

The Spiritual Self in Bahá'í Studies

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Introduction

Some Bahá'í scholars of religion have justifiably regretted the large gaps that still exist in the fabric of Bahá'í religious studies. Stephen Lambden, for example, observes that "Many issues within the history of religions urgently need researching"¹ and "Some areas within the humanities have been largely neglected by Bahá'ís. The various branches of theology are something about which Bahá'ís need to be aware."² Lambden states further on the same point:

Being philosophically informed is particularly important for Bahá'ís who are in dialogue with persons concerned with ethical, epistemological, theological and metaphysical issues. Too few Bahá'ís have to date grappled with this complicated but vital area.³

Lambden also comments that Bahá'í literature directed to members of the world's great religions is also sadly lacking.

In relation to major religious groups, Bahá'ís have yet, for example, to produce adequate literature directed towards Jews (18 million), Zoroastrians (100,000 in the world; around 5,000 in the U.K.) as well as the many millions of Confucians (almost 6 million), Shintoists (almost 3.5 million), Taoists etc. The Bahá'í literature for Hindus

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- ¹. Stephen Lambden, "Doing Bahá'í Scholarship in the 1990's: A Religious Studies Perspective", *The Bahá'í Studies Review*, 3:2, 1994, 67. The sad fact of the matter is (a point clearly implied by Lambden) that very few Bahá'ís to date are interested in the scientific study of religion. The scholarly circle remains consequently quite small. The relatively small band of Bahá'í scholars who dedicate their work to these vital areas cannot possibly do all of the work required. The significant efforts that they have made, however, have broken the ground for those who will follow them.
 - ². Stephen Lambden, "Doing Bahá'í Scholarship in the 1990's: A Religious Studies Perspective", *The Bahá'í Studies Review*, 3:2, 1994, 74-75.
 - ³. Stephen Lambden, "Doing Bahá'í Scholarship in the 1990's: A Religious Studies Perspective", *The Bahá'í Studies Review*, 3:2, 1994, 75. Lambden cites doctoral candidate Robert Parry's article "Philosophical Theology and Bahá'í Scholarship" in *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin*. 6.4-7.2 (Oct. 1992): 66-91 as a recent instructive paper in this area.

and Buddhists is very, very small.⁴

Other scholars have likewise pointed to the lacunae in Bahá'í religious studies. Seena Fazel has documented the still relatively minor attention the Bahá'í Faith has received as an object of academic interest. Fazel's study, states that "The Bahá'í Faith is suffering from a major dearth of academic literature."⁵ Based on his graph of the number of articles on the Bahá'í Faith appearing in indexed academic journals from 1970-1990, Fazel states that "the number of articles on the Faith will significantly decrease if the numbers remain static."⁶ Udo Schaefer also finds that the Bahá'í Faith compared to Islam which by its mid-second century had already founded its four schools of law (*Ar.madháhib*; sing. *madhhab*),⁷ has produced comparatively little specifically religious scholarship focusing on Bahá'í theology and metaphysics.⁸

Correlating the Knowledge of the Spiritual Self With Existential Theism: A Synopsis

This paper seeks to address one of those several issues alluded to by Lambden above. In so doing, it moves beyond merely decrying a gap, and initiates a preliminary discussion of what is potentially one of the most critical, but as yet largely unexplored, parameters of Bahá'í philosophical theology. As indicated, the theme of this paper is the knowledge of the spiritual self and the possibilities of existential theism to further such a perspective. By the knowledge of the spiritual self I intend three meanings. First, the individual's spiritual understanding of the Divine Word or divine questions and the spiritual experiences of living-in-the-world as progenitors of real self-knowledge, that is, the understanding of self and others as lesser divine beings. Second, the knowledge of the spiritual self and spiritual experience which I view as being one thing, that is, existing together in a symbiotic relationship. This symbiotic relationship of spiritual knowledge and experience would appear to be clearly implied in Bahá'u'lláh's *Kitáb-i-Iqán*, for the *Iqán* presents the knowledge of God as intuitional existential knowledge; that is,

⁴. "Doing Bahá'í Scholarship", 66.

⁵. Seena Fazel, "The Bahá'í Faith and Academic Journals", *The Bahá'í Studies Review*, 3.2 (1994), 85.

⁶. Seena Fazel, "The Bahá'í Faith and Academic Journals", *The Bahá'í Studies Review*, 3.2 (1994), 83. Fazel points out, however, that not all Bahá'í periodical literature has been indexed. Although *World Order* is indexed, *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies* is not. One can concur with Fazel this is "a serious omission". (83) The indexing of *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies* would have increased the number of academic articles on the Bahá'í Faith. This realisation makes the outlook marginally less bleak than it appears.

⁷. The position of most Muslim scholars is that the differences between the four schools are relatively minor and concern incidental matters. `Abdur Rahman I. Doi, professor of Islamic law writes, for example, in *Shari'ah The Islamic Law*: "If one closely examines the *fiqh* of the four schools, one will never come across any difference of opinions as far as the basic principles of Islam are concerned. The differences mainly centre around *furúat* (tiny branches) of theology rather than *Usúl* (the fundamental principles) of belief." (85) The four schools of Islamic jurisprudence are: (1) the *Hanafite* school founded by Abú Hanífa (d. 767). (2) the *Malakite* school founded by Málik ibn Anas (d. 795). (3) the *Sháfi'ite*, founded by Sháfi'í (d. 820). (4) the strictest and most conservative *Hanbalite* school, founded by Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 855). For a substantive presentation of the four schools of the *Shari'ah* see [title].

⁸. Udo Schaefer, "Challenges to Bahá'í Studies", *The Bahá'í Studies Review* 2.1 (1992):26.

its *epistemé* and its ontology present the knowledge of God primarily as an experience to be immediately apprehended by the soul, and not predominantly as the contemplation of an abstract set of propositions or truths arrived at deductively.⁹ This ontology of the immediate presence of the divine, the possibility that the seeker can be seized by the effects of divine revelation, is one of the great themes, not only of the *Iqán*, but indeed of all scripture. The knowledge of the spiritual self (self-knowledge) would here be perceived as the highest form of knowledge worth possessing. Third, the knowledge of the spiritual self refers to the *persona* of the scholar as hermeneute, as one who subjectively interprets the experiences and questions of spiritual life from the standpoint of his or her *vécu* or *Weltanschauung*, rather than treating a set of objective questions to be elucidated in analytical fashion, the more commonly accepted method of scholarship. Such an affirmation makes self-knowledge the common property of both sacred study and literary tradition.

I maintain that the knowledge of the spiritual self as a mode of reasoning and a hermeneutic of self, the world and divine questions is of capital importance in Bahá'í studies for the simple reason that it deals with spiritual anthropology, the life of the believer as a diminished reflection of the "Self of God" (*nafs illahi*),¹⁰ composed of those divine attributes which, in part or in whole, constitute the individual's spiritual *anthros* and distinguish the spiritual person as the preeminent creation of God. Further, such an approach to Bahá'í studies alludes to the growth of the soul in its continual evolution toward the ultimate and final goal of spiritual life, union with God.

The main purpose of religion, as the Bahá'í writings repeatedly affirm, is spiritual transformation¹¹ which is but another word for enhanced self-knowledge. This knowledge of the spiritual self is not merely theoretical, however, but derives from and leads to praxis. It is more importantly *savoir-faire*, that is, "know-how" and should be distinguished from knowledge as an end in itself. Self-knowledge is thus more perfect knowledge in that it constitutes both end and means. Any self-respecting Bahá'í theology cannot, consequently, afford to neglect spiritual anthropology, that is, an understanding of the human person as both subject and object of

⁹. This view that divine knowledge is derived from spiritual experience is a form of empiricism. I do not intend this view in an absolute way since this spiritual empiricism is one that derives from the phenomenon of divine revelation and is, to a great extent, dependent upon it. My comment about the "the intuitional existential knowledge" of the *Iqán* refers mainly to those passages in which Bahá'u'lláh outlines the qualifications of the true seeker in the search for God and describes the mystical experience of the divine encounter (pp. 192-99).

¹⁰. Juan Ricardo Cole states the Self of God "seems to refer to the totality of God's active attributes, of which the prophets and messengers are manifestations" (*The Concept of Manifestation in the Bahá'í Writings* 18). I have identified the Self of God with the human being because of Bahá'u'lláh's statement: "Upon the inmost reality of each and every created thing He hath shed the light of one of His names, and made it a recipient of the glory of one of His attributes, Upon the reality of man, however, He hath focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of His own Self" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 65).

¹¹. Bahá'u'lláh writes, for example, "...is not the object of every Revelation to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions? For if the character of mankind be not changed, the futility of God's universal Manifestations would be apparent" (*Kitáb-i-Iqán*, 240-41).

theological and philosophical understanding. The intellectual understanding of such a mode of spiritual anthropology well serves the method of correlation advocated by Shoghi Effendi, a polyvalent method based on the assumption of commonality between the things being compared, a commonality that is liable to forge links between the Bahá'í Faith and other world religions, as well as modern philosophies and movements. In this case the method of correlation links the Bahá'í Faith to existential theism.

This paper incidentally makes no facile assumption that the knowledge of the spiritual self (self-knowledge) is an easy task. It is not a finality, but rather a continual becoming. Søren Aabye Kierkegaard (1813-55) who "is certainly not a philosopher" according to Sartre,¹² and who has been considered as something of a paraphilosopher, but who Wittgenstein called nonetheless "by far the most profound thinker of the last century",¹³ has said that "An existing individual is constantly in process of becoming...and translates all his thinking into terms of process."¹⁴ Kant, moreover, doubted the possibility of true self knowledge when he said: 'We only know what is an appearance of ourselves'.¹⁵ In the light of this last saying particularly, one recognizes the monumental accomplishment of the believer who becomes the expression of the Hadíth of the Prophet Muhammad or Imám 'Alí and quoted by Bahá'u'lláh: "He hath known God who hath known himself."¹⁶

The Spiritual Self as Subject and the Objective Question

The three main functional tendencies or sub-disciplines that have emerged thus far in Bahá'í studies of religion are Bahá'í history, exegesis and theology.¹⁷ Some scholars remain

¹². *Marxism and Existentialism*, p. 370 Kaufmann. Sartre states that Kierkegaard himself refused the title of philosopher because he refused all systematisation which for him smacked too much of finality.

¹³. Ludwig Wittgenstein, in private correspondence with M. O'C. Drury, in *Acta Philosophica Fennica*, 28:1-3, 1976, North-Holland Publishing Company, Amsterdam, 1976, quoted in Alastair Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, ix. The complete quotation is "Kierkegaard was by far the most profound thinker of the last century. Kierkegaard was a saint." How unlike Wittgenstein, however, to canonize the religious.

¹⁴. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, (79) trans. by David L. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1941). *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* is usually regarded as the work that represents the point of view that objective reasoning is of little or no use in the life of religious faith. As I understand the Bahá'í view, Kierkegaard's views on this question have been argued *in extremis*, but the gist of his thinking on this matter is real and plausible.

¹⁵. Quoted by Simone Weil in *Lectures on Philosophy* 191. I have been unable to find the source for Kant's saying.

¹⁶. *Gleanings*, p. 178.

¹⁷. By exegesis I mean the act of explaining a sacred text in the broadest sense. At the present stage of development in the exegesis of Bahá'í texts, Bahá'í scholars necessarily have recourse to translation and commentary, although strictly speaking, as Bible translator J.B. Phillips has pointed out, translation and commentary are two different tasks. Translation and commentaries from the source languages of the Bahá'í revelation (Arabic and Persian), usually rely heavily on elucidating the text in light of its Islamic background since a not insignificant portion of the phraseology and theological motifs of Bahá'í sacred texts is Islamic in origin. Bahá'í exegesis at this point is quite literal. There is usually no attempt to apply the meaning of Bahá'í scriptural texts to contemporary situations, although some effort has been made to correlate some Bahá'í scriptures to the other world's religions.

skilled in and blend all three modes in their work, while others follow mainly one orientation. Historical studies aim for a veridical reconstruction of the sacred event; text-rooted studies insure faithfulness to the thought of the authors of Bahá'í scripture with learned commentary; Bahá'í theology helps to ensure theological "correctness" and allows for a correlation of Bahá'í thought to other movements and philosophies both ancient and modern. Yet all of these disciplines remain basically content oriented.¹⁸ Content orientation assumes that the Bahá'í Faith and any correlated subjects under study are essentially an objective collection of data to be researched and elucidated in a meaningful way. Yet the net effect of these approaches, while they are valid in their own right, is to risk becoming identified with `Abdu'l-Bahá's pointed critique of religion as being reduced to "the noise, the clamor, the hollowness of religious doctrine".¹⁹ Moreover, what `Abdu'l-Bahá has called "the discovery of the verities of life"²⁰ and *`ilm-i vújúdí* (the knowledge of being/existence)²¹ has thus far been conspicuously lacking in Bahá'í studies of religion.

The historical, doctrinal or exegetical approaches to Bahá'í religious studies, while they are making good use of increasingly critical and objective methods, and function consequently as a deterrent to dogmatism and an easy apologetic, have by their prevalence created a benign neglect of other capital questions such as practical ethics which `Abdu'l-Bahá has defined as "the fundamental aspect of the religion of God".²² Such approaches have, moreover, tended to divorce Bahá'í theology from the existential experience of the individual believer which in my view must remain one of the primary purposes of theology. The three pronged approach of the historical-exegetical-theological disciplines in Bahá'í studies has also resulted in a certain monotony of

Further, one must speak of Bahá'í theology as a theology without dogma, creed or decree. Since Bahá'u'lláh structured his faith without a clerical caste, unlike the religions of the past, any theological reflection remains strictly the result of the learned efforts of Bahá'í scholars, and their ability to convince others of the soundness of their views. At the present state of development of the Bahá'í Faith, there is no "official" institutional endorsement of the work of any living Bahá'í scholar.

¹⁸. Even though I am aware of the limitations of propositional approaches to theology, my own articles have in fact been mainly content oriented. See, for example, my "Prolegomena to a Bahá'í Theology", *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 5:1, March-June, 1992, 25-67 and "Propositions on a Comprehensive Theology" in *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*. [...] It would be silly to argue for a curtailment of objective content writing. What this paper advocates is simply diversifying the field of Bahá'í theology.

¹⁹. *The Divine Art of Living*, 25.

²⁰. *Bahá'í World Faith* 274.

²¹. For the expression *`ilm-i vújúdí* see, for example, `Abdu'l-Bahá's discussion of "The Knowledge of the Divine Manifestations" (157) in *Some Answered Questions*. Juan Ricardo Cole has alluded to a resemblance between `Abdu'l-Bahá's *`ilm-i vújúdí* with that of Plotinus' primal intellection in the *Enneads*, V. 3,2 and a similar notion in Avicenna, *De Anima*, 248-49. See "The Concept of Manifestation in the Bahá'í Writings", n. 149, 35.

²². `Abdu'l-Bahá has stated that "the ordinances which concern the realm of morals and ethics" constitute "the fundamental aspect of the religion of God". The complete quotation is: "These [essential spiritual teachings] are faith in God, the acquirement of virtues which characterize perfect manhood, praiseworthy morals, the acquisition of the bestowals and bounties emanating from the divine effulgences — in brief, the ordinances which concern the realm of morals and ethics. This is the fundamental aspect of the religion of God, and this is of the highest importance because knowledge of God is the fundamental requirement of man" (*The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 403)

method for a religion that increasingly demands diversity in a pluralism of meaning as it seeks to encounter the various schools of thought of both Orient and Occident.

Kierkegaard's polemic launched with Hegel and the Hegelians in mind against the speculative idealist philosophers of the last century²³ presented a facet that sheds by comparison some light on the current state of Bahá'í religious studies. Kierkegaard argued that the speculative philosophers with their categories, finality, systematisation and historicisation of religious phenomena had neglected to deal with the most crucial issues in Christianity. Although Kierkegaard was somewhat strained in his polemic, and created ironically an entire metaphysical baggage of his own making, not unlike in all respects the speculative systems to which he was heavily indebted, he was correct in his observation that the philosophical systems of his day for the most part bracketed the most real and urgent of human questions²⁴: personal meaning, suffering, anxiety and despair, peace of mind, faith and doubt, hope, happiness, spiritual rebirth and awakening, immortality. And divine love... where did such a vital reality fit into the philosophers' schemes? The religious subject, Kierkegaard maintained with good common sense, was interested primarily in eternal happiness rather than speculation:

The subject is in passion infinitely interested in his eternal happiness, and is now supposed to receive assistance from speculation, i.e., by himself philosophizing. But in order to philosophize he must proceed in precisely the opposite direction, giving himself up and losing himself in objectivity, thus vanishing from himself.²⁵

While no grand systematising philosophers or theologians have thus far emerged within the college of Bahá'í scholars,²⁶ Kierkegaard's remarks have a certain pertinence to the current

²³. Hegel's absolute idealism was the reigning philosophy in the Denmark of Kierkegaard's day. At the basis of Kierkegaard's disagreement with Hegel, to whom he was in many respects indebted, was Kierkegaard's assertion that attaining happiness, or in philosophical terms the highest good, could not be secured through philosophizing alone. For Kierkegaard, ideas alone were paltry means in securing eternal happiness which he viewed as the highest good (*Kierkegaard* 19-20). Like Hegel, Kierkegaard employed dialectic, but unlike Hegel's logical dialectic working within a closed system, Kierkegaard's dialectic was existential and expounded upon the solitary individual working within the three spheres of the esthetic, the ethical, and the religious. Kierkegaard attacked not only Hegelian idealism, but Kantian moral idealism as well. He felt that all forms of rational theology were inadequate for a true understanding of the human condition.

²⁴. In inveighing against the systematic, speculative philosophers of his time, Kierkegaard became the founding founder of another form of philosophy, existentialism which spawned in time both theistic and atheistic varieties. It was Kierkegaard who coined the word "existential." [Kaufmann] [influences on literature, psychology, etc.] [controversy with his own church]

²⁵. *Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. by David L. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 49. What Kierkegaard criticises here is the annihilation, so to speak, of the religious subject in the objective question. He argues rather for a validation and discovery of selfhood through discourse.

²⁶. With the occasional urgings one reads for the Bahá'í systematic theologian to emerge, one has to wonder if such a grand systematisation of Bahá'í theology would be desirable, even though its accomplishment would be a major *tour de force*. Kierkegaard maintained that systematisation corresponded to finality but existence is

pursuits of Bahá'í scholars of religion. For, one scarcely finds any elaboration of a *Lebensphilosophie* or a *vécu* (lived experience), a *Realdialektik* that deals with the above issues in an existential mode, one that is, however, careful to avoid an uncritical apologetic and mere rhetorical effect. The approach that I advocate here would nonetheless maintain a secondary pastoral *concern*, but one that would be addressed primarily through didactics rather than homily or counselling. For, if Bahá'í theology does not illuminate spiritual *anthros*, does not inspire or improve in some way the life of the believer, then it risks remaining in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's phrase in the realm of "Thought that belongs to the world of thought alone."²⁷ It would be both real and ideal, however, were the writings of Bahá'í scholars at some level to translate into an enrichment of the believer's spiritual experience of the quotidian.

This concern to address the concrete spiritual issues of "real life" in a manner befitting philosophical discourse raises another question about the mode of Bahá'í scholarship. I referred above to "the persona of the scholar as hermeneute". Normally, one does not think of the scholar as having a persona (*Lat.*=mask; *per*=through + *sonus*=sound), that is, a vehicle for voicing thoughts. It would seem, however, that scholars generally adopt one of two modes of discourse: either the objective-detached or the subjective-engaged. I argue, however, that it would be beneficial to Bahá'í thought for the scholar to emerge now more in the subjective-engaged mode, as someone who speaks with a persona, that is, a characteristic and personal voice and style that befits an advocate as much as an analyst. The persona refers moreover to the individuality or characteristic being of the scholar, and the voice with which the scholar speaks would be from the real self, not the projected self. This real voice of self offers to the reader, in a spirit of intersubjective communion, the richness of the scholar or writer's experience of divine subjectivity, the experience of the self with God, others or events interpreted through the prism of the thinking, believing, living, reacting self of the scholar/writer.

In the analytical, objective-detached content approach that has thus far dominated Bahá'í religious studies, however, the scholar is not transparent to the work, but has subjugated the spiritual self to the objective question under study. The writer/scholar is not there, so to speak. Only the question is there and the elucidation of the question. When writing in the persona of spiritual self, however, one is essentially *interpreting* experience, rather than analyzing a question or detailing an incident. This hermeneutic of spiritual experience neither requires references to academic authorities nor the observance of scholarly conventions, although they are by no means excluded. In this type of existential writing, the author would be more transparent to the reader and less subjugated to the dialectics of the objective idea. This form of Bahá'í

precisely the opposite of reality in which new truths are constantly emerging (*Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript* 107). The current academic fashion of postmodern deconstructionalism with its anti-systematic bias goes against any current of systematisation, at least for the present. The universalistic content of Bahá'í sacred scripture, in any case, would seem to defy any one theological system to do justice to the diversity of themes and concepts treated in the Bahá'í writings. It is rather more likely that a number of differing theological and metaphysical thought systems will emerge in time and coexist within and around the Divine Word revealed by Bahá'u'lláh.

²⁷. *Reality of Man* 9.

scholarship would essentially liberate the scholar to move further along the path of intellectual creativity by placing the locus of the authority of interpretation within the framework of the scholar's spiritual perception. Put differently, the subjective-engaged mode allows the scholar to become largely the creator of his/her own world of discourse.

In this same vein, Rudolf Bultmann writes that it is a false notion to suppose that one has to suppress subjectivity and individuality in order to attain "objective knowledge":

Nothing is sillier than the requirement that an interpreter must silence his subjectivity, extinguish his individuality, if he is to attain objective knowledge. That requirement makes good sense only in so far as it is taken to mean that the interpreter has to silence his personal wishes with regard to the outcome of the interpretation...For the rest, unfortunately, the requirement overlooks the very essence of genuine understanding. Such understanding presupposes precisely the utmost liveliness of the understanding subject and the richest possible development of his individuality.²⁸

The question of commitment also crops up in the discussion of scholar as persona. The style of academic scholarship today requires a certain emotional detachment of self from the subject matter. Indeed, in philosophy the word "emotion" is looked upon as a volatile alien that is liable to destabilize the cognitive milieu. According to convention, unless one is engaged in apologetics, the writer is not to openly avow commitment to the tradition about which one is writing, if one is committed to it, although this commitment may sometimes be presumed. And yet, religion is all about a sense of commitment. One is consequently justified in asking why it would be excluded for this sense of commitment, without it becoming shouting, or preaching, or justifying Bahá'u'lláh's deprecation of the one who "...clamorously asserteth his allegiance to this Cause,"²⁹ to be explicitly or indirectly voiced by the writer/scholar. The objective-detached mode of scholarship, more often than not, tends to be a safe haven but demands no sense of personal risk, judgement, disclosure or advocacy in its marshalling of facts or ideas, in its juggling of concepts. It often gives no indication of where it ultimately stands, on what ground of being it finally places its feet. It leaves no impression of the scholar as an engaged subject. In other words, existential writing makes it clear that the scholar/writer is sitting inside the theological circle, and is profoundly engaged not only in reflection, but in life itself.

When one raises the question of a scholar's commitment, however, one usually has to raise the flag of caution against dogmatism because there is always the fear, and the danger, of the one slipping into the other. Karl Jaspers put it well, however, when he said: "Man can seek

²⁸. "Das Problem der Hermeneutik," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 47 (1950), 64 quoted by Bernard J.F. Lonergan in *Method in Theology*, 158. (1971 by Bernard J.F. Lonergan, reprinted 1990 in paperback by the University of Toronto Press for Lonergan Research Institute).

²⁹. The complete sentence reads: "In this Day, We can neither approve the conduct of the fearful that seeketh to dissemble his faith, nor sanction the behavior of the avowed believer that clamorously asserteth his allegiance to this Cause." (*Gleanings*, p. 343)

the path of his truth in unfanatical absoluteness, in a decisiveness which remains open."³⁰ In reality, this validation of the persona of the scholar as a subjective interpreter of the spiritual experience becomes a *de facto* necessity because the existential spiritual experience is situated within a personal universe, the universe of the "Thou".³¹

The Self and Knowledge of the Thing and Knowledge *About* the Thing

I return to the question raised above of self-knowledge as praxis (practical ethics) or know-how, an empirical form of spiritual science that is distinguished from speculation or analysis. Such knowledge applies to both principle and practice. In this context, Northrop Frye has referred to a useful distinction created by Plato. There is the type of knowledge that Plato ascribes to *nous*,³² knowledge of things, as opposed to *dianoia*, knowledge about things. The knowledge of things, Frye says, "implies some identification or essential unity of subject and object", whereas *dianoia* implies a dichotomy of subject and object.³³ The knowledge of the self or self-knowledge relates to *nous*, that is a direct, intuitive form of knowledge with which the knowing subject is intimately bound, a knowledge which leads to praxis, or some deeper insight or wisdom. It is knowledge which is intimately dynamic and alive, for it consists of an empiricism of spiritual transformation.

Similarly, Simone Weil in an outline of her lecture notes published as *Leçons de philosophie (Lectures on Philosophy)*³⁴ writes regarding the injunction of the Delphic maxim 'Know thyself' written over the portico of Apollo's shrine at Delphi, which became a favourite motto of Socrates, that by it Socrates meant that self-knowledge, in contradistinction to knowledge about external things, was "the ultimate end of all thought."³⁵ Weil comments further on the famous dictum: "It seems to have meant: 'Why do you have to come and ask me about the secrets of nature, of the future? All you need to do is know yourself'.³⁶ She states further about

³⁰. From Jasper's essay "On My Philosophy" quoted in *Existentialism From Dostoevsky to Sartre*, p. 232.

³¹. For a brief treatment of Buber's notion of "I and Thou" see below..

³². Reinhold Niebuhr writes that "*Nous* may be translated as "spirit" but the primary emphasis lies upon the capacity for thought and reason." Aristotle distinguished the *nous* more sharply from the soul than did Plato. For Plato the *nous* is the highest element in the soul. (*The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941, 1:4-25.) [p.]

³³. Northrop Frye, *The Stubborn Structure*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1970), 74 quoted in P. Joseph Cahill, "Literary Criticism, religious literature, and theology", *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses*, Revue canadienne/A Canadian Journal, 12:1, 1983, 55.

³⁴. Peter Winch says in his introduction to Hugh Price's translation *Lectures on Philosophy* that "The *Lectures* do not come directly from Simone Weil's own hand but consist of notes of her lectures at the Roanne *lycée* taken by Madame Anne Reynaud-Guérithault, one of her students in 1933-4." (3) Winch feels, however, that "there is no doubt that we have here a very substantial presentation of what was said in the lectures". (3) (Cambridge University Press, 1978).

³⁵. *Lectures on Philosophy* 190.

³⁶. *Lectures on Philosophy* 190. The *pythia* or Delphic prophetess at Apollo's shrine sat on a tripod and in a trance-

self knowledge: "The knowledge of external things has no real interest, or, at least, is of less interest for men in general than self-knowledge. And, what is more, self-knowledge is the only thing that gives any value to any thought and action you care to think about."³⁷

While this comment is merely stipulative, Weil writes that the meaning of self-knowing is ambiguous. She understands three ordinary meanings to self-knowing: (1) knowing oneself in order to change, to correct oneself [transformation]. This would be self-knowledge as a means while Socrates viewed self-knowledge as an end (2) knowing oneself in order to find out what one is capable of doing, to make good use of oneself [the release of potential]. (3) Following Montaigne, knowing oneself in order to come to know human nature.[self-understanding to understand others].³⁸ By a process of shorthand dialectic, however, Weil concludes that the "self is a term which has no meaning",³⁹ yet she comes to the ethical insight at the conclusion of her lecture that "In all circumstances, to be a man, is to know how to separate the 'I' and 'self'. This is a task which never ends."⁴⁰ Weil here seems to be making a similar distinction found in the Bahá'í sacred writings between the "higher" and "lower" self.⁴¹ Weil's 'I' would represent the ego, elemental or selfish desires and the 'self', the magnanimity or self-sacrifice of the spiritual individual.

Modes and Defining Points of Existential Theology, Philosophy and Literature

(A) Modes

Existentialism is just too diverse to be labelled a "school" of thought.⁴² What it is,

like state gave out her oracles. H.W. Parke and D.E.W. Wormell state that "What the inquirer at Delphoi or one of the other shrines took away from him was not the actual words of the seer, but an edited official record, generally in different hexameters, couched for the most part in very riddling and obscure language, so that if the apparent sense of the prophecy proved false, the god could always take refuge behind another interpretation" (*The Delphic Oracle 2, The Oracular Responses* (Oxford 1956).

³⁷. *Lectures on Philosophy* 191.

³⁸. Simone Weil, *Lectures in Philosophy*, 190.

³⁹. Weil makes this claim because she says that one cannot "come to grips" with such concepts as the Will and Intelligence. As for "emotional states", she says that "one can only lay hold of those emotional states that have passed." She says further that there is a fragment of self that continues to exist from moment to moment but the term self itself disappears with time (*Lectures on Philosophy* 191).

⁴⁰. *Lectures on Philosophy* 193.

⁴¹. "...self has really two meanings, or is used in two senses, in the Bahá'í writings; one is self, the identity of the individual created by God. This is the self mentioned in such passages as 'he hath known God who hath known himself etc.' The other self is the ego, the dark, animalistic heritage each one of us has, the lower nature that can develop into a monster of selfishness, brutality, lust and so on. it is this self we must struggle against, or this side of our natures, in order to strengthen and free the spirit within us and help it to attain perfection." From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, December 10, 1947 in *Lights of Guidance*, comp. Helen Hornby, 1144:421. (Bahá'í Publishing Trust, New Delhi, 1983)

⁴². It lacks, for example, that mark of all schools, a recognizable system for analyzing questions. There is no set of

however, can best be described as a style or mode of reflection, although the metaphysical existentialism of Sartre, Jaspers and Heidegger, for example, is a serious philosophy with a hard core. The existential understanding of *Existenz* (the life of the human being) is accomplished through a commonality of themes or perspectives,⁴³ although there are great divergences in the way these themes or perspectives are treated. For the purposes of this paper, however, it would be useful to distinguish four general modes within existentialism. These modes have all borrowed from, reacted to, and influenced one another, so these divisions are in no way iron clad. Not surprisingly, even theists and atheists share common concerns in existentialism, although the treatment, as we might expect is different.

(1) First, there is the Christian theistic existentialism founded by Kierkegaard (1813-1855) who is the ancestral figure for post world war two existentialists, whether believing or atheistic. Although it was Kierkegaard who coined the term "existentialist", Walter Kaufmann sees in *Dostoevsky's Notes From Underground* (1864) the overture to the voice of strident individuality that was to be heard later in Kierkegaard.⁴⁴ Some of the other prominent theistic existentialists are Marcel, Buber, Brunner, Tillich, and at the antipodes of one another, Bultmann and Barth.⁴⁵ Pre-dating these men, one can recognize existential moods in Pascal and Augustine, in the Psalmist, in Ecclesiastes and the Book of Job. Indeed, existential theism finds its most ancient roots in the human condition itself, reflected in the Greek myths of estrangement and loss, and the Genesis account of the exile of humanity's original parents from Eden with its everafter estrangement from self.

(2) Second, there are the philosophical existentialists such as Sartre, Jaspers and Heidegger who are considered to be the fathers of post world war two existential philosophy. John Macquarrie

common tenets or discourse that interprets the world in a uniform mode. In this respect, one could say that the existentialists prefigured the post-moderns with their decidedly anti-systematic bias. Moreover, existentialist writers and thinkers sometimes draw diametrically opposed conclusions.

⁴³. See Macquarrie for commonality. Ironically, in true individualist fashion, several of the existentialists rejected the label by which they became known, but it has nonetheless stuck. The commonality of existentialism might best be compared to another movement, that of modern art. Although there are divergences among the styles of impression, cubism, [other styles] they are all clearly recognizable as belonging to the style of modern art.

⁴⁴. This work of fiction of Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky (1821-1881) which features the bizarre character of the underground man strongly influenced Nietzsche. In Dostoevsky's piece, the underground man thinks aloud in a stream of consciousness fashion speaking his thoughts to a group of "gentlemen". The piece shifts constantly from theme to theme, but is characterised by that extreme (and bizarre) introspection, subjectivity and intensity that was to mark later existentialism.

⁴⁵. Although Karl Barth's prodigious *Church Dogmatics* (12 volumes, 7,000 pages) and his *Theology of the Word* identify him as neo-orthodox, there are nonetheless existential dimensions to Barth's work. Unlike the Hegelian dialecticians, Kierkegaard has emphasized that there was never any final solution to human questions through dialectics. Barth was aware that revelation, the vertical line of transcendence and eternity, intersected the horizontal line of human existence in time. This meeting of time and eternity was paradoxical. Barth believed, against the dogmatician and the mystic, that our knowledge of God is never immediate. Over against Barth's work which seemed to some rigid and traditionalist, Bultmann made his case on the basis of technical biblical criticism and an existential dimension based on the early work of Heidegger. To some, Bultmann's works seemed overly anthropocentric, even non-theological.

describes Jaspers and Heidegger as standing "somewhere between the confessed theists and the confessed atheists".⁴⁶ While Jaspers may not have been a confessing philosopher, he was clearly a theist, but not, following a mistaken affirmation of Sartre, a professed Catholic.⁴⁷ Jaspers often writes of 'philosophical faith',⁴⁸ recognizes the existence of Deity and his 'Transcendence' has god-like qualities. Jaspers writes:

Man strives more decisively than ever for a certainty that he lacks, for the certainty that there is that which is eternal, that there is a Being through which alone he himself is. If the Deity is, then all hope is possible.... In the Deity alone there is reality, truth, and the immutability of being itself. In the Deity there is peace, as well as the origin and aim of man who, by himself, is nothing, and what he is he is only in relation to the Deity.⁴⁹

This does not sound at all like MacQuarrie's man in the middle. However, with Heidegger the case is more complex. Heidegger would not allow himself to be called either a theist or an atheist which makes his philosophy vis-à-vis God a confused issue.⁵⁰ Sartre called Heidegger an atheist,⁵¹ but Heidegger was careful to disassociate himself from the views of Sartre. In his *Letter on Humanism* (1947) written to a French existentialist, Heidegger writes:

Because we drew attention to Nietzsche's aphorism that "God is dead", they say that we teach atheism. For what is more "logical" than to assume that anyone who experiences "the death of God" (in the present age) is a thoroughly godless person?⁵²

⁴⁶. John Macquarrie, *Existentialism*, p. 252.

⁴⁷. In Sartre's famous essay *L'existentialisme est un humanisme* which made the definitive statement on Sartre's brand of atheistic existentialism at the time (1946) he wrote: "There are, on the one hand, the Christians, amongst whom I shall name Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel, both professed Catholics" (quoted in Kaufmann, 347). Although Marcel was a professed Catholic, having converted at age forty, Jaspers was not a professed Catholic.

⁴⁸. in Macquarrie, *Existentialism*, 247.

⁴⁹. "On My Philosophy" (1941) and published for the first time in Kaufmann (169).

⁵⁰. John Passmore, in *A Hundred Years of Philosophy* says: "Heidegger's own ontology, however, is by no means definite on 'the Being of God' (488).

⁵¹. In *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Sartre called Heidegger one of the "existential atheists" along with himself and the French existentialists. (348 in Kaufmann)

⁵². Cited in Passmore, 487. Nietzsche's reference to the death of God ("*Gott is tot*") was cited by Heidegger in his *Holzwege* (234-35). Although Nietzsche was a professed atheist, his iconoclastic phrase "God is dead" requires some nuancing. In *Die Froliche Wissenschaft* in which the famous phrase occurs, the phrase comes out in a dialogue between a madman who in the early hours of the morning ran to market square with a lantern in his hand shouted incessantly: "I seek God! I seek God!". It was the non-believers among the townspeople who mocked and yelled at the madman. "Wither is God", cried the madman. "I shall tell you. *We have killed him* — you and I. All of us are his murderers." Nonetheless, Nietzsche's madman boldly proclaims: "There has never been a greater deed; and whoever will be born after us — for the sake of this deed he will be part of a higher history than all history before." It seems that Nietzsche viewed the death of God as the ultimate sacrilege and iconoclastic deed. Later the madman visits the churches, and when he is led out and questioned he says in a prophetic and starkly moving phrase: "What are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchers of

On the other hand, Heidegger wrote in *Being and Time* that "God is, but he does not exist."⁵³ Heidegger maintained, however, that he opposed only the narrow concept of God as the supreme value, the one which refused to deal with God's Being.⁵⁴ But Heidegger's ontology of God (if God there be) remains decidedly problematic. Heidegger's 'Being' is the closest thing to God in his system,⁵⁵ and despite Heidegger's best attempts to elucidate it, his Being remains veiled in the mystery of an all-pervasive paradox. Heidegger often follows a pattern of affirmation and negation where Being is concerned. This creates the effect of such a detached impartiality, such a silent *apophasis*, that it has the effect of an untenable neutrality and reduces Being to the least descriptive, and least scientific, of divine attributes, the fact the Being is. Einstein has said that "For the scientist, there is only "being," but no wishing, no valuing, no good, no evil; no goal."⁵⁶ This sounds like an apt description of Heidegger's God, for Heidegger's God (Being) is scientific in the broadest possible sense of the word. It is reduced to the most basic of all scientific categories, being itself. Even the values that Heidegger affirms such as "care" (*alt.* concern, solicitude) (*Besorgen/Fürsorge*) are mildly anthropocentric and do not refer to Being itself. Further, Heidegger writes of the paradoxical nature of Being: "Once "existence" is understood rightly, the "essence" of being there (*Dasein*) can be recalled: in its openness, Being itself manifests and conceals itself, yields itself and withdraws..."⁵⁷ This description, however, is not so far from Bahá'u'lláh's equally paradoxical and mysterious description of the Great Being who hides himself within his own creation but who is everywhere visible at the same time, a description which Bahá'u'lláh makes in one of his prayers as "...the most manifest of the manifest and the most hidden of the hidden!"⁵⁸ Bahá'u'lláh's paradoxical assertion about God, illogical though it might seem to someone who applies consequent logic, is a wonderful (lit. "full of wonder") definition of God as pure Being, that is Mystery Itself. In another direction, Heidegger's quest for Nothing ("our quest for Nothing") strikes one as leaning somewhat in the direction of Buddhist logic and ontology.⁵⁹ John Macquarrie remarks in this connection that

God?" (in Kaufmann, 126-127) Ironically, Nietzsche's madman became a self-fulfilling prophecy in his own life.

⁵³. *Being and Time*, in Kaufmann 272. One has to wonder if this statement is mere hyperbole or a declaration of atheism. The sentence is moreover riddling with its affirmation of "God is", followed by an immediate negation "but he does not exist". It is no wonder that Heidegger has been subject to such conflicting interpretations.

⁵⁴. John Passmore, *A Hundred Years of Philosophy*, 487-488.

⁵⁵. Heidegger's most important views on Being were elucidated in *Being and Time*. [date]

⁵⁶. "The Laws of Science and the Laws of Ethics" in *The World As I See It and Out Of My Later Years*, p. 114.

⁵⁷. "The Way Back into the Ground of Metaphysics", Heidegger's fifteen page 1949 introduction addended to his 1929 famous seventeen page lecture "What is Metaphysics?" (*Was ist Metaphysik?*)

⁵⁸. *A Selection of Bahá'í Prayers and Holy Writings*, Bahá'í Publishing Trust of the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 1970, 62.

⁵⁹. For Heidegger "Nothing" is "an original part of essence (*Wesen*). It is in the Being (*Sein*) of what-is that the nihilation of Nothing (*das Nichten des Nichts*) occurs" (251). It was linked to the feeling of dread as the fear of death, that is, the fear of annihilation. It is here that we see clearly of the influence of Heidegger on Sartre for Sartre speaks in *L'être et le néant (Being and Nothingness)* of "néantiser le néant" ("annihilating nothingness") which is a word for word reproduction of Heidegger. What Heidegger means by *das Nichten des Nichts* is anybody's guess, for why, one might wonder, would something that is already nothing, have to be annihilated? As for parallels between Heidegger's thought and Buddhist ontology and logic, in Zen Buddhist logic, for

"One can scarcely read the books of T.D. Suzuki, for instance, without becoming impressed with the many similarities between his version of Zen Buddhism and the teachings of existentialism."⁶⁰

In his later works, Heidegger had the word *Sein* (Being) superimposed by a cross-out mark, thus: Sein. This cipher indicates that even the notion of Being was inadequate for what Heidegger wanted to say. Another possible interpretation is that Heidegger was trying to show that Being and its negation (Non-Being) were inextricable. Sartre and Nietzsche are confessed atheists, although as Karl Jaspers pointed out in *Nietzsche and Christianity*, there are certain marked ambivalences of Nietzsche toward the religion of Christ: "His *opposition* to Christianity as a reality is inseparable from his *tie* to Christianity as a postulate. And he himself regarded this tie as positive — not merely as something to be severed."⁶¹

(3) Third, there is the literary existentialism of writers such as Dostoevsky, Kafka, Camus and Sartre, a literature that tends, however, to be dark and pessimistic about human motives and the ability of the individual to overcome psychological conflict and live happily. Sartre, for example, completely explodes the concept of any meaningful existence, concluding with his well-known dictum that life is *absurde*.⁶² This literature is to be contrasted with the more positive interpersonal relations of Heidegger's *Besorgen/Fürsorge*⁶³ (concern/solicitude) and Buber's "I-Thou" or Gabriel Marcel's "métaphysique de l'espoir" (metaphysic of hope). Literature is also one of the three main branches of the common ancestry shared within existentialism by its other two modes, theology and philosophy.

(4) Fourth, there is the school of existential psychiatry and psychology, founded by the Swiss psychiatrists Ludwig Binswanger (1881-1966) and Medard Boss (1903-19..) which has a strong

example, the opposite of true is not necessarily false. Affirmations followed by negations (or opposites) are not viewed as being illogical or contradictory. There are paradoxes, and paradoxes are valid expressions of truth. Following Zen logic, P may be both Q and R. "A is A because A is not A". The seemingly illogical *koan* of the Zen master is meant to transcend the duality inherent in the logic of: if P is Q, then P cannot be R. The Zen moment, however, is meant to transcend duality. (See David Suzuki's *Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, 46-50). With his alternating affirmations of being and nothingness, Heidegger calls to mind the *Mādhyamika* or Middle Doctrine School founded by Nāgārjuna in the second century C.E. in which *Sūnyatā* is the absolute void (nothingness) of all things and particulars, and forms the basis for both relative (Samvriti) and absolute (Paramārtha) thought. Simply put, all thought comes from the void. In western mysticism there is, moreover, the *coincidentia oppositorum*, the way or reconciling opposites in a higher spiritual condition in which both poles have participated, but in which only one pole of the discussion may dominate at any given time.

⁶⁰ John Macquarrie, *Existentialism*, 43. Penguin Books, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England). See also D.T. Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, (New York, 1964)

⁶¹ Karl Jaspers, *Nietzsche and Christianity*, 6., quoted in Macquarrie, 19-20.

⁶² "La vie est absurde". "Le Suicide". Life's absurdity was made more pointedly by Camus in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, (1942) *The Myth of Sisyphus*, but as John Passmore points out, at least Camus did not attempt to ontologize absurdity. "But Camus is not an existentialist; he does not believe that absurdity can be ontologized" (*A Hundred Years of Philosophy*, 491).

⁶³ *Being and Time* in Macquarrie, p. 107. Heidegger was also preoccupied with the meaning of anxiety.

philosophical flavour and which has markedly influenced such writers as Rollo May, Eric Fromm, and Viktor Frankel, who have all authored several popular works. Even though American experimental psychology worked hard to divest itself of the influence of the philosophical overtones of European existentialist thought, the existentialist outlook has found a responsive chord in English-speaking readers of psychology, particularly in North America.⁶⁴ It can be seen from these examples that existentialism in its various modes has influenced at the same time theology, philosophy, psychology and literature. Indeed, John Macquarrie makes the wider argument that existentialism has influenced not only these areas, but also those of education, ethics and the visual arts.⁶⁵ In this Macquarrie sees a common thread in the existentialist worldview that ties several cultural elements together.⁶⁶

(B) *Defining Points*

Some defining points of existential theism to be highlighted below in a Bahá'í perspective are:⁶⁷ (1) Objectivity, inwardness, passion, doubt and despair in the individual's search for truth (2) Living or being-in-the-world (3) Overcoming primordial alienation from God (4) The personal mode of divine subjectivity (5) The existential moment and the epiphanic moment (6) The realism of facing self. These points will be considered in global fashion and in relation to one another.

In the search for truth, which `Abdu'l-Bahá has called "the first teaching of Bahá'u'lláh"⁶⁸ and Shoghi Effendi a "primary duty",⁶⁹ there is always a seeking subject. This seeking subject,

⁶⁴. "Existential Psychology" in *Theories of Personality*.

⁶⁵. See Macquarrie's chapter "Existential Influence in the Arts and Sciences" in *Existentialism*, pp. 256-274, in which he discusses also the influence of existentialism on psychology, psychiatry, theology, ethics and literature.

⁶⁶. In addition to the influence of existentialism in philosophy, theology, literature and psychology (if that were not enough), Macquarrie finds evidences of the influence of existentialism in education, the visual arts, and ethics. See "Existentialist Influence in Arts and Sciences" in *Existentialism*, (265-274).

⁶⁷. I am here following the grand themes raised by several existential theologians in my summary below, but I have made a conscious attempt to perceive their concerns through the filter of a Bahá'í worldview. A more specifically Bahá'í treatment of such concerns can be found below in "Existential Meaning in Bahá'í Sacred History and Writings". Each of the six points above deserves a greater in-depth treatment than the limitations of space allow for in this article.

⁶⁸. *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 62. It is perhaps the deceptive simplicity of this teaching that has caused it to suffer a certain neglect in comparison with the scholarly treatment of other Bahá'í teachings. For a further discussion on the search for truth see chapter one "The Starting Point: The Search for Truth" in J.A. McLean, *Dimensions in Spirituality. Reflections on the Meaning of Spirituality and Transformation in Light of the Bahá'í Faith*. (George Ronald, Oxford, 1994) See also Gary L. Matthews instructive article "The Searching Eye" (Bahá'í News, September, 1989, pp. 2-9). In his talks in North America, `Abdu'l-Bahá consistently places the search for truth first in his sequential presentations of Bahá'í teachings. See, for example, his talks in Washington, Pittsburg, Philadelphia, Boston, Montreal, Sacramento, and on two occasions in New York, and also in his long exposé of Bahá'í teachings in Paris. See *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* and *Paris Talks*.

⁶⁹. The complete quotation is: "It [the Bahá'í Faith] moreover, enjoins upon *its followers* the primary duty of an unfettered search after truth." This quotation is particularly noteworthy because of the italicized words. The

the individual, makes the spiritual world order meaningful for without the truth-seeking individual, there would simply be no application of spiritual principles or values of any kind in the world. This seeking subject is a person, that is a living, rational, spiritual being who embodies the highest worth because he/she possesses the reality of the rational soul. For the dimensions in which "we live, and move, and have our being;...",⁷⁰ truth would not exist without its apprehension by the rational soul. It is only the rational soul that is capable of apprehending the truth in its depths, in its profoundest meaning.

The truth should not be perceived, then, as an objective body of data waiting to be discovered outside of the seeker, for he/she is subjectively engaged *in* the process of truth-seeking. Under these conditions, purely objective theological knowledge or judgement becomes a quasi-impossibility. The search for truth is rather a movement toward the depths of the center of being, what St. Paul called "the deep things of God" (1 Corinthians:10). In one sense, the seeker is the truth that is being sought. Reinhold Niebuhr has pointed out that "The self knows the world, insofar as it knows the world, because it stands outside both itself and the world, which means that it cannot understand itself except as it is understood from beyond itself and the world."⁷¹ Although this statement clearly points to the agency of an outward or imploding transcendence that assists in self-understanding, Niebuhr implies that self-understanding and world-understanding are inextricably linked. Put differently, the catalyst of revelation will unfold the perception of the truth that lies both within the seeker's own soul and the world, for the world is nothing more than the enformed expressions of what already exists in the soul. The seeker's truth does not lie consequently outside the individual as a body of correct, contradiction-free propositions, but rather within the soul, and is disclosed in meaningful moments of discovery. According to Kierkegaard, moreover, it is only to the extent that one's truth is internalised is one happy or unhappy: "The unhappy person is one who has an idea, the content of his life, the fullness of his consciousness, the essence of his being, in some manner outside himself."⁷²

The process of truth-seeking is nourished, moreover, by a spiritual attitude on the seeker's part of active zeal or passion, one that leaves no stone unturned. Even a desperate search would be preferable to the way of negative detachment, a detachment lacking the key ingredients of sincerity and spiritual passion. Kierkegaard made passion a positive element in the quest for truth, for it alone could confer certainty: "The conclusions of passion are the only reliable ones", he said in a memorable phrase, and another statement could well apply to the state of truth-

search for truth is not just for those who are seeking truth in their pre-Bahá'í stage. The duty of the search continues in the post-Bahá'í stage. "A World Religion. The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh" (pamphlet), a summary statement of the origin, teachings and institutions of the Bahá'í Faith prepared in 1947 for the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine. (Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette: Ill. 1950), p. 9 (emphasis mine)

⁷⁰. This phrase is from Paul's sermon on Mars' hill to the men of Athens. Luke reports Paul as saying in The Acts of the Apostles: "For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring." (17:28)

⁷¹. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 1:4-25. (Charles Scribner's Sons, copyright 1941, 1943)

⁷². *Either/Or* 1, 220.

seeking today: "What our age lacks is not reflection but passion".⁷³ In the Bahá'í Faith, however, truth-seeking is God-seeking. In his epistemology of God, Bahá'u'lláh makes spiritual passion *de rigueur* in the search for God/Truth. This element makes spiritual passion not an irrational, but an extra or super-rational element in the search for truth:

Only when the lamp of search, of earnest striving, of longing desire, of passionate devotion, of fervid love, of rapture, and ecstasy, is kindled within the seeker's heart, and the breeze of His loving-kindness is wafted upon his soul, will the darkness of error be dispelled, the mists of doubt and misgivings be dissipated, and the lights of knowledge and certitude envelop his being.⁷⁴

One Bahá'í scholar at least has not been reluctant to mention the role of passion in Bahá'í epistemology. In a talk on "Bahá'í Scholarship-Definitions and Perspectives", Moojan Momen states: "I have never known an expert who was an impartial observer; the very fact that they are expert means that they have a passion about the subject. So it is illogical to consider them as impartial and dispassionate".⁷⁵

Nietzsche in *The Gay Science (Die Froliche Wissenschaft)* in the provocative and intense language that typifies his style, speaks of an age to come in which what he calls "preparatory men" will "carry heroism into the pursuit of knowledge"...⁷⁶ Like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche's "preparatory men" had understood that knowledge had to be pursued with an almost violent intensity:

men characterised by cheerfulness, patience, unpretentiousness, and contempt for all great vanities...Soon the age will be past when you could be satisfied to live like shy deer, hidden in the woods! At long last the pursuit of knowledge will reach out for its due: it will want to *rule* and *own*, and you with it!...For, believe me, the secret of the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment of existence is: to *live dangerously!* Build your cities under Vesuvius! Send your ships into uncharted seas! Live at war with your peers and yourselves! Be robbers and conquerors, as long as you cannot be rulers and owners, you lovers of knowledge!⁷⁷

⁷³. In Kaufmann, p. 18.

⁷⁴. *Iqán*, 195-6

⁷⁵. *The Bahá'í Studies Review*, 3:2, 1994, p. 55. Momen cites E.G. Browne "considered to be one of the greatest academics on Iran that there has ever been" (55) as one who dedicated himself passionately to Iranian studies as well as the Constitutional Movement.

⁷⁶. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* quoted in Kaufmann, p. 127.

⁷⁷. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* quoted in Kaufmann, p. 127. I take Nietzsche's bold and militant tropes to shock the "lovers of knowledge" out of complacency and to leave no stone unturned in the search for truth.

It is worth noting in this context, moreover, that doubt and despair have a legitimate role to play in the search for truth. Kierkegaard was to proclaim: "Every man who has not tasted the bitterness of despair has missed the significance of life."⁷⁸ Further, Bahá'u'lláh's phrase the "true seeker"⁷⁹ clearly implies that no one would ever become a seeker if one were not in the first place profoundly dissatisfied, disoriented or disillusioned with the spiritual status quo and/or the state of one's own soul. For why would one become a seeker in the first place, if one lived in a state of self-satisfaction? The stages of doubt and despair which Bahá'u'lláh clearly has in mind to dispel through a setting forth of "the essential prerequisites for the attainment by every true seeker of the object of his quest",⁸⁰ can be positively overcome, he teaches, through the practice of ardent search, spiritual passion, ethical discipline, and a spirituality of detachment. Doubt and despair which are normally seen as the antithesis of faith can ultimately lead to a deeper, more authentic spirituality if they drive us to seek a resolution of their cognitive and emotional dissonance through the dynamics of transcendence.

The existential point of departure is, however, the life of the solitary individual living or being-in-the-world.⁸¹ Existentialists hold that being, or more concretely, life itself (existence) rather than the world of the idea (essence) should become the object of reflection. Sartre says, for example: "What they [existentialists] have in common is simply the fact that they believe *existence* comes before *essence* — or, if you will, that we must begin from the subjective."⁸² Sartre was, of course, a representative of atheistic humanism, and so designated himself.⁸³ Consequently for him this existence could not mean any other than human existence: "Man is nothing else but that which *he makes of himself*. That is the first principle of existentialism."⁸⁴ (my emphasis)

This *vécu* or *Existenz* of the believer, the lived experience, aims at transformation or insight, a shift in consciousness, or a deepening of the spirit of wisdom, dynamics that are ultimately the whole purpose of religion. This necessary connection between philosophy and life as *Lebensphilosophie* is what lies behind Ludwig Feuerbach's remark: "Do not wish to be a philosopher in contrast to being a man...do not think as a thinker...think as a living, real being. think *in* existence."⁸⁵ Feuerbach seems to be saying that it is life itself which provides the *materia*

⁷⁸. *Either/Or*, II (Princeton, 1946), p. 175.

⁷⁹. *Iqán*, p. 192.

⁸⁰. *God Passes By*, p. 139. Shoghi Effendi refers to those passages of the *Iqán* which deal with the true seeker (pp. 192-196).

⁸¹. "Being-in-the-world" is one translation of *Dasein* in Heidegger's *Being and Time* and *What is Metaphysics?*

⁸². Jean Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, 348 (Kaufmann)

⁸³. Sartre declares "Atheistic existentialism, of which I am a representative...". *Existentialism is a Humanism*, p. 349 in Kaufmann.

⁸⁴. *Existentialism is a Humanism*, p. 349. A Bahá'í perspective of existentialism would, of course, stand at odds with any system that reduces the cosmos to the existence of the individual alone.

⁸⁵. *Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft* (Zurich, 1843) 78. Cited in Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, p. 89

bruta for philosophy, a commonplace which we are apt to forget. This is suggested by his phrase "think *in* existence." Philosophy cannot be, then, a flight from the quotidian. Thought moreover reflects upon the concrete situation in order to elaborate its view of truth, for in reality, philosophy found its origins in reflections upon life's common experiences.⁸⁶ There is, moreover, an inexorability about the life situation which cannot be escaped, and must be willingly embraced for both spiritual transformation and reflection in depth. On this theme Martin Buber writes:

But he will not remove himself from the concrete situation as it actually is; he will, instead, enter into it, even if in the form of fighting against it. Whether field of work or field of battle, he accepts the place in which he is placed. He knows no floating of the spirit above concrete reality; to him even the sublimest spirituality is an illusion if it is not bound to the situation. Only the spirit which is bound to the situation is prized by him as bound to the *Pneuma*, the spirit of God.⁸⁷

The life of the solitary individual in its relationship to the world is in Heidegger's word *Dasein*, our being-in-the-world, literally, our "being there"(Da=there. Sein=to be),⁸⁸ which suggests an openness, an availability or sensitivity to the emerging, unfolding world around us, or in Gabriel Marcel's word a "*disponibilité*" (availability) which "connotes openness, abandonment of self, welcoming" of persons and events and which, for Marcel, is an expression of hope.⁸⁹ Existential theism does not, moreover, ignore or deny the malaise of the spiritual subject who is in some sense dislocated or not whole because he/she lives in a world without spiritual values.⁹⁰ Neither does prophetic teaching deny or ignore the unhappiness and injustices

(New York, 1964). Feuerbach's theology reduced God to anthropology, (God is man) to a mere projection of human self-consciousness. (*The Essence of Christianity*) Feuerbach was one of the Left Wing or "Young Hegelians" who used Hegel but stood him on his head. For Hegel, man was God in his self-alienation. For Feuerbach, God is man in his self-alienation.

⁸⁶. The very early roots of Greek philosophy lie in Hesiod. After his poetic, mythological *Theogony* (eighth century B.C.E.), which deals with cosmology or the world order in light of the activities of the gods, Hesiod wrote *Works and Days*, also in poetry, in which man, rather than the gods, occupies the central stage. John Mansley Robinson writes that: "He is concerned with man as such, in his relations to the social order, to the gods, and to the necessities of life." (*An Introduction to Early Greek Philosophy*, 3). Robinson writes that Aristotle had named Thales as the founder of Greek philosophy but states that it is unlikely that Aristotle had a first hand knowledge of Thales' views. Robinson views rather Anaximander, a younger contemporary of Thales, as the founder of Greek philosophy (23).

⁸⁷. *Eclipse of God*, pp. 37-38.

⁸⁸. Heidegger has himself explained the meaning of *Dasein* in the introductory key sentence of *Being and Time* with this typically obscure statement: "Das "Wesen" des Daseins liegt in seiner Existenz" ("The essence of being there (Dasein) lies in its existence"). (p.42) *Dasein* referred to typically human existence and was the prelude to the greater discussion of *Sein* (Being).

⁸⁹. James C. Livingstone, *Modern Christian Thought From the Enlightenment to Vatican II*, p. 355.

⁹⁰. G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936) wrote wryly and amusingly about his own dislocation in the world: "The Christian optimism is based on the fact that we do *not* fit in to the world. I had tried to be happy by telling myself that man is an animal, like any other which sought its meat from God...The modern philosopher told me again and again that I was in the right place, and I had still felt depressed even in acquiescence. But I had heard that I was in the

in the world, but rather seeks to understand their root cause, pour out a spirit of compassion on those who suffers or are victims of injustice or oppression, and expose or denounce such pernicious influences. It is precisely because of this dislocation while living-in-the-world that the believer seeks a greater integration of spiritual values within the life of the soul and attempts to construct a *Lebensphilosophie* out of those events, whether dreadful or numinous, that impact upon consciousness.

The ancient philosophers and prophets were well aware, of course, of our being dislocated in the world, and the existential view, although it did not come to be known by that name until the post world war two period, and contrary to those who think of it strictly as an outgrowth of modern self-alienation, *angst* and pessimism, is really an ancient perspective of the human condition. According to Tillich, who defined himself as a fifty percent existentialist and a fifty percent essentialist⁹¹, existentialism dates back to Plato's allegory of the cave in which the human being finds herself estranged from the knowledge of true self which Plato equated with the contemplation of the Form of the Good: "But Plato's existentialism appears in his myth of the human soul in prison, of coming down from the world of essences into the body which is its prison, and then being liberated from the cave".⁹²

This alienation from an understanding of one's self as an expression of the "Self of God" has given rise to the *angst* so widely mentioned in connection with existentialism. One feels lost in a meaningless age when ones does not know who one is. One feels *angst* because one senses the threat to one's spiritual existence, but without the knowledge of the spiritual self, one cannot discover the cause of the dis-ease, and *angst* persists unabated. This is the both the tragedy and the pathos of spiritual ignorance. The believer experiences consequently a primordial longing to be at-one-ment with God and self, and return to the paradisaical garden or to be released from the cave and contemplate, in Plato's terms, the knowledge of the Good which if fully compatible in several ways with the knowledge of God.⁹³ There is also in Tillich's statement, one of the basic meanings of soteriology, the feeling of being bound and then being set free.

In Bahá'í perspective, this overcoming of primordial alienation from God and self would involve recovering the supremely important notion of self as soul, already alluded to above, for this conviction in the existence of the divine reality of the soul imparts the message of what

wrong place, and my soul sang for joy, like a bird in spring...I knew now why grass has always seemed to me as queer as the green beard of a giant, and why I could feel homesick at home." 389-390 Religious studies scholar and editor Jarsolav Pelikan comments in his introduction to Chesterton's extract from *Orthodoxy* that although Chesterton "was not a scholar or a theologian but a journalist and the author of the popular Father Brown detective stories" that nevertheless "in books on Francis of Assisi and Thomas Aquinas, "and in two interconnected works entitled *Heretics* and *Orthodoxy*, he defended the integrity of the theological tradition with a vigor that many professional theologians and scholars could (and did) envy." (*The World Treasury of Modern Religious Thought*, 385)

⁹¹. *Perspectives On 19th and 20th Century Protestant Theology*, p. 245.

⁹². Paul Tillich, *Perspectives on 19th and 20th Century Protestant Theology*, p. 244.

⁹³. *The Republic*, p. 227. Course on P. and A.

Gabriel Marcel called in his essay in *Homo Viator* "une métaphysique de l'espoir" (a metaphysic of hope):

I spoke of the soul. This word, so long discredited, should here be given its priority once more. We cannot help seeing that there is the closest of connections between the soul and hope. I almost think that hope is for the soul what breathing is for the living organism. Where hope is lacking the soul dries up and withers, it is no more than a function, it is merely fit to serve as an object of study to a psychology that can never register anything but its location or absence. It is precisely the soul that is the traveller; it is of the soul and of the soul alone that we can say with supreme truth that "being" necessarily means "being on the way" (*en route*).⁹⁴

To counteract this fear, despair and meaninglessness, existential theism summons up the realm of spiritual values, chief among them being faith and hope, values that can be put forward to counteract that "emptiness" which Rollo May characterised as the "chief problem of people in the middle decade of the twentieth century",⁹⁵ a statement that still holds as true, if not more so, in the last decade of this century as it did in the middle one.

Existential theism moreover values the personal. It puts the person above the proposition. "Personal" refers here to a perceptible, dynamic, interactive, and fully alive dimension that glimpses into the intimacies of the drama of the soul and the transpersonal space shared by the community of persons. Buber writes that "...every genuine religious experience has an open or a hidden personal character, for it is spoken out of a concrete situation in which the person takes part as a person".⁹⁶ Believing existentialism looks at the universe as a dialogue with a "Thou", a "Thou" which Buber expounded as a new epistemology based on the notion of *Begegnung* (meeting/encounter).⁹⁷ In all of the spiritual events that impact upon the soul one finds the encounter of a greater "Thou" with a lesser "thou", a greater Personal Being speaking to a lesser personal being, rather than an It speaking to an it. Buber writes: "In every sphere in its own way, through each process of becoming that is present to us, we look out toward the fringe of the eternal Thou; in each we are aware of the breath from the eternal Thou; in each Thou we address the eternal Thou."⁹⁸

Further, it seems that as spiritual progress is made through the hierarchical spheres of creation, from the lowest to the highest, the universe has a tendency to become more and more

⁹⁴. Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator*, pp. 10-11. For a further discussion of the metaphysic of hope, see Marcel's "Sketch of a Phenomenology and a Metaphysic of Hope" in *Homo Viator*, pp. 29-67.

⁹⁵. Rollo May, *Man's Search for Himself*, p. 14. Cf. Rollo May, *Existential Psychology*. R. May, E. Angel and H.F. Ellenberger, (Eds.) *Existence*.

⁹⁶. Buber, *Eclipse of God*, p. 37.

⁹⁷. See *Begegnung* in *I and Thou*.

⁹⁸. *I and Thou*, p. 6.

alive, increasingly personal and knowing. Even Gaia and beyond her the whole physical universe itself, seems to be regulated by a semi-consciousness, a ghostly kind of personal knowing. Gaia seems to know what she is doing. Teilhard de Chardin has also pointed out that we move from the impersonal to the personal in our evolution toward the Omega Point in which matter strives to become spirit. This moving from the material to the spiritual in our evolution upward, is a thought that is virtually identical to one of the points in `Abdu'l-Bahá's cosmology.⁹⁹ Spiritual evolution reveals then a personal, rather than an impersonal face.

This encounter or *Begegnung* with the divine, self, other or event takes on essentially two forms: *the existential moment* and *the epiphanic moment*. The existential moment is apocalyptic. Its strongest psychological element is unpredictability or surprise. It is a sudden meeting, although its effects may persist over time. The existential moment is accompanied by various psychological states: suspense and/or surprise, confusion, anger, despair, anxiety, fear, awe, reverence, or in Kierkegaard's phrase "fear and trembling".¹⁰⁰ In its ultimate form the existential moment brings "the sickness unto death".¹⁰¹ The existential moment radically alters our consciousness. It leaves us for better or worse. It is in reality a disguised form of a meeting with the *alter ego*, the spiritual self that is seeking to emerge, the potential true believer who is now being forced to peel away the mask of the old self so that the new self might emerge, a

⁹⁹. `Abdu'l-Bahá spoke on "the intrinsic oneness of all phenomena" (349) at Leland Stanford Junior University, Palo Alto, California on 8 October, 1912. This subject, he said, "is one of the abstruse subjects of divine philosophy"(349). The main theme developed by `Abdu'l-Bahá in this talk rested on both a teleological and cyclical view of the elementary forms of life in an "evolutionary process" when "a given cellular element or atom has its coursings or journeyings through various and myriad stages of life", until it finally reaches the human plane which stands at the apex of physical creation and thereafter reverts in cyclical fashion to the world of dust again (349). `Abdu'l-Bahá outlined the `Abdu'l-Bahá also spoke of the supreme necessity for this special creation of God (humankind) o live in peace: "Shall man, infinitely above them in degree [the lower kingdoms], be antagonistic and a destroyer of that perfection? God forbid such a condition!" (350) (*The Promulgation of Universal Peace*). Although the main point of `Abdu'l-Bahá's talk seems to be to give humankind its due as a special creation of God, and use humanity's unique gifts as a rallying-point for unity, `Abdu'l-Bahá makes it clear in other talks that the *teleos* of the spirit is linear its direction upward. See, for example, his talk on "Reincarnation" in which `Abdu'l-Bahá says: "The return of the soul after death is contrary to the natural movement, and opposed to the divine system" (*Some Answered Questions* 286). My understanding of this divine system is that spiritual evolution is teleological, not cyclical, and its ultimate end is the presence of God.

¹⁰⁰. From the title of Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling and The Sickness Unto Death*. Kierkegaard considered these books from the esthetic point of view to be "the most perfect" books that he had ever written. Translator's note, p. 18. One can certainly agree with Kierkegaard since the prose in these books is free of that strain and passion that is so characteristic of much of his other writing. There is both a simplicity and a philosophical lucidity in the prose of these works.

¹⁰¹. *The Sickness Unto Death* remains to this day the preeminent study in the psychology of despair and was very influential on the thinking of the existentialists who followed Kierkegaard such as Heidegger and Sartre. Kierkegaard explains that the sickness unto death is despair. Since death would mean the end of despair, he argues that "...the torment of despair is precisely this, not to be able to die. So it has much in common with the situation of the moribund when lies and struggles with death, and cannot die. So to be sick unto death is, not to be able to die — -yet not as though there were hope of life; no, the hopelessness in this case is that even the last hope, death, is not available" (150-151). Sartre, of course, went one step forward and offered his own solution to despair — suicide. See Sartre's *Le Suicide*. Critics of Sartre said that this book was responsible for the suicides of more than one French intellectual.

continual process that can be both acutely painful and challenging to the self's spiritual resources. In this spiritual crisis, or "life test",¹⁰² one is brought face to face with one's own finitude, moral weakness or powerlessness to control and direct the event or more tragically to even recognize its full import. The event seems rather to direct us. In this moment of spiritual crisis, the experiences of the believer rise up in a confrontation with a sometimes unpredictable and hostile world perceived as other [It], but which the believer longs both to reconcile to and integrate within the self by a process of actualising inborn spiritual potential.

In the existential moment, the believer may also come face to face with the lower self, either in oneself or others, which Shoghi Effendi tells us can develop into "a monster of selfishness".¹⁰³ If we have known the ideal self as found in the first valley of *The Four Valleys (Châhâr Vadî)* in the station of: "On this plane, the self is not rejected but beloved; it is well-pleasing and not to be shunned."¹⁰⁴, now we come to know the "real"¹⁰⁵ self as "O QUINTESSENCE OF PASSION", or "O REBELLIOUS ONES", or "O CHILDREN OF FANCY", or "O WEED THAT SPRINGETH OUT OF THE DUST".¹⁰⁶

Lady Wisdom teaches that before the believer can come to know oneself truly, he/she must experience the workings of both the higher and lower self, the one as an epiphany of glory, the other in its sordid ugliness and sorry ignorance. This coming face to face with and overcoming the lower self is one of the imperative steps in the development of spiritual maturity. Herein also lies the justification for looking at the shadow side of human nature: the presence of the shadow means the sun is shining.

In the context of facing self in a crisis of faith, it is worth noting that in the Chinese language the word for "crisis" is made of two symbols: one means danger, the other opportunity. These two symbols are somewhat akin to the meaning of the existential moment. It is a moment in which the fate of our spiritual development hangs in the balance. Bahá'u'lláh speaks, moreover, of the fate of all of humanity hanging in the balance, as to whether it accepts or rejects his own revelation, so it is something that is true of the collective as well as of the individual.

Such an existential moment is, moreover, the datum of the human condition, the given which we do not control, the given which we did not choose for ourselves. But it is the given which presents us with a limitless opportunity for growth, an opportunity in which the believer is continually becoming when one willingly embraces an infinity of hope. Although the believer

¹⁰². I have explored this notion of "life test" in a chapter entitled "A Paradigm of Spirituality and Life Tests" in my book *Dimensions in Spirituality. Reflections on the Meaning of Spiritual Life and Transformation in Light of the Bahá'í Faith*. (George Ronald 1994)

¹⁰³. The phrase is taken from a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, Dec. 10, 1947.

¹⁰⁴. *The Four Valleys*, p. 50.

¹⁰⁵. I use "real" here as the elemental, ego-centric, materially operating self, not as the ultimately real self.

¹⁰⁶. The epithets are from *The Hidden Words*, Persian 50, Persian 65, Persian 67, Persian 68 respectively.

may perceive the existential moment as an alien other, as an It rather than a Thou, if one but listens carefully, one can hear the voice of the Thou speaking through. At such moments of crisis, the self is being offered the possibility of transcending its present state of consciousness to more fully comprehend the divine purposes and to more fully reflect the attributes of God. The contrary experiences of loss, paradox, suffering and eventual death which the believer unavoidably faces in the world, provide the opportunity for the believer to look for the silver lining in the sometimes dark cloud of existence, and either to choose or to reject the realm of spiritual values, to choose or to reject the teachings of the Word of God, to choose the path of the insistent, elemental self or the ways of God.

The reverse side of the existential moment is the epiphanic¹⁰⁷ moment. Also of sudden onset, and by contrast with the weight of the existential moment, the epiphanic moment is a moment of exaltation, of great illumination or triumph when we are possessed by awe, or in the phrase of C.S. Lewis, "surprised by joy".¹⁰⁸ It is *Die Unglaubliche Leichtigkeit des Seins (The Unbelievable Lightness of Being)*.¹⁰⁹ This epiphanic moment is a numinous disclosure of glory, a resounding victory, triumph or celebration, a hierophany that looms up large with promise and exaltation. It is Bahá'u'lláh in the garden of Ridván,¹¹⁰ and all the lesser reflections of that spiritual event. It is the believer winning the desires of the heart. It may be a divine healing, a mystical encounter, or the certitude that our lesser will has become one with the greater Will of God.

The moments of crisis alluded to above are moments of high realism. They take the believer out the realm of the ideal and into the realm of the real. They make theoretical concerns comparatively unreal by the imposition of their unavoidable stark realism. If, for example, we have just been told by a surgeon that we have inoperable cancer, our current projects and concerns suddenly pale into insignificance. If we have just been told that the life of a loved one hangs in the balance, our present preoccupations suddenly no longer have the same significance. The existential moment bears down upon us then with all the weight of its full signifying force.

A note of profound realism in relation to our own spiritual development was also struck

¹⁰⁷. From the Greek meaning "God manifest".

¹⁰⁸. *Surprised by Joy* is the title of C.S. Lewis' spiritual autobiography in which he describes his conversion from atheism to Christianity. The title, however, does not describe Lewis' actual conversion experience which was as he has specified "not to Christianity" but to theism (p. 184) and which he has described as "strangely unemotional" (p.179), for it was a conversion to the realisation of free choice. Riding on top of a bus in Oxford, "going up Headington Hill", Lewis felt himself to be entrapped in a suit of armour or a kind of "corslet". Lewis became acutely conscious at that moment that he had been given the free choice either to keep this armour on or unbuckle it and go free. He was given the freedom to choose, but he did not seem to be able to do otherwise than to choose God. "Then came the repercussion on the imaginative level", says Lewis. "I felt as if I were a man of snow at long last beginning to melt...I rather disliked the feeling. (same) No doubt these were the hard and fast bonds of Lewis' former ego that were melting away.

¹⁰⁹. This is the title of the 1984 existentialist novel by Milan Kundera.

¹¹⁰. See Robert Hayden's poem by the same title.

by Shoghi Effendi when he pointed out the difference between character and faith:

There is a difference between character and faith; it is often very hard to accept this fact and put up with it, but the fact remains that a person may believe in and love the Cause—even to being ready to die for it—and yet not have a good personal character, or possess traits at variance with the teachings. We should try to change, to let the power of God help recreate us and make us true Bahá'ís in deed as well as in belief. But sometimes the process is slow, sometimes it never happens because the individual does not try hard enough. But these things cause us suffering and are a test to us...¹¹¹

Instead of making an "ideal preachment", instead of encouraging the believer to rise to new heights of spirituality, as one might have expected from the head of a world faith, with this statement Shoghi Effendi (1897-1957) strikes a note of profound and open realism. With a note of compassion, and without judgement, he merely observes that there are defects in the human character, weaknesses that are simply there. He acknowledges, moreover, that the believer does not always attain the hoped for end, a condition that produces suffering and trial. Shoghi Effendi's realism, however, seems to lead to the path of an easier acceptance.

Further Considerations of Existential Meaning in Bahá'í History and Sacred Writings

I have argued above that a view of existential theism is both valid and relevant for the widening field of Bahá'í studies since it offers insight into the meaning of the concrete spiritual experiences of the believer living-in-the-world. The patterns of existential experience lie, however, not only in the life of the ordinary believer, but more importantly they are found both in scripture and in sacred history, in the acts and events in the lives of the prophets of God. The quotidian, sacred history and the Word of God all have existential meaning.

I draw attention here to two existential moments: one in the life of the Bahá'í poet Robert Hayden; the other in the life of the "learned apologist"¹¹² Mirza 'Abu'l-Fazl. In the case of Hayden it was a crisis of "fear and dread", and in 'Abdu'l-Fazl's case his conversion to the Bahá'í Faith.

John Hatcher relates that Hayden one day came face to face with his own despair when he experienced the unsettling realisation that his religious beliefs were not reflected in his poetry. At least, this was his perception at that time. This realisation created a form of crisis in conscience for Hayden.

I sat in my front room one day when I was still teaching at Fisk University and was

¹¹¹. Shoghi Effendi, quoted in *Bahá'í Marriage and Family Life*, p. 20.

¹¹². *God Passes By*, p. 195.

filled with a sense of cold, almost inexpressible horror, because suddenly something sort of swept over me: "You are not really dealing with reality. Everything you are doing is false because you don't really see the connection between what you say you believe and what you are doing as a writer." It was naturally a horrifying experience.¹¹³

Robert Hayden's experience bears some of the marks of the existential moment. It was sudden, personal and dramatic, and encountered Hayden in a moment which he perceived in some sense as a crisis of faith. It came in that same form of dread ("a horrifying experience"), doubt or denial (in this case self-denial) which is so characteristic of the soul's dark day. As he reflected upon what he perceived as a dilemma, Hayden gradually came to realise that his faith, as contrasted with his beliefs, was expressed in his poetry as a "spiritual orientation":

Indeed, when I was less sophisticated in my outlook, I thought that the only way I really could serve [the Bahá'í Faith] was by writing religious poems, but later on as I pondered what Bahá'u'lláh had said about the role of the artist, I began to realise that if you really had the new spiritual orientation, just about anything you did could be of service.¹¹⁴

There was, however, a beyond for Hayden's spiritual crisis, one that lead him out of the despair that his faith was not reflected in his art, to a reaffirmation or strengthening of faith. The resolution of Hayden's crisis of conscience points to that psychological adjustment which leads to a more complete acceptance of self, or in John Hatcher's phrase, to a "pattern of consolation".

Sacred history is not merely the documented and detailed re-creation of the objective record of events, but is also in a profound sense an intensely personal record, since sacred history is salvation history (*Heilsgeschichte*) and revolves around the life of the sacred figure who is the object of much devotion, as well as being the subject of considerable historical curiosity.

The acts and events in the lives of the prophets have profound relevance and symbolical significance for the spirituality of the ordinary believer, for their mission was carried out amidst continual persecution and hardship, both actual and threatened. The spirituality exemplified in the lives of the Manifestations of God was consequently not merely theoretical but profoundly authentic. For the present discussion, the forty year period of Bahá'u'lláh's imprisonment and exile is ripe with meaning for a life of spirituality in the face of major tests and difficulties. It would be a travesty, however, to look upon the two themes of Bahá'u'lláh's imprisonment and exile as a mere intellectual curiosity, either for theistic existentialism or any other intellectual current. Imprisonment and exile resulted in prolonged adversity and distressing hardship for Bahá'u'lláh and his family, sufferings to which he has amply testified in various passages of his writings. Bahá'u'lláh's imprisonment and exile, whether it was the imposed exile of the

¹¹³. John Hatcher, "Racial Identity and Patterns of Consolation in the Poetry of Robert Hayden", *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, p. 38.

¹¹⁴. *Same*, pp. 38-39.

sovereign's decree, or his own voluntary exile into the mountains of Sulaymáníyyih in Kurdistan, affords an opportunity for us to consider how we also might face feelings of exile, alienation, loneliness and hardship in our own lives. Either by contrast or by analogy with Bahá'u'lláh's exile, we look to what both these twin themes might mean to us in our lives and in our time. In the context of salvation history, however, one can immediately point to Bahá'u'lláh's declaration of the cosmic redemption of all humanity as part of the greater plan of God brought about by the untold sufferings and privation of Bahá'u'lláh. He declares that because of his woes all things were "immersed in an ocean of purity" [Ridvan tablet] [complete]

The two outstanding references in the Bahá'í writings to the existential condition come in the form of narrative theology in two pointed stories in *The Seven Valleys (Haft Vádi)* and *The Four Valleys (Cháhár Vádi)*.¹¹⁵ Both theological narratives are concerned with the theme of the loss and recovery of true self in its encounter with God, alluded to earlier, as well as with the nature of true faith. The great literary critic Northrop Frye has written that this theme of the estrangement from self and its recovery is the grand theme of all of literature. It would not be, therefore, a unique concern of only existentialist writers, but of writers from all times and climes. Frye says: "The story of the loss and regaining of identity, is, I think, the framework of all literature..."¹¹⁶ Frye includes, of course, in his definition of literature, biblical literature whose themes and structures he has analyzed in great detail in a very creative and novel way.¹¹⁷

The first story is the one about the mystic and the grammarian in the first valley of *The Four Valleys*. Both travellers come to the "Sea of Grandeur", a metonymic and metaphorical phrase¹¹⁸ which is just another name for God. The station in this valley, Bahá'u'lláh tells us, is the station of the self as soul, that is the personal self rather than the philosophical self. This is indicated by the highly evocative transpersonal (intra-subjective) language Bahá'u'lláh uses in the text. As was mentioned above, the preoccupation with divine subjectivity, the self in its relation to God, is one of the main defining points of existential theism. This is also true of much of western mystical literature. Bahá'u'lláh says in his preeminent mystical treatise: "One must, then, read the book of his own self, rather than some treatise on rhetoric. Wherefore He (God) hath said: "Read thy Book: There needeth none but thyself to make out an account against thee this day."¹¹⁹ In addition to the reality of the human soul as the beloved of God, the quranic quotation cited by Bahá'u'lláh above raises the question of responsibility in attempting the challenging pursuit of self-knowledge. One must begin to read one's own self as one would read a book. One should begin to find meaning and understanding in the pages of one's own life. The theme of personal responsibility is moreover one of the cherished themes of existentialist writers and

¹¹⁵. This mystical treatise of Bahá'u'lláh, largely unexplored by Bahá'í scholars, also demands some attention in order to develop an understanding of the mystical experience and mystical theology itself.

¹¹⁶. Northrop Frye, *The Educated Imagination*, p. 21.

¹¹⁷. See Frye's *The Great Code*.

¹¹⁸. Metonymy is the naming of a thing by one of its parts.

¹¹⁹. *The Four Valleys*, p. 51. The quranic quote is from 17:15.

philosophers. Viktor Frankl has emphasized, for example, that the sense of taking responsibility for one's own mental and spiritual health rather than submitting passively to the outrages of fortune is one of the precipitators of healing.

Bahá'u'lláh's snippet-story of the mystic knower and the grammarian will tell, however, its own tale:

The story is told of a mystic knower, who went on a journey with a learned grammarian as his companion. They came to the shore of the Sea of Grandeur. The knower straightway flung himself into the waves, but the grammarian stood lost in his reasonings, which were as words that are written on water. The knower called out to him, "Why dost thou not follow?" The grammarian answered, "O Brother, I dare not advance. I must needs go back again." Then the knower cried, "Forget what thou didst read in the books of Sibavayh and Qawlavayh, of Ibn-i-Hájib and Ibn-i-Málik, and cross the water."¹²⁰

Bahá'u'lláh then quotes from Rúmi's *Mathnaví*: "The death of self is needed here, not rhetoric/Be nothing, then, and walk upon the waves."¹²¹ Although this micro-tale in itself could become the object of some fairly lengthy commentary, there are three elements which link it to existential concerns. First, there is the wholehearted commitment to the life of faith exemplified by the mystic knower who is very reminiscent of Kierkegaard's "knight of faith", the one who makes that supreme act of the will, the "leap of faith" (*Springet*), and summoning up courage, walks across the water. He stands in marked contrast to the hesitant grammarian. One of the symbolic meanings of walking on the water is the death of self, or overcoming nature, for to walk upon water is not only to defy nature but to overcome it. Second, the story puts some definite limitations on the abilities of reason to understand God, also a favourite theme of Kierkegaard. Bahá'u'lláh's tale implies a strong critique of the powers of reason to put us in touch with divine reality. The grammarian's desire to return to his books was in reality a desire to return to logical forms of knowledge on which he relied, whereas the mystic knower's experience of God is clearly in the realm of *le vécu*, that direct experience that transcends and transports the seeker into some larger, more synthetic and all-encompassing experience of the divine, an experience that is based on more intuitive, non-discursive forms of knowing. For the existential perspective involves not primarily analysis, that is the breaking down of a thing into its constituent parts,¹²² but rather the holistic interpretation of a life experience in a spiritual context. When believing existentialism interprets a part of life, it does so in order to interpret it as a constituent of the whole. Indeed, there is a holistic vein to the experiences and writings of the

¹²⁰. *The Four Valleys*, p. 51.

¹²¹. *ibid*, p. 52.

¹²². One of the dangers in an *épistémé* that makes exclusive use of rational analysis is that, like Humpty Dumpty, the thinker is sometimes left with the impression that the left over pieces cannot be made to fit back together again. Either that, or one senses that one has violated something vital in the process of the breakdown and is left profoundly dissatisfied.

existential theists, for they aim at some unified vision of the self with the world.¹²³

In the story of the mystic and the grammarian, it is the heroic self of the true believer that emerges as the mystic knower casts behind him the despair and doubt that is left in reason's wake, and leaps into the Sea of Reality. By taking this "leap of faith" into the waves of the Sea of Reality, the seeker finds the courage to defy "the violence of logic" and the dictates of reason that command the protection and preservation of self, but instead of sinking beneath the waves and drowning, the mystic knower defies gravity, rises above and walks on water. One notes in context again the quick turnabout, the sudden great reversal. Instead of *falling* as in the primeval experience of humanity's original parents, the mystic know *rises*. The spatial metaphor speaks abundantly of the powers of the "leap of faith", that of the concerted will to trust in the powers of God, self and the search. The spatial metaphor of walking upon the water is particularly effective in this context, for the leap of faith has the double effect of creating space, that is, it accentuates the freeing up of the spiritual traveller when released from the gravitational weight of self through the power of faith.

The Christian parallel to Bahá'u'lláh's text is Peter's attempt, in a sorry imitation of Christ, to walk upon the water when Jesus came to the disciples in "the fourth watch of the night...walking on the sea". (v. 25) (Matthew 14: 25-31) Like the mystic knower, who can moreover be interpreted as a veiled illusion to Bahá'u'lláh himself, Christ bids the disciple to walk upon the water, but Peter "when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me." (v. 30) The rest of the story is familiar: Jesus stretches out his hand and catches Peter as he is about to sink into the waves and saves him. But Christ's pointed remark to Peter is significant, for it provides the moral meaning to the tale: "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" (v. 31) The dispelling of doubt is also one of the object lessons of Bahá'u'lláh's seaside micro-tale. Although the grammarian was a learned man, and Peter an unschooled fisherman, both individuals were summoned to leave behind "the baser stages of doubt",¹²⁴ and to throw themselves into that dimension of faith which is not characterised by philosophic reasoning, but essentially by faith defined as belief and implicit trust in the Divine Power that is greater than ourselves.

The realism in the gospel narrative is also noteworthy. Matthew does not hide the fact that Peter failed his test of faith, as he will fail later another test of faith when he is accused of being the Nazarene's companion during Christ's trial. (Matt. 26: 69-75) Because he feared the annihilation of his own being, Peter denied the One that he loved more than everything in the world, everything except his own life. Happily, Peter's test was resolved, as `Abdu'l-Bahá tells us, with untold remorse¹²⁵, after which he became the *petros*, the "rock" that Christ had named

¹²³. Jaspers, p. 210.

¹²⁴. The complete quotation is: "O FLEETING SHADOW! Pass beyond the baser stages of doubt and rise to the exalted heights of certainty. Open the eye of truth, that thou mayest behold the veilless Beauty and exclaim: Hallowed be the Lord, the most excellent of all creators! (*The Hidden Words*, Persian, no. 9)

¹²⁵. "Even the glorious Peter was not rescued from the flame of trials, and wavered. Then he repented and mourned

him.

These existential moments should be viewed as an opportunity — and a necessity — for spiritual transformation. The tests of Peter, which appeared on the surface as massive failures, proved to be ultimately the means of attaining his predestined station of becoming the rock of faith. Also present in Peter's existential moment is the paradoxical note that failure participates profoundly in the means of ultimate success.

The other story, borrowed from Rúmi's *Mathnáví* by Bahá'u'lláh, is one of the brightest gems in all of spiritual literature. It is the story of the lost lover refound, the story of the bereaved Majnún who finds his beloved Laylí again in a garden. It is also pointedly significant that humanity's spiritual history, which begins in a garden in the Middle East, finds its fulfilment in a scripture written by Bahá'u'lláh, a modern day Prophet from the Middle East.¹²⁶ This spiritual allegory of Bahá'u'lláh's is in one respect the complement and the fulfilment of the Genesis story of Adam and Eve which `Abdu'l-Bahá tells us is really a story about the bondage and liberation of the soul in its relationship to the material world and to God.¹²⁷ But let us listen to Bahá'u'lláh himself:

There was once a lover who had sighed for long years in separation from his beloved, and wasted in the fire of remoteness. From the rule of love, his heart was empty of patience, and his body weary of his spirit; he reckoned life without her as a mockery, and time consumed him away. How many a day he found no rest in longing for her; how many a night the pain of her kept him from sleep; his body was worn to a sigh, his heart's wound had turned him to a cry of sorrow. He had given a thousand lives for one taste of the cup of her presence, but it availed him not. The doctors knew no cure for him, and companions avoided his company; yea, physicians have no medicine for one sick of love, unless the favor of the beloved one deliver him.

At last, the tree of his longing yielded the fruit of despair, and the fire of his hope fell to ashes. Then one night he could live no more, and he went out of his house and made for the market-place. On a sudden, a watchman followed after him. He broke into a run, with the watchman following; than other watchmen came together, and barred every passage to the weary one. And the wretched one cried from his heart, and ran here and there, and moaned to himself: "Surely this watchman is `Izrá'il, my angel of death, following so fast upon me; or he is a tyrant of men, seeking to harm me." His feet carried him on, the one bleeding with the arrow of love, and his heart lamented. Then he came to a garden wall, and with untold pain he scaled it, for it

the mourning of a bereaved one and his lamentation raised unto the Supreme Concourse." (`Abdu'l-Bahá, from a tablet to an American believer, December 23, 1902 in *Star of the West*, vol. 8, no. 19, March 2, 1918.

¹²⁶. Strictly speaking, one cannot really say "ends" in a garden for there is no end to humanity's spiritual history on earth.

¹²⁷. `Abdu'l-Bahá says that "It [Adam and Eve] contains divine mysteries and universal meanings and it is capable of marvellous explanations." (p. 123) and he gives only one them while inviting the reader to discover others. For `Abdu'l-Bahá's explanation, see "Adam and Eve" in *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 122-26.

proved very high; and forgetting his life, he threw himself down to the garden.

And there he beheld his beloved with a lamp in her hand, searching for a ring she had lost. When the heart-surrendered lover looked on his ravishing love, he drew a great breath and raised up his hands in prayer, crying: "O God! Give Thou glory to the watchman, and riches and long life. For the watchman was Gabriel, guiding this poor one; or he was Isráfíl, bringing life to this wretched one!"¹²⁸

This little story is the ultimate allegory in the overcoming of despair when the seeker, sojourner or pilgrim is suddenly surprised by the joy of the soul's reunion with God, which can be viewed in another light as the soul's union with itself once it has discovered its true identity. Bahá'u'lláh's mystical story of the loss and regain of the beloved strikes the triumphant note of ultimate victory over the sense of loss of identity and despair. Bahá'u'lláh uses moreover the very word "despair" in his spiritual allegory once the bereaved Majnún reaches the nadir of anxiety. Bahá'u'lláh's narrative has moreover Majnún pushed beyond the limits of despair to the edge of madness, or to the contemplation of self-destruction, when the trauma of lost love is too much to bear for the sensitive soul. Further, one notices that Bahá'u'lláh's story does not hide us from the most pointed and distressing elements in human existence: acute pain, loneliness, alienation from self and the desires of the heart, and impending death.

Bahá'u'lláh's purpose in exposing these distressing themes is, however, clearly therapeutic. The experience of such distressing emotions, Bahá'u'lláh is telling us, can be the prelude to the healing and integration of self. The characters in existentialist literature, however, often remain trapped in the morass of these disturbing states of mind. This has contributed in no small measure to the endless despair and defeatism that certain forms of literary existentialism convey, and have resulted in the partially justified reputation that existentialism is a dark and pessimistic literature and philosophy. For, if as Sartre has said in *L'être et le néant*, (*Being and Nothingness*), our only real freedom lies in the possibility to "néantiser le néant" (to annihilate nothingness), then the prospects are bleak indeed. Bahá'u'lláh's allegory of the lost lover refound even contains Sartre's notion of *Huit Clos*, of no exit, of the lover's being hemmed in on all sides by the watchmen who are the symbols of all the conspiring forces of evil that have descended to hem in and to harm him. Unlike Sartre, however, Bahá'u'lláh does provide us with a way out, a door of hope, the promise of the lost lover who is found again. How this process takes place fully is the subject of a study in spiritual transformation, but Bahá'u'lláh's allegory of the lover (the soul) finding its true beloved (God) promises the tokens of God's love and mercy in the joyous surprise of the highest of paradoxes. The bereaved lover viewed himself to be lost, whereas he was, in fact, saved. His salvation is reunion with God.

The Existential Individual and Science

¹²⁸. *The Seven Valleys*, pp. 13-14.

It should be pointed out, however, that existential theism pursues no *de jure* anti-rationalistic, irrational, or chaotic approach to transcendence. It would recognize in a Bahá'í perspective, however, limits to both the arts and sciences as being the most meaningful expressions of the human mind and the final values in human culture. Bahá'u'lláh emphatically proclaims that neither science, nor the artifacts of civilization will save us, but only His Most Sublime Word.

Your sciences shall not profit you in this day, nor your arts, nor your treasures, nor your glory. Cast them all behind your backs and set your faces towards the Most Sublime Word through which the Scriptures and the Books and this lucid Tablet have been distinctly set forth.¹²⁹

It is in this context of the limitations put on reason that Professor Bill Hatcher makes his strong critique of existentialism which he sets out in his essay "Science and the Bahá'í Faith" in *Logic and Logos*. Professor Hatcher is motivated by his perception that existentialism is an enemy of science (logic) and its methods. Professor Hatcher's assertions about some existentialists' views of science (*Logic and Logos*, pp. 106-111, 121-122) might best be described as a half truth. It is true that some existentialists held the view that the abstract, theoretical and practical aspects of science were insufficient to fully awaken the human spirit. But this insufficiency view of science, Professor Hatcher neglects to mention, is one that Bahá'u'lláh himself also puts forth. Bahá'u'lláh puts severe limitations on the abilities of both science and the arts, as the above quotation from Bahá'u'lláh's *Lawh-i-Burhán* (Tablet of the Proof) clearly indicates. Not only is Professor's view of existentialism "somewhat consciously exaggerated at some points" ., as he himself admits, (p. 108) but it is reductionist in the extreme.

Professor Hatcher makes overly general statements about existentialism, all of them negative. He ascribes nothing positive to the theistic existentialists. Indeed, he does not mention one existentialist thinker by name in the essay, so it is difficult to determine exactly to whom he refers. Hatcher says, for example: "It [the existential religious experience] must strike like lightning for reasons which are never wholly clear or else as the result of some magic or occult practice. Clearly no experience of such an erratic and unstable nature can ever serve as the basis for a progressive society." (121-122) This is indeed a strange statement to make in the view of the fact that existential psychologists and psychiatrists are devoted to the healing of the mind. To associate existentialism with magic or the occult, however, is highly exaggerated. Hatcher's dismissal of existentialist religious experience is based on two charges: (i) "the existentialist grants that science cannot be applied to religion". (ii) "He values this subjective aspect of religion above science and its method." (p. 108) If the existentialist values religion above science, then I rather suspect most Bahá'ís are existentialist as well. Further, Professor Hatcher fails to mention that Karl Jaspers, one of the founders of post world war two existentialism, clearly valued both science and reason, views he set forth in *Reason and Anti-Reason in our Time*, although Jaspers did recognize some of its limitations. And why indeed should he not?

¹²⁹. *Tablets*, p. 211.

Only those who view science as some kind of absolute might argue that science deserves to be put above any reproach. Einstein, however, like `Abdu'l-Bahá, deplored "the malignant fruits of science." [*Abdu'l-Bahá*, source] Even those existentialist philosophers who critiqued science, like Heidegger, were not *de jure* enemies of science. What they deplored was that the partial and limited abilities of science to decipher total reality were becoming the object of absolutistic claims for its abilities. Moreover, it is not excluded that one use both analytical (logical) and existential (subjective) approaches to religious knowledge. The very way that Professor Hatcher describes existentialist religious experience as "private", "emotional" "uncommunicable" [sic] "even chaotic" and "unsystematic" as driving a wedge between science and religion (p. 107) is an implied critique of the experience, and is not tenable. The fact that religious experience is private, emotional and at times uncommunicable is a valid, enriching and meaningful aspect of religious experience. We are not duty-bound to apply scientific method to our religious experiences in order to test their validity, as Professor Hatcher suggests, for such an approach reduces the experience of the divine to the controlled experiment, that is, to something to be manipulated. Third, there is the notion of divine subjectivity to which I have referred several times and which has lead, incidentally, to the criticism that existential writers — -and this criticism has also been levelled at the mystics — -are overly preoccupied with self.¹³⁰ This criticism is being raised only to dismiss it, for clearly we had better be preoccupied with an understanding of true self if we are to make real spiritual progress. The inscription once written above Apollo's shrine at Delphi ("know thyself") stands as both an eternal reminder and a challenge for all souls to make that longest of voyages, the journey into the unknown reaches of the inner self.

Here I share Kierkegaard's view that the objectivity of the physical sciences takes us in a direction that *moves away* from personal truth. But the nature of the scientific enterprise is to objectify and with objectification we move away from the subjectivity that seeks enlightenment in ethics and religion, in the search for faith, meaning and values. Personal truth, on the other hand, is what *moves toward* the human being. It is what gives the human being profound and personal meaning; that is, a dynamic that is capable of altering lives, profoundly changing consciousness, moulding behaviour, or bestowing a depth of meaning, or hallowing existence.

¹³⁰. A.J. Paton, for example, wrote in *The Modern Predicament* that Kierkegaard was "self-centered" and that "he hardly ever thinks of anyone but himself." (p. 120) Although Paton's critique warns of the danger of egotism, it is not substantial because Kierkegaard and others who speak in this mode are not just speaking of subjectivity but of intersubjectivity, whether that be with God or with others. (Macquarrie, p. 280)