

You are encouraged to read the whole book, and please make a proper citation if needed.

May, R. (1977). *The meaning of anxiety*. W.W. Norton.

I propose the following definition: Anxiety is the apprehension cued off by a threat to some value that the individual holds essential to his existence as a personality. The threat may be to physical life (the threat of death), or to psychological existence (the loss of freedom, meaninglessness). Or the threat may be to some other value which one identifies with one's existence: (patriotism, the love of another person, "success", etc.). (p. 205-206)

To summarize: the objectless nature of anxiety arises from the fact that the security base of the individual is threatened, and since it is in terms of this security base that the individual has been able to experience himself as a self in relation to objects, the distinction between subject and object also breaks down. (p. 208)

Since anxiety threatens the basis of selfhood, it is described on the philosophical level as the realization that one may cease to exist as a self. This is phrased by Tillich as the threat of "nonbeing." One is a being, a self; but there is at any moment the possibility of "not being." Death, fatigue, illness, destructive aggression, etc., are all illustrations of nonbeing. The normal anxiety associated in the minds of most people with death is, of course, the most universal form of this anxiety. But the dissolution of the self may consist not simply of physical death. It may consist also of the loss of psychological or spiritual meaning which is identified with one's existence as a self – i.e., the threat of meaninglessness. (p. 208)

Normal anxiety is that reaction which (1) is not disproportionate to the objective threat, (2) does not involve repression or other mechanism of intrapsychic conflict, and, as a corollary to the second point, (3) does not require neurotic defense mechanisms for its management. It (4) can be confronted constructively on the level of conscious awareness or can be relieved if the objective situation is altered. (p. 209)

Neurotic anxiety, on the other hand, is the reverse of our definition of normal. It is a reaction to threat which is (1) disproportionate to the objective danger, (2) involves repression (dissociation) and other form of intrapsychic conflict, and as a corollary (3) is managed by means of various forms of retrenchment of activity and awareness, such as inhibitions, the development of symptoms, and the varied neurotic defense mechanisms. (p. 214)

As a corollary we have pointed out that courage consists not of the absence of fear and anxiety but of the capacity to move ahead even though one is afraid. This constructive confronting of normal anxiety in daily life and in crises which require moral rather than physical courage (such as the crises in self-development, often attended with profound anxiety, which occur during psychotherapy), is accompanied by the feeling of adventure. (p. 377)

A person is subjectively prepared to confront unavoidable anxiety constructively when he is convinced (consciously or unconsciously) that the values to be gained in moving ahead are greater than those to be gained by escape. (p. 378)