

Coronavirus and The Age of Anxiety Redux

By [Christopher Black](#)

Theme: [History](#)

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In 1948 the poet, W.H. Auden, published a long poem he titled, The Age of Anxiety, in which four characters express their anxiety about their place in a world that has been destroyed by two world wars and was threatened by a third, and nuclear, world war.

He described the faces in the bars, the people trying to cling to average days that no longer existed, all hoping that the lights wouldn't go out, that the music would always play, that they could avoid looking at where they were, lost in the dark, "children afraid of the night, who have never been happy or good."

The entire period, from 1914 until today, has been an age of anxiety created by our common experience of life in the dominant economic, social, and political system that atomises the individual, reduces them to fragment of themselves and constantly threatens them with annihilation.

A tortured humanity cried out for something better and, for a time, during the rise of socialism, during and after the First World War and through to the counter-revolution in what was the Soviet Union, a new human spirit appeared and created conditions that made people aware of their own possibilities and taught them that the other was not an enemy or a competitor, but a friend, a brother, a sister, who, together, could do anything, for when you can do things and know it, anxiety transforms into confidence and calm, into resoluteness and courage. Liberation movements arose against all the imperialist countries, supported by the socialist nations. The possibility of a better world arose, and as Che Guevara wrote, the possibility of a new human being governed by the spirit of cooperation and regard for fellow beings, by love instead of war.

But, though the struggle goes on, the present reality is a return to universal anxiety. Nuclear war is a possibility at any time. The Americans threaten it, the Russians, Iranians, Koreans, Chinese prepare for it, and the rest of us can only bite our nails and hope they will not see that bright flash on the horizon just before they are swept into oblivion.

Human caused climate change alone threatens us with an immediate existential threat. Temperatures are rising faster than expected by the official journals, though as expected by the more astute scientists, climate systems are disrupted, crops are threatened, the oceans acidified, the ice melting, the seas rising. Our industrial civilisation has destroyed the world ecological systems so that the scientific consensus is that we are in the midst of the 6th Mass Extinction event and its ultimate conclusion is not far off; decades at most, much shorter by some estimations, certainly within my life time.

And the daily grind in the capitalist system generates the daily anxiety we all face, worrying about getting the money you need to live in this system, about paying the bills, about losing

the job that you probably hate in any event and only do out of necessity, for most of us do work that creates no satisfaction and from which we can see no escape. The alternative is the street, the hunger, the cold, the heat, the loneliness of being poor. Charlie Chaplin expressed it in *Modern Times*, the human being as human machine, used up and then discarded by the machine system, worse than slaves, now reduced to subhuman slaves.

On top of all this background anxiety we now have the warnings of imminent death from the corona virus and the unprecedented disruption of every aspect of our lives its appearance has created. Now many face the cruel reality of losing their place in the capitalist lottery as the capitalist economic system breaks down, the system ceases to function, and uncertainty and fear are ever-present.

And, as with all states of anxiety, we see the rise of irrationality and superstition, as people try to convince themselves, “like children afraid of the night” that it is not really happening, or that man created it instead of nature, feeling more secure that it was designed than is a random product of nature, which seems to frighten them the more, and that however it came to be, it is much ado about nothing, just another flu.

We have seen several articles lately making these claims. It has been claimed it was a result of a Chinese bio-warfare lab making a mistake and leaking a virus. It has been claimed it was an American Army laboratory that leaked it; that China was attacked by the US Army sports team that went to a competition in China. For none of these claims is any evidence presented, Instead, they use speculation and conjecture based on false facts or coincidence. Some of them contradict themselves in different articles, One wrote an alarming essay the US Army was behind it. Later he wrote another suggesting it was all a plot by Bill Gates and friends. Well, which it it? They don’t know because they don’t know and don’t care about being consistent so long as it is alarming.

But these articles are passed around and soon Trump begins blaming China and China blaming the US exacerbating the already tense situation between the two countries that could lead to nuclear war. These articles fan those flames. While those that claim it is a plot for “world domination” and that it is either not really happening, or, if happening, is nothing to be concerned about, cause people to put themselves and others at risk by ignoring any measures put in place to protect them and the rest of us.

That superstition involved is plain to see. Those making these claims state that world governments are lying to us. Yet they cannot then explain why the Chinese, Russian, Iranians, Cuban, North Koreans and other anti-imperialist nations take it very seriously and have acted to contain it. But they don’t think about that. They are whistling in the dark because their own anxiety levels are so high, so, to comfort themselves, they invent comforting stories so that they can feel in control. But we are not in control. Nature is. For it is probable, as the Chinese have shown with their genetic studies of the virus that it likely came out of nature not out of a lab.

Of course there is no denying the evil intentions and potential of the western war machine, and of course anything is possible, but until someone comes up with some concrete and reliable evidence that, for example, the virus was an attack on China by the USA, a claim which could add the spark to the powder keg of war, I will assume it is something Nature has thrown at us, at the world, and that instead of creating more division between the nations and peoples of the world we must all act together to help each other as humanity unites to overcome this new threat.

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Christopher Black is an international criminal lawyer based in Toronto. He is known for a number of high-profile war crimes cases and recently published his novel [Beneath the Clouds](#). He writes essays on international law, politics and world events, especially for the online magazine ["New Eastern Outlook."](#) He is a frequent contributor to Global Research.

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