reductionist approaches not only misrepresent the historical field but also impose a teleological logic onto what is, in fact, an agonistic, stratified, and heterogeneous space of meaning-making.

Foucault’s genealogical project draws heavily on Friedrich Nietzsche’s own critique of historical teleology, particularly as developed in *On the Genealogy of Morality* and *The Use and Abuse of History for Life*. Nietzsche rejects the idea of history as a progressive unfolding of reason or moral development, proposing instead that the values and institutions we inherit are the result of conflict, domination, and contingent power struggles. Genealogy, for Nietzsche, is a method of exposing the layered, often ignoble

origins of our most cherished ideals—what he famously called the “will to power” behind moral valuation.

Foucault radicalizes this insight by shifting the focus from moral values to discursive formations, showing how regimes of knowledge are historically constituted through power-laden practices rather than reasoned consensus or universal truths. Like Nietzsche, he insists that what we take to be timeless truths are often the sedimented outcomes of historical conflict, institutional enforcement, and strategic appropriation. The genealogist, then, does not seek purity or origins but rather maps the force-relations that produce and sustain specific configurations of knowledge, identity, and authority. Another author who offers an interesting take on this subject is Raymond Williams. The Welsh thinker offers a parallel and complementary critique in his cultural materialist approach, particularly in *Marxism and Literature* (1977), where he interrogates the notion of “the structure of feeling,” a term he develops to capture the lived experiences and affective tonalities of a particular historical moment that escape formal categorization. He writes:

The structure of feeling is not merely residual or emergent; it is the lived experience of the quality of life at a particular time and place, and it is often not yet fully articulated. (Williams 1977: 132)

Williams is thus wary of analyses that treat an epoch as dominated by a single, knowable system of thought. He identifies in such methodologies a tendency to prioritize codified ideologies or institutions while ignoring or downplaying the unformalized and often contradictory practices that shape lived reality. When an analyst takes a single ideological formation—say, “bourgeois individualism”—and treats it as the expressive totality of a historical period, the analytic frame risks silencing the countercurrents and emergent forms that were equally constitutive of that time.

Both Foucault and Williams, in their distinct but converging critiques, resist the gravitational pull of what might be called “conceptual monism”—the desire to explain a multiplicity of historical expressions through the logic of a single dominant principle. The problem is not merely empirical (that one omits some data) but methodological and ethical: one imposes order where there was friction, movement, contradiction. The “essence” of a historical period becomes a proxy for normative judgments or political positions. The “Age of Reason” is then not only described as such but prescriptively valorized as rational, progressive, and civilizational. Any deviation from this norm—be it mysticism, affective labor, or non-European modes of knowing—is rendered residual or derivative. What appears as analytical clarity is, in truth, a form of historical myopia.

Beyond Totalization: Plurality, Contradiction, and Critical Epistemology

The methodological critique of reducing an era to a single category of thought also resonates with Louis Althusser’s theory of overdetermination and his critique of expressive totality. In *For Marx* (1965/2005), Althusser challenges the notion that a society—or by extension, an epoch—can be understood as the straightforward expression of a single, determining contradiction. Instead, he proposes that social formations are

constituted by multiple, relatively autonomous contradictions, which are overdetermined in their effects. He writes:

In contrast to the expressive conception of the structure, we must advance a radically different concept of the social whole as a structure of structures, with its own levels, its own relations of dominance and subordination, its own temporality. (Althusser 2005 [1965]: 101)

Althusser's structural Marxism intervenes directly against the temptation to explain all aspects of a given era—its literature, philosophy, political economy—through a univocal principle such as "class struggle" or "capitalist ideology." For Althusser, the reduction of a historical moment to a single essence not only misrepresents the complex articulation of its structures but also risks reinstating a metaphysical subject (such as "History" with a capital H) as the motor of change. This critique aligns closely with the concern over hypostatization: the transformation of an abstract function into a substantive agent.

Where Althusser offers a structural alternative to expressive causality, Theodor W. Adorno, particularly in *Negative Dialectics* (1966), provides a critical epistemology that addresses the impulse to conceptual closure. Adorno's central concern is with identity thinking—the philosophical operation that seeks to subsume the particular under the universal, collapsing the non-identical into the identical. He writes:

The name of dialectics says no more, to begin with, than that objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder. (Adorno 1966: 5)

This "remainder" is precisely what is lost when an era is grasped through a single, totalizing category. Adorno's negative dialectics resist the seductions of synthesis, calling attention instead to the fractures, tensions, and unresolved contradictions that constitute reality. In this sense, his thought complements both Foucault's genealogical fragmentariness and Williams's emphasis on the lived, affective complexity of historical experience. To impose a category such as "instrumental reason" upon an epoch—without attending to the historical specificities and resistances that persist alongside it—is to engage in a kind of epistemic violence that Adorno's method is designed to expose.

Moreover, Adorno's work highlights the ideological function of conceptual totalization. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Adorno & Horkheimer 1947), he and Max Horkheimer critique the Enlightenment not for its rationalism per se, but for the way in which reason becomes instrumentalized and fetishized as a dominant mode of world-making:

What men want to learn from nature is how to use it in order wholly to dominate it and other men. (Adorno & Horkheimer 1947: 4)

Thus, even the claim that an era is characterized by "reason" must be critically examined not only for its descriptive accuracy but for its ideological implications—what forms of power and domination are masked by the invocation of such a term? In this way, the hypostatization of a category is not a neutral act of intellectual simplification; it can serve to obscure forms of violence, marginalization, and struggle that are not captured by the dominant narrative.

Together, Althusser and Adorno add layers of complexity to the critique of mono-causal or mono-conceptual approaches to history and culture. Althusser insists on the structured multiplicity and relative autonomy of social practices, while Adorno insists on the irreducibility of the non-identical and the moral imperative to think against the grain of synthesis. Their insights reinforce the necessity of a methodological pluralism—one that acknowledges the simultaneity of contradictions, the unevenness of historical time, and the conceptual opacity of lived experience.

Ultimately, the danger of explaining an era through a single hypostatized category is that it converts historical analysis into a form of myth-making. It projects coherence onto dissonance, order onto conflict, and identity onto difference. Against this tendency, the theoretical contributions of Foucault, Williams, Althusser, and Adorno constitute a shared defense of complexity, contingency, and resistance—values that remain essential for any critical engagement with history and its representations.

Anxiety as Structure: The Affective Landscape of Late Modernity

The very act of delineating an era constitutes an intellectual enterprise of considerable magnitude—one fraught with profound ramifications and laden with methodological ambiguities that often evade initial scrutiny. In retrospect, the question posed at the outset of this article—namely, which dimension of our contemporary condition might be most emblematic of the current *state of the art*—now appears, if not entirely misguided, then at least insufficiently attuned to the complexities at hand. Yet, upon revisiting Raymond Williams's concept of the *structure of feeling*, it becomes evident that beneath the disjunctive surface of late modern life, a resonant undercurrent persists—a kind of affective background noise—that permeates and conditions the cultural atmosphere of our time. This intangible yet persistent sensibility may not crystallize into fixed categories or institutions, but it nonetheless exerts a formative influence on the ethos of the present. This white sound captures a persistent feature that has increasingly marked the past decade: a pervasive sense of uncertainty and anxiety that subtly infiltrates daily life, saturating both public discourse and private experience. It is not merely a consequence of instability; it is the affective atmosphere of our time. As many of the preceding sections have argued, the context in which we live is marked by the simultaneous collapse of normative frameworks and the intensification of systemic contradictions. It is within this setting that anxiety—both existential and structural—becomes a privileged lens through which to read the contemporary condition.

Anxiety is not new. As existentialist philosophy reminds us, it belongs to the human condition. Yet, in the current age, it has taken on new configurations, shaped by economic volatility, political polarization, digital hyper-connectivity, and a pervasive erosion of trust. It is no longer just a psychological or philosophical problem; it has become a generalized socio-cultural phenomenon, one that demands both diagnosis and interpretation. To understand the present morphology of anxiety, one must consider its constitutive link to uncertainty. Anxiety, unlike fear, does not have a definite object. It emerges not in response to a specific threat, but in relation to indeterminacy—the suspension of knowledge, the collapse of reliable narratives, the encroachment of what

cannot be controlled or foreseen. This distinction has been central to philosophical and psychiatric accounts since at least the 19th century. Already Sigmund Freud observed in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (1926), anxiety functions as a signal, a response to internal or external danger that is vague or anticipatory rather than concretely defined. “Anxiety,” he writes, “has an unmistakable relation to expectation, to a state of expecting the danger which is dreaded” (Freud 1959: 106). Freud thus places anxiety within a temporal structure of uncertainty, in which the mind reacts not to what is, but to what might be.

More recent work in philosophy and psychiatry continues to foreground uncertainty as the core of anxiety. The philosopher and psychoanalyst Jonathan Lear has emphasized the way anxiety operates when “the concepts with which we understand ourselves and our world begin to collapse” (Lear 2006: 6). Lear identifies anxiety as a response to cultural and symbolic breakdown—a condition in which one cannot even locate oneself within a coherent narrative of meaning.

Phenomenology of Uncertainty: Embodiment and Existential Exposure

The experience of uncertainty occupies a foundational position within phenomenological inquiry. It is not reducible to cognitive ambiguity or emotional instability; rather, it constitutes a primordial structure of being-in-the-world. In this regard, Søren Kierkegaard’s contribution is foundational. Long before the vocabulary of phenomenology was formalized, Kierkegaard articulated a vision of human existence in which anxiety (*Angest*, often rendered as “dread”) emerges as both a metaphysical condition and an existential necessity. His 1844 work *The Concept of Anxiety*, offers not merely a psychological taxonomy, but a profound meditation on the ambiguity of freedom and the dialectic of becoming.

Anxiety, for Kierkegaard, is not reducible to fear. Where fear has an object—something determinate that threatens or endangers—anxiety is objectless. It is the dizziness of freedom, the vertigo that arises when the human being becomes aware of its infinite possibility. The famous formulation encapsulates this:

Anxiety is the dizziness of freedom. (Kierkegaard 1980: 61).

In this dizziness, the self confronts the terrifying and sublime openness of its own becoming. To be human, Kierkegaard suggests, is to exist in a state of suspended determination, always on the threshold of choices that cannot be grounded in certainty.

Crucially, anxiety is not a merely negative or pathological affect. It is a sign of spiritual maturity, the affective echo of the self’s encounter with the groundlessness of existence. In this way, Kierkegaard anticipates Heidegger’s later analysis of *Angst* as a mood that discloses the nothingness at the heart of being. But where Heidegger frames this in ontological terms, Kierkegaard places it within a theological and ethical horizon. Anxiety is the condition of possibility for sin, but also for faith. It is that moment in which the individual glimpses the power to transcend the merely given, to actualize a self that is not simply inherited or predetermined.

This structure is vividly dramatized in Kierkegaard's reading of Adam in the Garden of Eden. Before the Fall, Adam is not guilty—he is innocent. And yet he is not at peace. He experiences anxiety in the face of possibility, in the face of the prohibition: "You shall not eat." This command does not close the world but opens it, introducing the dizzying potential of transgression. Adam's anxiety is not the result of sin; it precedes it. It is the revelation of a freedom that has not yet taken form. Kierkegaard writes:

He is dreaming, and anxiety is the reality of the spirit as dreaming.
(Kierkegaard 1980: 44)

The dream, here, is the birth pang of subjectivity.

What distinguishes Kierkegaard's approach is the insistence that anxiety must be endured, not eliminated. It is a teacher—indeed, a kind of initiation into ethical and spiritual existence. To attempt to flee from anxiety, whether through distraction, social conformity, or despair, is to flee from the task of becoming oneself. "Kierkegaard affirms:

Whoever has learned to be anxious in the right way, has learned the ultimate.
(Kierkegaard 1980: 155)

This "right way" does not mean mastery over anxiety, but a disciplined openness to its demands: a willingness to inhabit the tension of freedom without collapsing into nihilism or dogma.

Kierkegaard's contribution is thus double. On the one hand, he identifies anxiety as the affective manifestation of human freedom—a freedom that is terrifying in its indeterminacy. On the other hand, he reclaims anxiety as a site of transformation, the very condition for ethical and religious awakening. The self, in Kierkegaard's vision, is not given but made, and it is anxiety that marks the moment of its possible making.

In placing anxiety at the center of existence, Kierkegaard bequeaths to phenomenology a problem it cannot avoid: how to understand the human being not as a stable substance, but as a becoming structured by ambivalence, ambiguity, and affective intensity. The path forward—from Husserl's horizontal intentionality to Heidegger's ontological exposure, from Merleau-Ponty's corporeal openness to Ricoeur's narrative refiguration—can be traced back to this Kierkegaardian insight: that uncertainty is not a deviation from truth, but the very space in which truth must be lived.

If Kierkegaard inaugurates the existential grammar of anxiety through the dialectic of freedom and dread, Edmund Husserl brings this existential restlessness into the very structure of intentional consciousness. For Husserl, anxiety is not explicitly thematized as such; nevertheless, it is immanent to the horizontal structure of meaning itself. In *Ideas I* and *The Crisis of the European Sciences*, Husserl insists that consciousness is always intentional—always directed toward something—but this directedness is necessarily horizon-bound. No object is ever fully given in a single act: "every experience of something already carries with it a horizon of references to other experiences," he writes, and it is this horizontality that renders all meaning essentially incomplete (Husserl 1970: 224). Every perception anticipates further fulfilment (*Erfüllung*), but this fulfilment is never complete. The world, as experienced, is therefore an open totality, not a closed system. This horizontality introduces a constitutive ambiguity to all meaning, rendering

every act of sense-making provisional, contextual, and historically situated. Here, uncertainty is not the absence of meaning but its condition—the very structure that allows the world to appear as open, historical, and reinterpretable. From this standpoint, anxiety can be interpreted as a structural affect—an implicit modality of our being-in-intentionality. It is the affective resonance of a consciousness that never fully possesses its object, that lives perpetually oriented toward the not-yet, the un-grasped, the excess of sense. This tension between intuition and horizontality renders human consciousness inherently fragile, always leaning into a future that it cannot determine. Anxiety thus arises not from a lack of meaning, but from the surplus of possible meanings that consciousness cannot stabilize. Moreover, Husserl's commitment to the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) as the ground of experience reveals that even scientific objectivity is rooted in pre-reflective, everyday uncertainties—conditions that are embodied, historical, and intersubjective.

Heidegger radicalizes this insight by shifting focus from the structures of consciousness to the existential conditions of being. In *Being and Time*, he introduces the concept of *Angst* as the privileged affect through which the Dasein encounters the uncanniness (*Unheimlichkeit*) of its own being. Unlike fear, which is directed at a specific entity, anxiety reveals the nothing: the collapse of the familiar world and the surfacing of being itself as question. Heidegger writes:

Anxiety reveals the nullity of all possibilities in the face of which the Dasein is anxious for its ownmost being. (Heidegger 2010: 232)

In anxiety, the everyday ontic structures (tools, routines, roles) lose their obviousness, and the Dasein is thrown back upon itself. This confrontation with its own thrownness (*Geworfenheit*) and finitude discloses the possibility of authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*): not a secure identity but an open-ended task of existence. Importantly, Heidegger's account shifts anxiety away from a psychological symptom toward a fundamental ontological attunement that discloses the finitude of being and the radical contingency of the world. In this brief historical account, anxiety, as a mode of existential disclosure, finds another rich articulation at the intersection of phenomenology, existentialism, and hermeneutics. While its tremors first appear in the fragility of embodied life—where Merleau-Ponty locates the breakdown of perceptual coherence—it intensifies in Sartre's conception of radical freedom and finds a final mediation in Ricoeur's account of narrative identity. What unites these otherwise distinct trajectories is a shared understanding of anxiety not as a psychological disturbance, but as a structural tension at the heart of subjectivity: a potentially generative confrontation with the limits of embodiment, meaning, and selfhood.

Merleau-Ponty, while deeply influenced by both Husserl and Heidegger, redirects phenomenology toward the lived body as the site of meaning. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, he critiques the Cartesian legacy of disembodied subjectivity and shows that perception is not an inner representation but an embodied engagement with the world. . In ordinary life, the body functions transparently through sedimented habits, a silent choreography of perception and action that renders the world meaningful. Anxiety emerges precisely when this habitual synthesis is interrupted—through illness, trauma,

or displacement—and the body ceases to be the invisible medium of engagement, instead appearing as a site of estrangement. Yet this interruption, far from signaling mere dysfunction, exposes the ontological interdependence between self and world. The collapse of bodily habit is not simply a loss, but a moment of visibility for the structures that normally recede. Anxiety, in this context, is the felt experience of this exposure—where the world no longer holds, and one must re-orient oneself without guarantees. In this context, Merleau-Ponty extends Husserl's horizontality to the domain of bodily perception. The body, too, perceives in horizons: its posture, sensorimotor schemas, and spatial orientation are anticipatory and open-ended. The disruption of these anticipatory structures does not simply produce confusion but existential dislocation. The body becomes disoriented, not merely spatially but existentially—a state that echoes Heidegger's description of anxiety as the collapse of the world's intelligibility. Sartre inherits this moment of destabilization but radicalizes its consequences. Where Merleau-Ponty still anchors the subject in a perceptual world, Sartre casts the subject into the abyss of its own freedom. The body may falter, but what truly unsettles is the realization that the self lacks any given essence—it must choose its being in every act. Anxiety thus reveals the nothingness at the heart of human existence: a void that is not a metaphysical absence but a condition of possibility. The subject, confronted with the unbearable lightness of its freedom, experiences anxiety not as a consequence of external threat, but as an internal dissonance—a recoil from the weight of having to become. The self does not encounter itself as a fixed identity, but as an open project, perpetually ungrounded and thus perpetually responsible. In this sense, anxiety is not the shadow of freedom, but its very manifestation.

Yet Sartre's emphasis on radical freedom, if left untempered, risks collapsing into vertigo—a vision of the self too detached from any enduring structure. It is here that Ricoeur's hermeneutical perspective offers a crucial mediation. He reframes the existential openness revealed by anxiety within the temporality of narrative, suggesting that identity is neither strictly given nor wholly invented, but constituted through the act of interpretation. The self is not simply a freedom thrown into the world, but a fragile synthesis of continuity and rupture, of *idem* and *ipse*. Anxiety, in Ricoeur's thought, arises when this narrative coherence is disrupted—when events render the self's story unintelligible, or when the plots through which we understand ourselves no longer suffice. Unlike Sartre's unanchored subject, Ricoeur's self still seeks meaning—but does so through the patient work of reconfiguration. The question is not whether the self is free, but how it can sustain fidelity to itself across fragmentation.

What binds these three accounts is their refusal to treat anxiety as an anomaly. Instead, each position is a privileged site for understanding the instability and openness of subjectivity. Merleau-Ponty locates it in the fragile intimacy between body and world; Sartre pushes it into the abyss of absolute freedom; Ricoeur reframes it as the interruption of narrative intelligibility. And yet, across these registers—corporeal, ontological, hermeneutic—anxiety retains its structural role. It is not a pathology to be cured but a condition to be inhabited: the very mode through which the subject comes to terms with its temporality, its relationality, and its ethical responsibilities.

From Being to Governance: The Biopolitical Management of Uncertainty

If phenomenology reveals uncertainty as a constitutive feature of existence—one that manifests in perception, embodiment, and narrative identity—then the question arises: how is this ontological condition treated within contemporary cultural and institutional frameworks? Whereas thinkers like Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty illuminate the existential potential of anxiety as a disclosive mood, other traditions—particularly those concerned with power, technology, and social regulation—approach it from a different angle. Michel Foucault, Umberto Galimberti, and Bernard Stiegler offer critical analyses of how modern regimes of knowledge and power transform this ontological vulnerability into an object of governance, medicalization, and technological control. The following section will explore how uncertainty, rather than being embraced, is increasingly managed, suppressed, or commodified—thus reshaping the very experience of subjectivity in the age of surveillance capitalism and algorithmic rationality.

Uncertainty as loss of Meaning

Umberto Galimberti's philosophical anthropology offers a trenchant diagnostic lens for understanding the contemporary entanglement of anxiety and uncertainty, especially within the Western world's post-metaphysical landscape. Drawing on Heideggerian ontology, Freudian psychoanalysis, and contemporary psychodynamics, Galimberti situates modern anxiety not merely as a psychological disorder, but as a symptomatic expression of civilizational disorientation. In *I miti del nostro tempo* (2009), he introduces the figure of the “orphan of meaning”—a subject cast adrift in a secularized world where the metaphysical scaffolding of religion, tradition, and collective teleology has collapsed. This orphanhood, he argues, renders the individual psychically naked before the overwhelming task of self-construction in a socio-symbolic vacuum. The neoliberal imperative to fabricate meaning internally—without shared myths or ethical coordinates—transforms anxiety from a circumstantial affliction into a constitutive structure of the self. In this framework, failure is no longer understood systemically, but internalized as moral inadequacy. The individual becomes both the product and the executor of a logic of self-optimization that deems vulnerability a defect rather than a fundamental feature of existence.

This analysis converges powerfully with Viktor Frankl's notion of the “existential vacuum,” articulated in *Man's Search for Meaning* (1946), where he describes the postwar subject's exposure to an emptiness born not of deprivation, but of meaninglessness:

No instinct tells him what he has to do, and no tradition tells him what he ought to do; sometimes he does not even know what he wishes to do. (Frankl 2006: 85)

For both Frankl and Galimberti, anxiety arises not simply from a confrontation with death or fate, but from the deeper epistemic void created when shared frameworks of intelligibility disintegrate. What makes the contemporary form of this void particularly insidious, however, is its camouflage within the ideological language of freedom and individual empowerment.

Galimberti's later work, especially *Psiche e Techne* (1999), extends this diagnosis into the domain of technoculture, exposing how the modern drive toward mastery over uncertainty exacerbates rather than resolves psychic distress. In line with Heidegger's critique of *Gestell*, Galimberti contends that modernity has transformed uncertainty from an existential given into a technical error, something to be eliminated through optimization, surveillance, and predictive algorithms. This "technological mind" does not merely produce tools—it reconfigures ontology, remaking the world into a system of manipulable data points and rendering any form of opacity or delay as pathological. As such, experiences that resist quantification—grief, ethical ambiguity, spiritual longing—are either pathologized within psychiatric discourse or bureaucratically neutralized. Anxiety, in this schema, is paradoxically intensified: no longer rooted in the unknown, it is generated by the impossibility of total knowledge and control. Bernard Stiegler captures this condition with acute urgency in *Technics and Time* (1998), arguing that the temporality of digital culture—its acceleration, immediacy, and fragmentation—destroys the conditions necessary for reflection, care, and memory. The promise of instant certainty, he argues, produces a hollowed subject, saturated by information yet deprived of significance.

In both Galimberti and Stiegler, then, the pathology of anxiety lies not in a surplus of uncertainty, but in a cultural refusal to dwell within it. This refusal is not benign; it is violent, a symbolic foreclosure of the very textures of finitude and ambiguity that constitute human existence. The Enlightenment ideal of the rational, autonomous subject mutates into a managerial self, anxiously scanning for signs of inefficiency, deviance, or vulnerability. As Heidegger warned in *The Question Concerning Technology* (1977), the danger is not technology per se, but its power to conceal the essence of Being by enframing all things—including the human—as standing-reserve. In this light, phenomenology offers not simply a critique but a counter-ethos: one that reclaims uncertainty as a space of ethical openness and ontological humility. Galimberti speaks of a needed "re-education of sensibility," an apprenticeship in fragility through which the subject might learn to endure, rather than eliminate, the disquieting but generative instability of existence itself. This ethics of dwelling—patient, attentive, and unarmed—might be among the few remaining antidotes to the pervasive affective regime of our time. While Umberto Galimberti and Bernard Stiegler articulate a critique of anxiety rooted in existential disorientation and the technological pathologization of uncertainty, Michel Foucault offers a complementary yet distinct diagnostic frame—one that shifts the focus from the phenomenology of individual experience to the historically contingent formation of subjectivity through regimes of power and discourse. Where Galimberti reads anxiety as a symptom of symbolic erosion and the epistemic violence of instrumental rationality, Foucault recasts it as an affect produced by the internalization of disciplinary mechanisms and the normalization of neoliberal selfhood.

In *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and *The Birth of Biopolitics* (1979), Foucault reveals how modern power operates not through brute coercion but through the fine-grained modulation of behavior. Institutions such as the school, the clinic, the prison, and—today—the digital platform, become sites of micro-regulation in which the subject is constituted as both observer and observed, agent and object of their own surveillance.

The Panopticon, Foucault's emblematic figure of visibility as control, is no longer a static architectural model but a dynamic, omnipresent condition of digital life. Through algorithmic tracking, social media metrics, and biometric monitoring, individuals are compelled to perform a version of themselves calibrated to external standards of optimization, productivity, and affective positivity. In this sense, Foucault's neoliberal subject—"the entrepreneur of the self"—resonates with Galimberti's self under techno-capitalism: both are trapped in systems that require ceaseless self-measurement and improvement, not as an optional endeavor but as a moral duty.

Yet where Galimberti emphasizes the existential impoverishment caused by the loss of shared symbolic horizons, Foucault underscores how these very symbols are historically constructed and operationalized by power. The affective toll of this disciplinary regime is anxiety, the emotional register of overexposure, hyper-accountability, and the demand to conform to ever-shifting norms of efficiency and resilience. In this light, anxiety is not a dysfunction to be corrected, but a structural byproduct of biopolitical governance.

This insight gains further depth in Foucault's later work on the medicalization of behavior. As he notes, the rise of the human sciences, particularly psychiatry and psychology, entails not only the treatment of mental illness but the codification of what counts as normal affect. Anxiety, within this epistemic regime, becomes a disorder to be managed, diagnosed, and treated—often pharmacologically—rather than a rational response to conditions of systemic instability, precariousness, and atomization. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), often taken as the authoritative voice in defining psychiatric categories, exemplifies this process. As scholars such as Allan Horwitz and Jerome Wakefield (2012) have argued, the DSM's classificatory logic tends to isolate symptoms from their social context, reifying culturally and historically specific experiences as universal medical facts. These risks obscure the very structures—economic, political, and technological—that generate the distress it seeks to name.

Thus, Galimberti's existential orphan and Foucault's biopolitical subject are not opposed figures, but complementary expressions of the same socio-historical condition: a world that erases ambiguity in the name of control and prescribes self-management in place of solidarity. Where one laments the loss of meaning and symbolic mediation, the other maps how those mediations are themselves governed by power. Together, they offer a critical synthesis: anxiety in late modernity is both a symptom of disenchanting existence and a technology of governance—a feeling that both reveals and conceals the fractures of our time.

An Ontology of Political Withdrawal

This erosion of existential grounding and symbolic mediation finds a particularly acute expression in the political domain: the progressive disappearance of political will and the withdrawal of individuals from political life. This widespread retreat is often interpreted through sociological categories such as apathy or democratic fatigue. Yet such readings

fail to capture the deeper ontological crisis at stake: a phenomenological disintegration of political subjectivity and the shared space in which political life becomes meaningful. In a world increasingly governed by abstraction and technocratic rationality, political existence no longer appears as viable—not because individuals lack convictions, but because the very stage upon which conviction might be enacted has collapsed. What emerges is not merely the absence of participation but the erosion of the conditions of appearance, intelligibility, and plural agency.

In *The Human Condition* (1958), Hannah Arendt defines politics as the realm of action and speech among a plurality of actors, taking place within what she terms the space of appearance. This space, though fragile and contingent, is not metaphorical: it is the ontological ground of political life, brought into being wherever humans come together to disclose themselves in word and deed. Under the pressures of late modernity, however, this space has atrophied. The colonization of life by economic logic, the rise of social conformity, and the proliferation of technical management systems have resulted in the reduction of politics to administration and of action to behavior. The political subject, Arendt feared, is being replaced by the statistical individual—one whose actions are no longer undertaken in freedom, but determined by systems of optimization, productivity, or risk avoidance. In her view, this substitution of governance for politics—of *technē* for *praxis*—renders freedom invisible, not by suppression but by irrelevance. As the political disappears from perception, the will itself becomes inoperative, not through laziness but through a structural absence of meaningful horizons for action.

A powerful complement to this diagnosis is found again in Michel Foucault's 1978 lectures at the Collège de France. Building on his aforementioned concept of governmentality, we observe how modern regimes of power no longer operate through sovereign imposition, but rather through the internalization of normative environments. In *The Subject and Power* (2000), Foucault shows how the modern state produces subjects who govern themselves through market logic, behavioural incentives, and the imperative of self-enterprise. Foucault explains:

To govern is to structure the possible field of action of others. (Foucault 2000: 341)

The ontology of political withdrawal, then, is not a passive condition but an effect of this redefinition of the political. Subjects cease to experience themselves as political not because of ignorance or disinterest, but because the political has been evacuated of appearance, transformed into a logic of calculation, control, and invisible governance. The subject is no longer called into the political through speech and risk, but addressed as a profile, a user, or a node in a data economy.

This suspended state finds one of its most conceptually suggestive articulations in Giorgio Agamben's idea of inoperativity. In *The Coming Community* (1990), Agamben describes the modern subject as a "whatever singularity"—a being who neither fully belongs to political categories nor stands entirely outside them. These figures inhabit a zone of indistinction, where the very terms of inclusion and exclusion have lost their operational clarity. Here, the subject is not actively excluded from political life but is caught in a perpetual suspension: present but unactivated, included but functionless.

For Agamben, this condition is not merely symptomatic of decline. It is also the space in which a radically different form of political life might be conceived. Inoperativity marks the interruption of assigned roles and habitual structures—a kind of destituent power that withdraws from existing frameworks without abolishing the potential for a new use. Agamben wrote:

What the politics of the future must discover is a new use of the body—one that is entirely removed from all norms and economic tasks, and instead opens onto the inoperativity of being. (Agamben 2016: 69)

In this light, political withdrawal reveals not just loss, but latency—a site in which politics is no longer actualized but remains thinkable in different terms.

Taken together, these perspectives reveal the withdrawal from political life as an ontological and perceptual transformation. Arendt shows us that politics depends not on sovereignty or law, but on appearance—on the fragile and ephemeral coming-into-presence of plurality. Foucault exposes how governmentality renders such appearance obsolete, replacing speech and risk with the management of behavior. Agamben pushes further, offering the conceptual space to imagine political potentiality outside the frame of productivity and command.

Yet if the space of appearance has collapsed, it does not follow that political life is impossible. As Arendt insisted, the political is not an institutional given but a world-making event—a performative irruption in which action, plurality, and freedom disclose themselves. Similarly, Agamben's notion of inoperativity, if approached not as nihilistic renunciation but as a suspension of inherited roles, may open the way toward new articulations of political being. The challenge is not to restore the political in its classical forms, but to rethink the conditions of its emergence in a world shaped by uncertainty, abstraction, and ontological exposure.

The ontology of political withdrawal, then, does not signify an end but a threshold: a limit at which the categories of inclusion, participation, and agency must be reconfigured from the ground up. In the silence of appearance and the inoperativity of will, a new political subject may be gestating—one attuned not to mastery or sovereignty, but to fragility, relation, and presence. If politics is to reappear, it must do so not as a return, but as a transformation—a world-disclosing gesture capable of responding to the disorientation of our time.

Yet if the reconfiguration of political subjectivity carries the promise of transformation, it also brushes against the abyss of meaninglessness. When withdrawal becomes severance, and inoperativity drifts into paralysis, the risk of nihilism emerges—not merely as a theoretical concept, but as an everyday condition.

From Exposure to Abyss: The Risk and Reality of Nihilism

While this inquiry has emphasized the generative dimensions of anxiety and uncertainty—drawing from phenomenological and existential traditions that affirm indeterminacy as the condition of human freedom—it is necessary to acknowledge the shadow these

experiences cast. Uncertainty, when unaccompanied by symbolic mediation or ethical orientation, may no longer act as a space of possibility but as a site of collapse. Without interpretive frameworks capable of sustaining ambiguity, anxiety can devolve into paralysis, and openness into vertigo. This is the terrain where nihilism takes root—not merely as a theoretical position but as a lived, affective condition: a mode of existence in which meaning erodes, action becomes inert, and the self drifts in a cultural vacuum.

This collapse finds a stark articulation in the thought of Emil Cioran, whose radical pessimism exposes the danger that existential lucidity may curdle into metaphysical despair. I will only briefly consider this topic, as it would otherwise entail a rigorous investigation into the role of nihilism nowadays. In works such as *A Short History of Decay* (1975) and *The Trouble with Being Born* (1998), Cioran strips existence down to its raw absurdity, presenting it as a wound rather than a task. Unlike Kierkegaard, who locates in anxiety the birth of ethical selfhood, Cioran turns anxiety inward, allowing it to consume the very possibility of becoming. Yet even here, a paradox emerges: his refusal of consolation grants a form of negative freedom—a lucidity that resists illusion and endures without promise. Cioran’s nihilism thus serves as a cautionary limit case: when anxiety is stripped of relational or symbolic structure, it ceases to be transformative and instead becomes terminal.

But nihilism is not only a philosophical risk—it is a condition that is already materializing within modern societies. Today, the symptoms Nietzsche foresaw manifest less as dramatic collapse than as quiet resignation: in the normalization of cynicism, the routinization of despair, and the commodification of life under digital capitalism. Freedom becomes weightless; identity, negotiable; and meaning, precarious. The result is a “soft nihilism” that pervades everyday life—not declared but silently operative in social fragmentation, consumer addiction, and existential fatigue. Therefore, nihilism today is not merely philosophical—it is systemic. It operates through algorithmic governance, the collapse of symbolic authority, and the replacement of ethical deliberation with managerial rationality. If Cioran represents the solitary endpoint of existential dissolution, other authors mentioned beforehand, such as Han and Bauman, show that modern society itself is becoming nihilistic, not by explicit rejection of values, but by dissolving the conditions in which values can cohere. In this light, the phenomenology of uncertainty risks becoming a pathology of indifference, unless accompanied by renewed symbolic, ethical, and political articulations capable of holding open the space of meaning. The question, then, is not only how to endure uncertainty, but how to inhabit it without losing the will to respond.

Conclusion

Before turning to the conclusions, I consider it necessary to distill the broader theoretical arc that has emerged from this inquiry. Drawing on thinkers such as Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, and Galimberti, a phenomenology of uncertainty emerges that positions indeterminacy not as a deficit to be overcome, but as a fundamental condition of human existence. From Husserl’s horizontality to Heidegger’s ontological finitude, from Merleau-Ponty’s fragile embodiment to Galimberti’s critique of technological rationality,

these perspectives converge in affirming that uncertainty is not a deviation from meaning, but the very space in which meaning becomes possible. In a world increasingly governed by imperatives of control and clarity, this approach demands a renewed ethical posture—one that embraces ambiguity as a site of transformation rather than pathology.

If one were to risk a provisional definition of the *zeitgeist* that characterizes our current epoch, it would not be grounded in a singular ideology, a dominant institution, or a stable cultural logic. Rather, it would be defined by the structural experience of uncertainty as both a historical condition and an existential climate. What emerges from the preceding analysis is a constellation of overlapping crises—epistemic, institutional, ontological—that collectively erode the frameworks of intelligibility inherited from Western modernity. The disintegration of metanarratives, the fragmentation of social bonds, and the technocratic transformation of human subjectivity point not merely to a transitional moment, but to a deeper dislocation in the way we inhabit time, meaning, and the self.

This epoch is marked by a heightened awareness of contingency and a radical exposure to finitude. As such, it resonates with what Heidegger, Kierkegaard, and later phenomenologists identified as the constitutive ambiguity of existence—now intensified by digital acceleration, biopolitical governance, and the collapse of shared symbolic orders. In this context, anxiety ceases to be merely a psychological phenomenon; it becomes the affective mode through which the subject encounters a world no longer underwritten by certainty, coherence, or continuity. The historical condition of the West, as surveyed through the thought of Spengler, Nietzsche, and Foucault, reflects a civilization increasingly estranged from its foundational claims to universality, rationality, and progress.

Yet this disorientation does not necessarily entail nihilism. Rather, it foregrounds the necessity of a methodological and ethical reorientation: one that resists conceptual totalization and remains attentive to the irreducible plurality of historical, affective, and ontological experience. The *zeitgeist* of our time—if it is to be named—might be defined precisely by this exposure to uncertainty, by a collective condition of interpretive suspension. It is in this suspension that new configurations of life, value, and thought may begin to take shape.

In sum, the task of contemporary philosophical inquiry is not to resolve the uncertainty that defines our epoch, but to think from within it: to articulate a phenomenology of crisis that neither forecloses the future through premature synthesis nor retreats into nostalgic idealizations. To understand our time is to recognize that the center no longer holds—and that in this decentering lies both the anxiety of loss and the promise of transformation.

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