trust and relatedness to life. Maslow uses the phrase “oceanic feeling,” in his discussion of the self-actualized person, to describe the experience of being a part of the whole universe.

The source of these three elements of man’s religious need is his existential anxiety. Anxiety in general is the response of the human organism to anything that is perceived as a threat to what one regards as essential to one’s welfare or safety. Pathological (neurotic) anxiety arises when contradictory impulses, desires or needs clamor simultaneously for expression or satisfaction. It is the result of inner conflict. It serves the function of keeping material that is unacceptable to the self-image repressed. In contrast, existential anxiety is nonpathological or normal anxiety. It arises from the very nature of human existence. Man is the animal who knows he will die. He is trapped by his rootage in nature. He is subject to its forces of sickness, pain and death, and he lacks what Big Daddy, in Tennessee Williams’ Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, calls the “pig’s advantage”—viz., ignorance of his mortality. The theme of existential or nonpathological anxiety has been discussed by thinkers holding to diverse metaphysical presuppositions, including Kierkegaard, Tillich, Fromm, Horney and May. The German philosophical literature refers to this anxiety as Urangst. Erik Erikson calls it the “ego chill.” Tillich writes:

Man’s essential loneliness and seclusion, his insecurity and feeling of strangeness, his temporality and melancholy are qualities which are felt even apart from their transformation by guilt. They are his heritage of finitude.14

Existential anxiety results from threats to man’s very being. According to Tillich these threats come from three directions: the threat of fate and death, of emptiness and loss of meaning, of guilt and condemnation.15

There is no psychological answer to existential anxiety. It cannot be eliminated through psychotherapy. It is existential in that it is inherent in man’s very existence as a self-aware being. But its impact on the individual can be either constructive or destructive, a stimulus to creativity or a paralyzing force. Which it is depends on the way it is handled by the individual. Existential anxiety is not the result of the peculiar threats of our period of history, since it is a part of man’s “heritage of finitude” in all periods of history. However, as will be discussed subsequently, the particular combination of factors which cause our period of history to be an “age of anxiety” make it more difficult to handle existential anxiety constructively. There are only religious or pseudo-religious ways of handling this kind of anxiety.

14 P. Tillich, Shaking of the Foundations (New York: Scribner’s, 1948) p. 170