References to philosophical and religious factors in the causation of alcoholism have been relatively rare in the literature. The view that such factors exist and are of significance in understanding alcoholism in both its etiological and treatment aspects underlies the present attempt to explore these factors, and leads to a consideration of the ways in which the alcoholic handles his existential anxiety.

Lolli has suggested that the problems of neurotic and existential anxiety are complexly intermingled in the causation of alcoholism. The suggestion that three types of anxiety—neurotic, historical and existential—are involved in alcoholism is one that I offered and elucidated in a preliminary way in another statement. The purpose of the present essay is to set forth a tentative theoretical structure which may prove to be useful in understanding the role of existential anxiety and its relationship to neurotic anxiety in the alcoholic.

BACKGROUND CONSIDERATIONS

Several types of evidence contributed to my curiosity concerning the broad area of the relationships between alcohol and alcoholism, on the one hand, and such matters as religious strivings, fear of death, loneliness and meaninglessness, on the other. One was a statement by Bill W., co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous: “Before A.A. we were trying to find God in the bottle.” Another datum was the familiar paragraph from William Jame’s Gifford lectures: “The sway of alcohol over mankind is unquestionably due to its power to stimulate the mystical faculties of human nature, usually crushed to earth by the cold facts and dry criticisms of the sober hour. . . . Not through mere perversity