

Depression, Anxiety, Powerlessness and Irrational Belief in Unlimited Individual Possibility as a Consequence of Ubiquitous Systemic Terror

Ross Channing Reed

Abstract: Systemic existential conditions are indelible aspects of a client's reflective and non-reflective modes of consciousness. These conditions impinge upon a client's ability and willingness to think through his/her situation in the world, as this may serve to highlight the terror of living. Depression, anxiety, and a sense of powerlessness, in conjunction with a contradictory belief in unlimited individual possibility are often translations of and reaction formations against the ontological experience of terror. The problematic nature of terror, as such, is discussed, as are its effects upon those who seek counseling. Sources of terror include but are not limited to the increasing monetization of all facets of contemporary post-Modern society, the collapse of the possibility of a democratic society, the renewed global arms race, the increasing debt load shouldered by individuals, the destruction of liberal arts education, and the wholesale disregard of basic human rights as enumerated in the United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. In sum, an artificially created state of nature could account for currently existing conditions of terror and the attendant consequences of that terror: depression, anxiety, a sense of powerlessness, and an irrational belief in unlimited individual possibility.

INTRODUCTION: THE CENTURY OF TERROR

My aim is to (imperfectly) advance four related theses:

- (1) The 21st century is the century of terror. Paradoxically, it is also the century of belief in unlimited individual possibility.
- (2) Current global existential conditions have induced a radical, chronic sense of terror in the population at large. This is most often translated into anxiety, depression, and powerlessness. The belief in unlimited individual possibility is a reaction formation constructed as a defense against existing conditions.
- (3) Reflective awareness magnifies terror and therefore anxiety, depression, and powerlessness. Reflective awareness also serves to highlight the absurdity of belief in unlimited possibility. Individuals take measures to reduce reflective awareness in order to minimize terror, anxiety, depression, and powerlessness.

(4) The monetization of all facets of society effectively produces an artificially created Hobbesian state of nature. The pathologies advanced in theses 1 through 3 are consequences of this artifice.

Albert Camus has written in *Neither Victims Nor Executioners* that “the 17th century was the century of mathematics, the 18th that of the physical sciences, the 19th that of biology.” The 20th century, he writes, is the century of fear.¹

The 21st century is not so easily described. It is both the century of terror, and the century of unlimited possibility. The aspect of terror is existentially grounded, that of limitless possibility a function of the teleology of desire. Terror, like anxiety, has no object. Terror, therefore, is qualitatively different from fear, rather than simply its magnification. Anxiety, depression, and powerlessness are rooted in the phenomenological experience of terror. Terror remains non-reflective or subliminal. Rarely does terror reach the level of reflective consciousness. Terror, then, is not experienced as such. Anxiety, depression, and powerlessness are translations of terror. Anxiety and depression have now reached what could arguably be called epidemic levels. As conditions on the ground devolve, the epidemic spreads. The physiological response to such conditions has been well-described by the Canadian physician Hans Selye in a general pattern: alarm, resistance, and finally, exhaustion.² As we enter the final phase, the Nietzschean paradigm of nihilism—sickness of life, the radical repudiation of meaning and value—looms ever before us.³

WHAT IS TERRORISM?

Terrorism is violence, but it does not require overt physical violence or terror as they are traditionally understood. Terror, as such, is the mechanism by which terrorists exert control. Terrorism is a tool, a technique, a teleological procedure designed to control a given subgroup. Its aims transcend terror, thus terror is not the goal of terrorism. Its aims transcend physical violence, thus physical violence is not the goal of terrorism. It may even be stated that physical violence against the targeted group maybe neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition to effect the aim of terror, and may, in fact, be contraindicated. As such, neither conscious terror nor physical violence are required to effect the teleology of terror.

The principles of parsimony and conversion necessitate a minimum of physical violence, stressing instead the advantages of subliminal psychological violence against the intended victims. This is often most successfully accomplished through

the induction of a *radical sense of insecurity* within the targeted population. To this end, all historically necessary means of self-preservation practiced by the targeted group must be destabilized, including but not limited to food, housing, energy, medical care, education, work, culture, leisure, and political enfranchisement and liberties.

Transitory and ephemeral governments are merely epiphenomena of the goals and interests of the international power elite. The first order of business is to produce in the terrorized the belief that the power elite does not exist. Having successfully induced disbelief in said class, the question of terror as a tool of a nonexistent group does not arise.

Conditions of terror exist by design, as they provide the constitutive instability necessary to induce terror unrecognized as such. The targeted group cowers under the weight of the onslaught of the contradictory nature of its reality--a reality where freedom is trumpeted from every rooftop by the relentless corporate media, by the corporate institutions of indoctrination that pass for schools and colleges and universities--while the targeted group feels, nevertheless, that it cannot find terra firma, that nothing is sacred because nothing is protected, that nothing is sacred because everything is negotiable, that nothing is sacred because everything is for sale.

THE MACROMATRIX I

The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists Doomsday Clock is set, as we speak, at two and a half minutes to midnight.⁴ We do our best, as rational achievement-subjects, not to be aware. Within our discrete, ever-constricting micro-spheres, we boldly step out to embrace the infinitude of our freedom. Powerlessness is no longer subject to attenuation, and in that homeostasis we seek our solace. Camus writes that "Life has no validity unless it can project itself toward the future, can ripen and progress. Living against a wall is a dog's life."⁵ Can a human being live without conceptualizing a future toward which she projects her freedom?

No longer Freudian discipline-subjects, it is said that we now transcend the moral realm of should and should not. We are achievement-subjects, in the realm of unlimited can, the territory of to-be-able, but do we sleep well for all that? Unlimited opportunity stands at the door; whence cometh this most uncanny of guests? Unlimited opportunity, if only one can negotiate the minefield of despair

and death, the labyrinth of deception and duplicity, the gulag of domination and destruction. Our age could be characterized as the age of multitasking, the age of chronic partial attention. Is it any wonder that reflection is an anomaly? Is reflective awareness, existential attention, in fact, possible in our century, the century of terror, the century of unlimited possibility? Possibility is not actuality. Achievement, therefore, remains theoretical, whereas terror is an ever-present ontological reality. What, then, can a disempowered being hope to achieve? Or even...dream? If reflective awareness, in fact, amplifies terror, anxiety, and depression, what then?

The Enlightenment has turned back upon itself, the age of science, of mathematics, of reason, effaced by the new gods of technology: the omniscience of mass surveillance, the omnipotence of thermonuclear weapons, Bentham's panopticon and Hobbes's Leviathan in the form of multinational corporations and the surveillance state-- artificially intelligent, ubiquitous, and immortal. An infinitude of information, of cold electronic data. Algorithmic social media creates a user's electronic shadow (digital Doppelgänger, i.e. *double-goer*), more pervasive and everlasting than the user herself. Soon indistinguishable from the current of charged particles, the user is, finally, eclipsed by them. We have manufactured our own deluge; there is no god to save us, no dove to fly to shore. It is the end of metaphysics, but not of physics. All metanarratives effaced, discarded, we are left only with our own feeble narratives, which, having no possible ending, spin on to infinity.

Psychoanalyst Erich Fromm writes in his 1960 introduction to Orwell's 1984 that the world arms race will, if it continues, destroy any possibility of real democracy: "...fright and hatred of a possible aggressor will destroy the basic attitudes of a democratic, humanistic society. In other words, the continued arms race, even if it would not lead to the outbreak of a thermonuclear war, would lead to the destruction of any of those basic qualities of our society which can be called 'democratic,' 'free,' or 'in the American tradition.'"⁶ There is no doubt that the arms race has continued in the fifty-eight years since these words were written. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute reported the following in its Sipri Yearbook 2017: Global arms spending for 2016 was \$1.686 trillion dollars. The United States of America, currently 4.3% of the world's population,⁷ sold 33% of these weapons. Russia was second at 23%. The total inventory in the global nuclear arsenal stands at 14,935 nuclear warheads. Russia has 7,000, the United States 6,800.⁸ Are we, therefore, living in a post-Democratic age? Is the 21st century not only the cen-

tury of terror and unlimited possibility, but also the century of coercion—coercion couched as freedom, as opportunity, as the consent of the governed? Might such coercion be the basis for anxiety, depression, even terror?

The 2017 Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists Doomsday Clock is set at two and a half minutes to midnight. In the 70 years since its existence, “the Clock has become a universally recognized indicator of the world’s vulnerability to catastrophe from nuclear weapons, climate change, and new technologies emerging in other domains (including lethal autonomous weapons systems that make “kill” decisions without human input or supervision).⁹ John Mecklin, editor of the report, writes that “Founded in 1945 by University of Chicago scientists who had helped develop the first atomic weapons in the Manhattan Project, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists created the Doomsday Clock two years later, using the imagery of apocalypse (midnight) and the contemporary idiom of nuclear explosion (countdown to zero) to convey threats to humanity and the planet. The decision to move (or to leave in place) the minute hand of the Doomsday Clock is made every year by the Bulletin’s Science and Security Board in consultation with its Board of Sponsors, which includes 15 Nobel laureates.” The report begins with the following:

To: Leaders and citizens of the world

Re: It is 30 seconds closer to midnight Date: January 26, 2017

“Over the course of 2016, the global security landscape darkened as the international community failed to come effectively to grips with humanity’s most pressing existential threats, nuclear weapons and climate change.”

THE NECESSARY DELUSION OF UNLIMITED INDIVIDUAL POSSIBILITY

Let’s set aside, for a moment, the inescapable terror of our age. The 21st Century may also be described as the age of achievement, of belief in unlimited individual possibility. What is it, then, that we have achieved? John Stuart Mill argued in *Utilitarianism* that 95% of humanity is unhappy, but that most human suffering is of human origin, caused either by oneself or others.¹⁰ The ultimate end, for Mill, of course, was happiness. Not because it is mandated from on high, but simply because we seek it. Even Aristotle and Kant are agreed that we seek happiness as the final end. Aristotle writes in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: “Now happiness (*eudaimonia*), more than anything else, seems complete without qualification. For we always choose

it because of itself, never because of something else.”¹¹ And, likewise, Kant: “There is, however, *one* end that can be presupposed as actual in all rational beings...and thus there is one purpose which they not only *can* have, but which we can assume with certainty that they all *do* have by a natural necessity--the purpose, namely, of *happiness*.¹² If happiness is, by necessity, our final end, our telos, how well have we fared? Does our civilization meet the necessary preconditions for the possibility of happiness? Let’s take a look.

The Korean-German philosopher Byung-Chul Han has posited that we live in an age of neuronal illness as a result of excess positivity. He writes in *The Burnout Society* that: “From a pathological standpoint, the incipient twenty-first century is determined neither by bacteria nor by virus, but by neurons. Neurological illnesses such as depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), borderline personality disorder (BPD), and burnout syndrome mark the landscape of pathology at the beginning of the twenty-first century. They are not infections, but infarctions; they do not follow from the *negativity* of what is immunologically foreign, but from an excess of *positivity*. Therefore, they elude all technologies and techniques that seek to combat what is alien.”¹³

Excess positivity is unlimited possibility. Such possibility creates limitless pressure to achieve, creating an inhuman “ego-ideal”¹⁴ which the achievement-subject relentlessly pursues by means of violence against itself. Thus, says Han, freedom itself turns out to be a form of coercion. We auto-aggressively exploit ourselves in an endless quest to maximize achievement. Han writes: “On the basis of the paradoxical freedom it holds, the achievement-subject is simultaneously perpetrator and victim, master and slave. Freedom and violence now coincide.”¹⁵

The achievement-subject self-deceptively believes in unlimited individual possibility. Self-exhibition, self-commodification, anesthetic hypercommunication, pornographic transparency, and auto-aggressive control under the guise of freedom are means by which the achievement-subject seeks the unrealizable ideal.

THE MACRO MATRIXII

What specific 21st century subterranean-existential conditions have produced the phenomenon of terror and the epiphenomenon of the achievement-subject?

We have already noted the now almost-invisible global arms race. Why invisible? Rather than causing systemic upset, terror has been normalized. It has,

additionally, become grounds for great economic profit. An example of the normalization of terror is the Fallout Shelter. Developed during the Cold War to protect citizenry from radioactive debris—particularly gamma rays—in the event of a nuclear attack, such shelters have fallen into disrepair and abandonment. The Army Corp of Engineers produced 1.4 million Fallout Shelter signs in 1961 alone. Their designer, Robert W. Blakeley, died October 25, 2017 at the age of 95. Note the tone in the *New York Times* obituary: “You can still see Robert W. Blakeley’s ominous signs on old public buildings, *rusted metal relics of an age when nuclear war was a clear and present danger*. They marked the way to the fallout shelters where millions of Americans wereto take refuge from the deadly radioactivity of thermonuclear explosions.”¹⁶ Americans no longer think of taking refuge in the event of such an attack. If you are not directly killed in the attack, and do not die from the effects of radiation poisoning, you will die as a result of the ensuing nuclear winter.^{17,18} When Fallout Shelters were established, we didn’t know about nuclear winter. Now that we do, the shelters seem pointless, quaint, even ridiculous. The terror has been internalized and is now processed as anxiety, depression, and powerlessness.

The second subterranean-existential condition of terror is economic. Post-modern global capitalism is, in short, a zero sum game. Oxfam recently reported that the world’s eight richest men own the same wealth as the bottom half of the world’s population— over 3.6 billion.¹⁹ (A year prior, 62 people owned the same wealth as the bottom half). Upon publication of the report in January of 2017, Winnie Byanyima, Executive Director of Oxfam International, said:

“It is obscene for so much wealth to be held in the hands of so few when 1 in 10 people survive on less than \$2 a day. Inequality is trapping hundreds of millions in poverty; it is fracturing our societies and undermining democracy. Across the world, people are being left behind. Their wages are stagnating yet corporate bosses take home million dollar bonuses; their health and education services are cut while corporations and the super-rich dodge their taxes; their voices are ignored as governments sing to the tune of big business and a wealthy elite.”

The Oxfam report also included the 2016 Credit Suisse data that show that since 2015, *the world’s richest 1% has owned more wealth than the rest of the planet*.

Has the world ever seen such inequality? The answer is beyond the scope of this work, but I postulate, given ample data, that the answer is no. By all measures, inequality is increasing. Democracy? Freedom? Unlimited possibility? Rather, an encroaching sense of powerlessness, anxiety, depression, and terror.

A specific example of economic terror is the American student loan debacle. At this moment, on the last day of December 2017, student loan debt has reached \$1,508,300,000,000 dollars.²⁰ That's right, over \$1.5 trillion dollars. The number topped \$1 trillion only five years ago, in 2012, and made quite a flurry in the press at the time. Over 43 million Americans have student loan debt, and the average age of debt-holders has been increasing. \$1.508 trillion works out to, on average, \$35,076 per person, or \$84,009.60 amortized over 30 years at 7.0%. Put differently, the average student must pay \$233.36 every month for the rest of her working life. Making matters worse, tuition is rising at an exponential rate, far ahead of inflation—or wages.

Thomas Frank, in his article titled “The Price of Admission”, writes “Ten years from now, in fact, college students may well look back with jealousy on their predecessors who got away with a mere hundred grand in debt.” He goes on: “We are living in a golden age of price discovery, in which our masters have figured out that no one is going to stop them from charging as much as they want for necessities that ought to be or used to be considered public goods...Massive indebtedness changes a person, maybe even more than a college education does, and it's reasonable to suspect that the politicians who have allowed the tuition disaster to take its course know this...It's hard to find...ecstasy among the current crop of college graduates. The sensibility shared by their generation seems to revolve around student debt, which has been clamped onto them like some sort of interest-bearing iron maiden. They've been screwed--that's what their moment of enlightenment has taught them.”

Social anthropologist David Graeber, author of *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*, related a story to Frank: “Graeber relates the story of a woman he met who got a Ph.D. from Columbia University, but whose \$80,000 debt load put an academic career off-limits, since adjuncts earn close to nothing. Instead, the woman wound up working as an escort for Wall Street types. ‘Here is someone who ought to be a professor,’ Graeber explains, ‘doing sexual services for the guys who lent her the money.’”²¹

How little do professors actually earn in America today? According to *The American Association of University Professors Annual Report on the Economic Status of the Profession* by John W. Curtis and Saranna Thornton,²² over three-quarters of all college and university professors in America are now “contingent”: “Combining

the contingent employment categories as described above... more than three of every four instructional staff positions (76 percent) are filled on a contingent basis.”

How much do these professors (the 76 percent) actually earn? Given their “contingent” status, it is difficult to pin down the exact numbers, but the average, looking at the figures, is somewhere between \$11,600 and \$25,904 per year, gross income, teaching *eight* courses per academic year. What better way to silence a large portion of the intelligentsia? The recent addition of digital panoptic surveillance has further disempowered this intellectual subclass.

This point was forcefully driven home by one of America’s leading intellectuals, Dr. Noam Chomsky, Professor Emeritus, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in a recent article aptly titled *The Death of American Universities*.²³ Chomsky writes that “As universities move towards a corporate business model, precarity is imposed by force.” What is precarity? It is quite simple: one’s existence is *made* precarious. Why? Chomsky: “It’s part of a corporate business model designed to reduce labor costs and to *increase labor servility*...to keep labor costs down and make sure that labor is docile and obedient.” The point of this type of management is to *increase worker insecurity*, he argues. How do you increase worker insecurity in American colleges and universities? Chomsky: “Crucially, by not guaranteeing employment, by keeping people hanging on a limb that can be sawed off at any time, so that they’d better shut up, take tiny salaries, and do their work; and if they get the gift of being allowed to serve under miserable conditions for another year, they should welcome it and not ask for any more.” Precarity, in this model, is the ideal. Chomsky: “And as universities move towards a corporate business model, precarity is exactly what is being imposed. And we’ll see more and more of it.” I think the larger point here is that colleges and universities are following the corporate lead in their focus on monetization as the sole measure of value. The effect is systemic precarity; planning is no longer possible. One no longer has a future. No long-range plans can be made. The psychological effects are anxiety, depression, rage, terror, addiction, auto-aggression, and a radical sense of powerlessness. These categories are not mutually exclusive.

Let’s step back from the monetization of education and look at some other numbers. Credit card debt in the United States has inched back over a trillion, at \$1.03 trillion. Mortgage debt is a whopping \$14.887 trillion. The United States federal government is currently shouldering \$20.612 trillion in debt. All sources of

debt combined, according to the United States Federal Reserve, including household, business, state and local governments, financial institutions, and the federal government, is running as we speak at \$69.056 trillion, which, according to the Federal Reserve, equals a debt of \$211,500 per citizen or \$830,500 per family. Savings per family, according to the Congressional Budget Office, is, on average, \$5,018 dollars.²⁴ Personal debt alone, per citizen, is \$57,350 dollars, up 142% since 2000.

Yet another example of economic terror is the absence of the right to health care. The United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on December 10, 1948, Resolution 217A, Article 25, states that:

“(1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

(2) Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.”²⁵

What rights do we enjoy? One need not postulate a metaphysical basis for such rights, nor provide a rigorous epistemology. One could, as Alasdair MacIntyre does in *After Virtue*, deny the existence, in any essentialistic sense, of human rights.²⁶ One might simply argue that if everything is for sale, there are, as a matter of fact, no human rights—if, by human rights, we mean something that is acknowledged by those with the power to enforce or deny such claims. There may be no adequate essentialistic account of human rights. The absence of such an account does not preclude the possibility of enforceable, de facto rights for citizens the world over.

A cursory comparison of the thirty articles of the universal declaration with the facts on the ground will reveal that for the vast majority, rights do not exist even in the latter, nonmetaphysical sense. Commodification has replaced moral value and reigns supreme as a value unto itself. Thus, for example, the best that can be said is that we, as Americans, have a “right” to purchase for-profit health insurance for a market-set price. Health insurance and health care must, of course, be distinguished from one another, as the former is no guarantee of the latter. In fact, they may be antithetical. The primary function, the *raison d'être*, of health insurance is to generate profit. This is possible through the minimization of health care. There

is, therefore, an irreducible conflict between the two. The de facto elimination of human rights is the moral equivalent of the wholesale dehumanization of a population. This would be true whether such rights were of metaphysical origin or were simply agreed-upon social constructs. A monetized society is not a society based on consent, but on power, that is to say, coercion. Terror, anxiety, and depression are the means by which coercion is operationalized.

Without a minimal level of guaranteed access to actual health care, a population lives with a sense of radical insecurity well described by Thomas Hobbes in his *LEVIATHAN* (1652) as the state of nature, a state prior to the time in which a human being lives in a civil society, a society which would provide certain guarantees against the expected exigencies of solitary living.²⁷ One primary focus of civil society should be to alleviate the existential terror of everyday living through the sharing of resources, knowledge, power, and defenses. But a society in which anyone is potentially one serious illness away from destitution, poverty, homelessness, starvation and death is certainly not a civil society by any account. Put differently: a society that would allow the loss of everything necessary to sustain human life when such a situation is eminently preventable does not meet the necessary preconditions for civil society. No one would agree to such a situation in John Rawls' hypothetical original position, wherein we choose the basic framework of justice as fairness without knowing where we will be in the socio-economic hierarchy, since this situation is neither fair nor just.²⁸ A society where anyone is potentially one serious illness away from destitution, poverty, bankruptcy, homelessness, starvation and death is certainly not a civil society by any account, and yet such is the present situation in the United States of America.

Such an uncivil situation clearly violates multiple articles of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, adopted seventy years ago. At that time, the United Nations General Assembly called upon all member nations to publish the thirty articles found in the *Declaration*, and "to cause it to be disseminated, displayed, read, and expounded principally in schools and other educational institutions, without distinction based on the political status of countries or territories."

It is eminently clear that Americans have no such rights, as described in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, to health, well-being, and security. For this reason as well as those drawn from Hobbes and Rawls, we see that America is in fact not a civil society at all. Such a situation is one of induced terror. It is a situation

of systemic invisible violence inducing terror, based upon the principles of parsimony and conversion.

With few exceptions, economics is the determining factor when it comes to the availability of health care in the United States. Thousands die,²⁹ sustain preventable permanent injuries, become homeless, lose all of their savings and/or incur monstrous debt every year due to medical reasons.³⁰ Meanwhile, millions who work every day, year in and year out, could lose everything in an instant if they were in an automobile accident and required sustained medical attention (even if they were not at fault). “Health care” itself has become an instrument of terror. This is an artificially created state of nature. Pervasive terror is thus induced as a function of systemic constitutive instability.

To return to Thomas Hobbes in *LEVIATHAN*: “To this war of every man against every man this also is consequent, that nothing can be unjust. The notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice, have there no place. Where there is no common power, there is no law; where no law, no injustice.”³¹ Hobbes goes on to assert that the terror of such a state is far greater than the terror of a unitary dictatorship, and yet we are in such a state. The existing artificially created state of nature is nothing less than a state of induced terror.

Nothing can be unjust: neither death, nor famine, nor poverty, nor homelessness, since the onus to provide these essentials rests squarely upon the person who sustains the serious injury. No one owes her a thing, not even to be left to die peacefully—from preventable injuries—on a public sidewalk, since “living” in said location could very well violate local ordinances. Nothing can be unjust—even the denial of a medical procedure necessary for one’s continued existence—if the patient in question has not made acceptable financial arrangements. Nothing in the state of nature can be unjust, since conditions do not yet obtain for justice to exist.

How have Americans responded? Rather predictably, one might argue. The Citizens Commission on Human Rights International³² reported on data taken from IMS Health Vector One National database Year 2013, Extracted April 2014, the largest vendor for U.S. physician prescribing data. The American population currently stands at 326,000,000 million. According to the data, 78,694,222 Americans took prescription psychiatric medication in 2013. This includes the following classes of drugs: anti-depressants, drugs for ADHD, anti-psychotics, and anti-anxiety drugs. This does not include analgesics.

Let's look at analgesics. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there were 214,881,622 prescriptions written for opioids in 2016 alone.³³ Christopher Ingraham recently reported on the epidemic in a *Washington Post* article titled "CDC releases grim new opioid overdose figures: 'We're talking about more than an exponential increase'" (December 21, 2017). Ingraham writes that "The national opioid epidemic escalated in 2016, driven by an unprecedented surge in deaths from fentanyl and other synthetic opiates, according to new data released Thursday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. More than 42,000 Americans died of opioid overdoses in 2016, a 28 percent increase over 2015. The number of people fatally overdosing on fentanyl and other synthetic opiates more than doubled, from 9,580 in 2015 to 19,413 in 2016. Deaths due to heroin were up nearly 20 percent, and deaths from other opiate painkillers, such as hydrocodone and oxycodone, were up 14 percent. Overdose deaths from all drugs, including non-opioids, stood at 63,600 last year, an increase of 21 percent over the 2015 number. "It's even worse than it looks," said Keith Humphreys, an addiction specialist at Stanford University. Given that research has shown that the official figures could be undercounting the true number of opioid deaths by 20 percent or more, "we could easily be at 50,000 opioid deaths last year." The unlimited freedom of the achievement-subject? Or induced terror, powerlessness, anxiety, and depression?

From the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2017 report titled "The Current Drug Overdose Epidemic in the United States":

"Drug overdose deaths in the United States more than tripled from 1999 to 2015... Morbidity and mortality statistics, however, fail to capture the full extent of the problem with substance use disorders in the United States. Survey data indicate that tens of millions of Americans misuse prescription opioids, sedatives, tranquilizers, and stimulants. Others use illicit drugs such as heroin, fentanyl, cocaine, and methamphetamine... The problem with misuse of prescription drugs of various kinds is related to high levels of prescribing of such medications. For example, in 2016 prescribers wrote 66.5 opioid and 25.2 sedative prescriptions for every 100 Americans."³⁴

The report also states that "During 2015, an estimated 47.7 million persons in the United States aged 12 years or older used illicit drugs or misused prescription drugs, a rate of 17.8 per 100 persons. This estimate includes use of marijuana, cocaine (including crack), heroin, hallucinogens, inhalants, or methamphetamine, and the misuse of prescription drugs."

These findings indicate that Americans are exerting themselves as never before to limit or extinguish their own reflective awareness. This behavior aligns with the thesis that, given current existential conditions, reflective awareness heightens one's sense of terror and therefore induces anxiety and depression.

Let's look at other forms of subterranean-existential terror. According to the Gun Violence Archive, there were 37,554 Americans killed and 31,159 injured by firearms in 2017.³⁵ 22,000 gun deaths were the result of self-inflicted wounds. There were 344 mass shootings in 2017 (an incident in which four or more people are shot and injured or killed). Like all other important public health and human rights issues, we have made no progress toward stemming the tide of blood in our streets, and for one clear reason: a seemingly intractable inability to have a public dialogue on this or any other issue of import. Is it any wonder that citizens feel anxiety, terror, and depression? The statistics show that 60% of gun deaths are ruled suicides. Unlimited possibility—or induced terror, powerlessness, anxiety, and depression?

NO FUTURE?

Thinking cannot alleviate the effects of systemic existential conditions over which a thinker has no control. The net effect is a pervasive sense of terror translated as anxiety, depression, and powerlessness. "Concern for the good life, which also includes life as a member of the community, is yielding more and more to the simple concern for survival," writes Byung-Chul Han.³⁶ "Rage is the capacity to interrupt a given state and *make a new state begin*."³⁷ Han writes in *In the Swarm* that: "The general distraction and dissipation characterizing society today prevent the epic energy of rage from arising. Rage, in the strong sense, is more than an affective state. It means the capacity, the power, to interrupt existing conditions and bring about new ones. In this way, it produces the future."³⁸ Han goes on to say that we are no longer capable of such rage, and thus we have no future. Thus, reflective awareness, underscoring the absence of a future, has been radically disincentivized. If the final telos is happiness, one might even suggest that the most effective use of the intellect would be to shield it from itself. Thus the intellect could marshal its resources to prevent its own lucid awareness.

The notion of a common destiny, the notion of brotherhood, the notion of sisterhood, the notion of statecraft, the notion of community, they are gone, gone in a sea of calculated, monetized verbiage. Living together has been replaced with

competition unto death. In the final analysis, when nothing is sacred, the individual ceases to exist.

The very possibility of personhood has been eradicated. The use of systemic violence as a tool of terror makes it all possible. Hail to the new Masters of the Universe. The King is dead. Long live the King.

Ross Channing Reed holds an M.A. in philosophy from Baylor University, an M. Mus. from the University of Memphis, and a Ph.D. in philosophy from Loyola University Chicago. He has been in private practice as a philosophical counselor since 1998. He is the author of Love and Death: An Existential Theory of Addiction as well as other works of fiction and nonfiction. He teaches at Missouri University of Science and Technology.

NOTES

1. Albert Camus, *Neither Victims Nor Executioners*, trans. Dwight MacDonald. Introduction by Robert Pickus. (New York: Continuum, 1980), 25. Originally published in *Combat* in the fall of 1946, and then in translation in the July-August 1947 issue of *Politics*.
2. See, for example, Hans Selye, *Stress in Health and Disease* (London: Butterworth, 1976).
3. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage, 1966). Originally published in 1886. See also *The Genealogy of Morals* and *The Will to Power*.
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