

Kurtz, E. (1986). Alcoholics Anonymous: A phenomenon in American religious history. in Peter Freese (ed.), Religion and Philosophy in the United States of America: Proceedings of the German American Conference, Paderborn, 1986 (Essen: Verlag Die Blaue Eule, 1987), vol. 2, pp. 447-462. Reprinted in The Collected Ernie Kurtz (1999). Wheeling, West Virginia: The Bishop of Books, pp. 23-38.

In mid-1985, I was invited to participate in a German - American Conference on "Religion and Philosophy in the United States of America" to be held in Paderborn, Germany, in the late Spring of 1986. The following paper was prepared for that conference. Unfortunately the paper was never given, though the organizers were kind enough to publish it in the Proceedings of the Conference: I suffered heart attacks in March and April of 1986 and in May underwent bypass surgery that also repaired a ventricular aneurism.

Some diligent friends, among them Jim Blair of Montreal, somehow came across the piece and have urged me to give it wider publication, so here it is.

Alcoholics Anonymous:

A Phenomenon in American Religious History

Rarely must a scholar defend his choice of topic, and it is of course impolitic to begin with an *apologia*, but a decade's experience has taught that approaching Alcoholics Anonymous as an historically significant phenomenon requires such an introduction. In the context of this conference, if my topic needs defense, I would point less to the over one million now living human beings who attest that A.A.'s fellowship and program have enabled them to find and to live the meaning of their humanity – sheer numbers, after all, mean little – than to two other realities that it seems irresponsible to ignore.ⁱ

First, despite wide-ranging developments both philosophical and theological, we still live in the shadow of Bonhoeffer's call for a "religionless Christianity." Although the writhings of theologians over

the last forty years have failed to concretize that reality, the same forty years have witnessed A.A.'s claim to be "spiritual rather than religious" find resonance both in the minds of a surprisingly large smattering of intellectuals and – even more surprisingly – in the experience of an ever more diverse spectrum of ordinary people.ⁱⁱ Second, for whatever reasons of health-care economics or valid re-evaluation of the role of professional expertise in treating chronic illness, the burgeoning spread of "self-help mutual aid groups" that enable the healing and the recovery of human dignity is too obvious – and too obviously significant – to ignore. Such groups virtually all use Alcoholics Anonymous as model, and most of them adopt or adapt the "Twelve Steps" that are the core of A.A.'s program as their own modality of healing.ⁱⁱⁱ

What is Alcoholics Anonymous?

Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for AA membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. AA is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy, neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics achieve sobriety.^{iv}

That "Preamble," the reading of which begins most meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous, well summarizes the thrust of A.A.'s significance in American Religious History. Two points stand out. First, note the idea of a "fellowship," a *Gemeinschaft*, a *fraternité*, within which one seeks self-healing through sharing one's own "experience, strength and hope" – that is, telling one's story. Second, mark the wariness of the usual trappings of religion in the succinct detailing of the membership requirement, the attitude to money and to controversy, the explicit denial of belief-based or cause-based affiliation.

Although my approach to describing A.A.'s significance will be historical, it seems better to use the allotted time to analyze that significance rather than to detail its historical development. Thus, to

frame understanding, let me merely list the conscious, explicit, and well-documented sources of the ideas embodied and enacted within Alcoholics Anonymous and then briefly sketch how those ideas got there.^v

A.A.'s explicit sources are three: (1) the psychology of Dr. Carl Jung and most particularly his insistence on the importance of "religious experience"; (2) the Oxford Group (later Moral Re-Armament) vision of "First Century Christianity" as promulgated by the Pennsylvania-born Lutheran minister, Frank Buchman; and (3) William James's portrayal of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* and especially his description of the "conversion" experienced by the "twice-born" or the "sick-soul."

The story of A.A.'s shaping by these sources can be told briefly. Over several months in 1931, Rowland Hazard, a Rhode Island businessman, sought treatment for his alcoholism from Dr. Jung, who suggested that his only hope was "a religious experience." Rowland joined the Oxford Group and carried that message of Jung to a friend, also alcoholic, who carried it to another alcoholic friend, Edwin Thatcher. Thatcher in turn, in November of 1934, conveyed it to the most hopeless drunk he knew, his old drinking-buddy William Griffith Wilson, a former Wall Street hustler. Scant weeks later, Wilson, while being detoxified in Towns Hospital in New York City, underwent a "spiritual experience" that his physician, Dr. William Duncan Silkworth, helped him to understand in Jamesian terms.

Upon his release from the hospital, Wilson for four months tried to carry the same message to others, both within the Oxford Group and at Towns Hospital, but without any success beyond the fact that he himself stayed sober. In May of 1935, Bill traveled to Akron, Ohio, in pursuit of a business opportunity that promptly failed. Fearing that he would again turn to alcohol, Wilson sought out another alcoholic not for the purpose of saving that alcoholic but to save himself. The alcoholic Bill found turned out to be a physician, a surgeon, Dr. Robert Holbrook Smith, and so rather than tell him about the malady, alcoholism, Wilson told Smith about himself, the alcoholic. Although familiar with Oxford Group ideas, Smith heard something different in Wilson. The date of Smith's last drink, June 10, 1935, is celebrated within Alcoholics Anonymous as its birthday, and "Bill W. and Dr. Bob" are revered as A.A.'s co-founders.

Mindful of those sources, some dismiss Alcoholics Anonymous as

another example of the crutch that simplistic evangelical religion affords the intellectually deficient, seeing little difference between attending A.A. meetings and joining some revivalist congregation.^{vi} Others find in Alcoholics Anonymous more of a “mind-cure” or “positive thinking” approach, and of course Donald Meyer has taught us to see through all the heirs of William James.^{vii} Still others, perhaps more respectfully but no less reductively, concentrate on the “mysticism” of Jungian thought and present A.A. in terms of Aldous Huxley’s “perennial philosophy” as updated by Milton Berman or, more fashionably, in the concepts of Gregory Bateson’s “Cybernetics of Self.”^{viii} Most recently, in response to A.A.’s continuing success, we find deeper psychological yet still religiously lacking analyses in the work of Harvard psychiatrists John Mack and Edward Khantzian in their explorations of “narcissism” and “The Governance of the Self.”^{ix} Yet all these analyses of Alcoholics Anonymous, whether contemptuous or appreciative, overlook the same two things: A.A.’s context and A.A. practice.

My point in this paper is that in order to understand the religious and philosophical significance of Alcoholics Anonymous and its offspring in American history, two simple facts must be kept in mind. First, Alcoholics Anonymous came into being and attained final form in the decade between 1935 and 1945. Second, from its beginning and still today, the philosophy and the spirituality – the *healing* – of Alcoholics Anonymous is transmitted by the practice of storytelling, of telling a particular kind of story the very format of which inculcates a way of thinking that shapes a particular way of life.

First, the context. Ideas, perhaps especially if borrowed from varied sources, have implicit as well as self-conscious roots. There is both a climate and a soil of opinion. The years between 1929 and 1945 mark the dawn of a renewed awareness of human limitation. Less significant, for our purposes, than the Great Depression, the revelations of Auschwitz, and the use of atomic weapons, are the permeation of American thought by existentialist philosophy and neo-orthodox theology. However confusedly, Americans in this era found themselves confronting “the experience of nothingness” and distinguishing not only between doing and having but between doing and *being*.^x

The earliest members of Alcoholics Anonymous, like most of their successors, were not readers of Heidegger and Sartre, nor even of Paul

Tillich and the brothers Niebuhr. And although there is evidence of subtly shaping influence by the thought of Karen Horney and Harry Stack Sullivan, I prefer to rest my claim for affinity on the recognition of it by Reinhold Niebuhr in his 1960 “Letter to A.A.,” in which he marked precisely the “acceptance of failure and limitation” as the key to A.A.’s success.^{xi}

The personal acceptance of human essential limitation permeates the whole A.A. program. It comes through most clearly in the Alcoholics Anonymous understanding of the “alcoholic” as someone who cannot safely drink any alcohol at all. The acceptance of that “cannot” does not take away freedom but bestows it. For if there is a *not* at the very core of one’s being, then embrace of that *not* fulfills one’s being.

Guided by an insight far older than the fifty or two hundred years usually accorded it by the historically naive, the A.A. member views his or her disease as an inherent attraction to the self-destructive – in psychological terms, as an obsession-compulsion. In a theological vocabulary, Alcoholics Anonymous understands alcoholism not as actually sinful but as a manifestation of “original sin.” In the acknowledgment “I am an alcoholic,” then, one professes less “I cannot drink” than “I *can* not-drink” – no small freedom for the obsessive-compulsive, for the addict.

A.A.’s focus on the “not-ness” of human essential limitation suggests a vision of human both-and-ness, of the human as a mixture or a meeting point of being and non-being. Because that concept is so abstract, let me break off from this exploration of what A.A. drew from the context of its formative decade and turn to *how* this abstract vision is conveyed within the very concrete format of an A.A. meeting – by the practice of storytelling.

The bridge between context and practice, between the abstract and the concrete, may be found in two understandings that undergird Alcoholics Anonymous as both program and fellowship. According to a key passage of the A.A. “Big Book”: “Selfishness – self-centeredness! That, we think, is the root of our troubles.”^{xii} That self-centeredness, which attempts to deny human both-and-ness, manifests itself in especially two ways in the drinking alcoholic. First, there is the claim and the demand to be in control, signaled by the way the alcoholic uses

both alcohol and other people. Second, there is the denial of all dependence – again, both on alcohol and on others.

In reality, of course, as A.A. recognizes, the actively drinking alcoholic is both totally out of control, addicted, and utterly dependent on the chemical alcohol. A.A.'s prescription, the fundamental message of all the stories told at its meetings, is the middle course of limited control and limited dependence. "You can do something, but not everything." "You alone can do it, but you cannot do it alone." These acceptances, conveyed by the telling of stories, shape the nature of the A.A. fellowship. The telling of stories. Recall A.A.'s "Preamble": "share their experience, strength and hope." How is it that personal narrative – telling stories that "disclose in a general way what we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now"^{xiii} – can prove healing not only of chronic disabilities such as alcoholism but of one's humanity itself? For the answer, it seems most helpful to turn first not to the context of scholarly discussion in the fields of philosophy, theology, literary theory and historiography, but to the context of A.A.'s own history.^{xiv}

When the fledgling fellowship left the Oxford Group – in 1937 in New York, in 1939 in Akron – its first one hundred members did so precisely because they objected to the Group's explicit religiosity. Philosophically, the Oxford Group's insistence on its "Four Absolutes" did not fit the emerging program's focus on essential limitation. Theologically, the Oxford Group practice of narrating tales of conversion offended the sensibilities of both the agnostics and the Roman Catholics who made up a significant part of early A.A. membership. But what, then, were they to do at their own meetings?

Newcomers attended those gatherings, and the neophytes had questions. They had failed at earlier efforts to avoid drunkenness, how was A.A. different? What did it mean when one suffered loss of memory? How complete need be the "inventory" and the "amends" spoken of in the Twelve Steps? Was wanting to get even the same thing as "harboring a resentment"? These and a hundred other questions were raised: no one is more skilled in denial, in finding a reason to drink again, than the newly dry alcoholic. But those sober for a year or two were not philosophers, theologians, psychologists, nor physicians – even Dr. Bob, after all, was a proctologist. And so they could answer only by

telling of their own experiences with the same or similar concerns.

Thus developed the A.A. modality of story-telling: a modified “conversion narrative” that contained echoes of the classic story motifs of the hero and the pilgrimage. The themes explored by Joseph Campbell in his studies of heroic myth shed much light on A.A. stories.^{xv} Each teller, in the pursuit of “more,” had entered the outer darkness and had explored the pit; now, having surmounted its dangers, he had returned, wiser and witnessing to hope. But the heroic plot of separation-initiation-return is leavened by another, deeper, theme – that of the pilgrimage.^{xvi} A.A. storytellers are still “on the way,” for they are ever mindful that A.A.’s promise is “spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection,”^{xvii} and the very fact that they are present testifies that they too need help.

“What we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now” thus describes a dialectical process of both being changed and changing. Or, to put it another way, in the A.A. modality of storytelling, one is “saved,” but not completely. Salvation – sobriety – remains operative only so long as one makes it available to others by telling the story of one’s own.

Having limned A.A.’s context – the existentialist and neo-orthodox sense of limitation – and the implications of the A.A. practice of storytelling, it is now time to bring these together in a deeper unity. Through the program and within the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous, human beings are healed not by technique but by practice, not by science but by art. For A.A. has discovered – and tells and implements – a larger story.

One corollary of essential limitation, and therefore of the context of the sense that marks the post-modern sensibility, is the rediscovery of the ancient distinction between *techné* and *phronesis*, between knowledge and wisdom.^{xviii} Perhaps the greatest significance of Alcoholics Anonymous in the history of ideas consists in its practical implementation of a mode of thinking that leads to a way of life that values the claims of *wisdom* without rejecting the validity of *knowledge*.

For those unfamiliar with or perhaps unsympathetic to the rediscovery of *phronesis*, let me suggest ten distinctions in an attempt

not to explain but to describe the significance of the fundamental distinction and therefore of Alcoholics Anonymous.

1. Knowledge seeks to collect facts, data; concerned with technique, it hears the question “Why?” as asking “How?” Wisdom is concerned with meaning and thus with value; seeking reasons rather than causes, it hears the question “Why?” as inquiring “Wherefore?” Research demonstrates that A.A. stories offer better raw material for philosophy than for sociology.^{xix}

2. Knowledge is primarily a method; it seeks truth by experiments that aim at exactness. Knowledge focuses on quantity, and the mastery of knowledge produces experts. Wisdom is a vision; it seeks truth by understanding, which is concerned with adequacy. Wisdom focuses on quality: immersion in wisdom produces artists. There are no experts in Alcoholics Anonymous.

3. Knowledge can and must be added to, even replaced; it comes to us in textbooks and articles that we read once and then “refer to.” Wisdom is less added to than deepened; it comes to us in “classics” – works that we re-read and ponder because we change more than they do. As its nickname hints, A.A.’s “Big Book” falls in the latter category.

4. Knowledge gives answers: one possesses knowledge and therefore can sell it. Wisdom suggests new perspectives on ultimate questions; one does not possess wisdom but is rather possessed by it, and thus any claim to “sell” wisdom signals the charlatan. No one can “buy” Alcoholics Anonymous.

5. In the ancient classical understanding, the source of knowledge is leisure, either the possession of it or the desire for it. A.A. stories witness to what Edith Hamilton has suggested was a core Greek insight: “Wisdom’s price is suffering, and it is always paid unwillingly although sent in truth as a gift from God.”^{xx}

6. Knowledge attends to realities as things: biochemists and neurologists can offer us much knowledge about alcoholism. Wisdom attends to realities as personal: Alcoholics Anonymous is interested only in the alcoholic.

7. Knowledge locates human uniqueness in the capacity to think. Wisdom locates human uniqueness in the capacity to love. A.A. presents itself as both program and fellowship.

8. Knowledge, rejecting story for analysis, insists on the separation of “fact” and “value.” Wisdom finds truth in stories because of its insistence that “What can I know?” and “How shall I live” are not two unrelated questions.

9. Knowledge is fascinated by the new; it is at least tempted to give the presumption of validity to novelty. Wisdom encourages mindfulness of the old, offering the presumption of value to that which has endured the test of time. The truest statement about Alcoholics Anonymous is that it is nothing new.

10. Knowledge accepts as reality only that which has been or at least can be proven. Wisdom acknowledges the possibility of the existence of that which escapes strict proof, holding that there are some realities, such as love and sobriety, in the existence of which one must believe before one can see them.

Now let me blur those distinctions: according to the point of view represented by Alcoholics Anonymous, to be human is to be *both* scientist and artist, for to live humanly requires *both* knowledge and wisdom. If, as we have been warned and have even experienced in some modern cult and drug experiences, “Knowledge separates while mysticism unites,” it is also true that wisdom distinguishes without either separating or uniting.

Wisdom’s key distinction and the message of all storytelling concerns the complexity of human being. To be human is to be *both* a unique, individual self *and* somehow part of reality greater than the self. This insight underlies all religion, art, and love. To be human is thus also at the same time to be both more and less than *merely* human: it is to exist, essentially, in a mixed, middle, paradoxical condition. Over Emerson Hall, the philosophy building in Harvard Yard, there is inscribed the Judaeo-Christian version of one-half of that ancient wisdom: “You have made him a little less than the angels.” The ancients knew that we are also a little more than the beasts, or, better, that to be human is to be neither beast nor angel yet somehow also to be

both. Wisdom's vision is of human both-ness.

All comedy and all tragedy – all storytelling – witness to that vision. The core of comedy is the embrace of human both-and-ness. Tragedy details the effort to deny that same both-and-ness. And what of Alcoholics Anonymous, wherein the way in which tragic tales are met with laughter confuses so many observers? Long before A.A., some alcoholics – “compulsive drunkards,” they were called in American colonial times – recovered. Until Alcoholics Anonymous, they thought of themselves as “ex-alcoholics,” or perhaps as “reformed drunkards.”^{xxi} Now I am sure you know that the customary introduction of any storyteller within Alcoholics Anonymous runs: “My name is _____, and I am an alcoholic.” Refer to an “ex-alcoholic,” and most members of Alcoholics Anonymous will begin searching the obituary pages.

Wisdom's paradox of human both-and-ness, then, is contained in and taught by the very concept “sober alcoholic.” That is why a recovering member need not even speak at all to tell his story at an A.A. meeting: simply *being there* as a sober alcoholic, tells the story . . . although it is of course useful and helpful to hear some of the details of each particular heroic pilgrimage quest. To accept the possibility of being a “sober alcoholic” is to accept the reality of human both-and-ness, and in the wake of that acceptance comes wisdom itself.

Does this embodiment of “wisdom” make Alcoholics Anonymous a philosophy or a religion? No, but A.A.'s claim to be a “way of life” does appear validated.^{xxii} Remember Bonhoeffer's call for a “religionless Christianity.” Both philosophy in the classical sense and theological religion have suffered eclipse in modern times, especially in the Anglo-American world that gave birth to Alcoholics Anonymous and first witnessed its widespread impact.^{xxiii}

My point in this paper concerns the significance for the story of wisdom of the story of Alcoholics Anonymous. For at least a millennium, until some time in the seventeenth or eighteenth century, human beings preferred wisdom to knowledge. Then, for some two or three centuries, they pursued knowledge at the expense of wisdom. In both contexts, some sought to reverse the trend, but almost always in an either-or, all-or-nothing fashion. The modern drug cult, and even some therapies, evidence that tendency. The significance of Alcoholics

Anonymous, lies in its attempt to regain wisdom without sacrificing knowledge, in its witness to their complementarity, in the reality that the A.A. fellowship and program have transcended the religious “problems” of the past two or three centuries in a way that again makes Wisdom and its insights available to large numbers of very ordinary people without requiring them to reject knowledge.

But wisdom – *phronesis, sapientia* – is not the same as “religion” nor even as the reality for which Bonhoeffer called. Alcoholics Anonymous presents its fellowship as “spiritual rather than religious,” and co-founder Bill Wilson was wont to parry challenges to its program by those who wanted it to be “more” by referring to A.A. as “a spiritual kindergarten.” Mindful that “only what does not have a history can be defined,”^{xxiv} I would suggest that no better description of wisdom can be found than A.A.’s portrayal of itself as “way of life.”

My second contention in this paper, then, involves the claim that Alcoholics Anonymous is also significant because of what its way of life teaches, enables, and inculcates: an attitude – a posture before reality – that is at the same time both profoundly philosophical and deeply religious.

How describe such an attitude? Of what might it consist? Argument, although inevitable, proves fruitless. Rather than beginning with a definition and proceeding deductively, then, let me begin with A.A. practice, seeking to derive an at least possible model. To what does research indicate the practice of the A.A. program leads in the daily life of its members?

The literature on Alcoholics Anonymous recognizes four attitudes as characteristic of A.A.’s sober members.^{xxv} Feeling a sense of *release* for which they are profoundly *grateful*, members of Alcoholics Anonymous in embracing their own both-and-ness as “sober alcoholics” reveal a *humility* from which flows profound *tolerance* – a joyous willingness to accept others’ limitations. Would it be too much to claim that it is precisely these qualities – releasement and gratitude, tolerance and humility – that characterize any really “religious” attitude?

You will note that something is apparently missing. A philosopher has recently insisted that the core of religion is to be found in *worship*.^{xxvi}

But is “worship” so different from the “attitude of awe in the face of the universe” that the psychiatrist, John Mack, remarked in A.A. – especially if that attitude of awe be celebrated communally?^{xxvii} Alcoholics Anonymous not only has a program; it *is* a “fellowship.” Releasement and gratitude, tolerance and humility, although A.A. members attempt to practice them “in all our affairs,” are *celebrated* at A.A. meetings – celebrated *by* the telling of stories.

Often, religious professionals see in those meetings either too much or too little. In A.A.’s early years, Catholic clergy scented in its Oxford Group origins and in its usual use of “the Protestant Lord’s Prayer” a forbidden *communicatio in sacris*. More recently, other clerics have more pragmatically resented the fact that at least some alcoholics seem to substitute going to A.A. meetings for attendance at church. Similarly, most non-religious professionals tend to view Alcoholics Anonymous as “just another form of religion,” just another “church.”

But these objections must be balanced by criticisms from the opposite direction. Others, beginning with the Jesuit theologian John Ford in the 1940s, have found A.A.’s claim to be “spiritual rather than religious” all too true, or even too much. They fault Alcoholics Anonymous less for its failure to worship than for its absence of theology. Some social scientists follow the same tack, viewing A.A. as primarily group socialization – but Durkheimian religion is not religion in any usual sense.^{xxviii}

Where does such disagreement leave the observer concerned primarily with A.A.’s continuing history? The revivification of religion, like the rebirth of philosophy, is of course beyond A.A.’s scope. Sober alcoholics are not that grandiose. But I would suggest that any interested in either question – and perhaps especially any scholars fascinated by the current revival of interest in story-telling among philosophers and theologians, critics and historians, might find suggestive hints in the ongoing story of Alcoholics Anonymous.

The significance of Alcoholics Anonymous as a phenomenon in American Religious or Philosophical History is quite simply that for the past half-century it has been in the center of a mainstream that most scholars have been led by ideological blinders to ignore. Two current revivals of interest render the continuation of that ignorance

unconscionable. Within Alcoholics Anonymous and its Twelve-Step offspring, more and more people are asking more and more explicitly for guidance in spirituality. Indeed, “spirituality” bodes to become the next fad in an already over-faded field. That outcome will be sad, for it will steal from all of us yet another important word. When a culture does not accept the existence of some reality, whatever term those who experience that reality use to name it quickly becomes debased, its original meaning perverted and lost.

Perhaps the second revival, then, can offer hope – if those engaged in it can prove more open-minded than their predecessors. The revival of interest in narrative, in storytelling, might learn much from the experience, strength and hope of Alcoholics Anonymous. I commend to you that task in the words of the only italicized sentences that appear in the book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*: “Willingness, honesty and open mindedness are the essentials of recovery. But these are indispensable.”^{xxix}

A.A.’s experience proves that that holds true for recovery from alcoholism. May I suggest that it might hold equally true for scholarship’s recovery of humanity?

NOTES

i 1. Current membership figure by private communication with A.A.’s General Service Office, 10 January 1986; on the accuracy of such figures, cf. Barry Leach and John L. Norris, “Factors in the Development of Alcoholics Anonymous,” pp. 441-543 in Benjamin Kissin and Henri Begleiter, *Treatment and Rehabilitation of the Chronic Alcoholic* (New York: Plenum, 1977), pp. 443-451.

ii 2. “More of the Young and Cross-Addicted Now in A.A., Survey Reveals,” *Box 459*, vol. 29 (1984), no.5, 1; similar articles on other diversity can be found in almost every issue.

iii 3 Leonard D. Borman, ed., *Explorations in Self-Help and Mutual Aid*, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ., 1975); Alan Gartner and Frank Riessman, eds., *The Self-Help Revolution* (New York: Human Sciences Press, 1984); Daniel J. Anderson, *Living With Chronic Illness*, (Center City, MN: Hazelden, 1985).

-
- iv 4. May be found on p. 3 of any issue of the *A.A. Grapevine*.
- v 5. The history of Alcoholics Anonymous is recounted in two of its own publications: *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* (New York: A.A. World Services, 1957) and "*Pass It On*" (New York: A.A.W.S., 1984). Full sources for all the detailed points that follow may be found in my own study, *Not-God: A History of Alcoholics Anonymous* (Center City, MN: Hazelden, 1979).
- vi 6. e.g. R.K. Jones, "Sectarian Characteristics of Alcoholics Anonymous," *Sociology* (Oxford) 4: 181-195 (1970); Francesca Alexder and Michelle Rollins, "Alcoholics Anonymous: The Unseen Cult." *California Sociologist*. 1984; 7(1): 33-48.
- vii 7. Donald Meyer, *The Positive Thinkers* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), pp. 315-324.
- viii 8. Morris Berman, *The Re-Enchantment of the World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1981); Gregory Bateson, "The Cybernetics of 'Self': A Theory of Alcoholism," in Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine, 1972), pp. 309-337.
- ix 9. John Mack, "Alcoholism, A.A., and the Governance of the Self," pp. 128-162; E.J. Khantzian, "Some Treatment Implications of the Ego and Self Disturbances in Alcoholism," pp. 163-188, both in Margaret H. Bean and Norman E. Zinberg (eds.), *Dynamic Approaches to the Understanding and Treatment of Alcoholism* (New York: Free Press, 1981); cf. also George E. Vaillant, *The Natural History of Alcoholism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1983).
- x 9. William Barrett, *Irrational Man* (New York: Doubleday, 1958).
- xi 10. "Letter to A.A. from Reinhold Niebuhr," *Thirty-Five Years* (New York: A.A.W.S., 1960), p. 65; on the claim to influence by Horney and Sullivan, cf., e.g. Dr. Esther Richards (Baltimore) to Wilson, 18 July 1938.
- xii 11. *Alcoholics Anonymous* (New York: The Alcoholic Foundation, 1939), p. 74; in the more readily available 2nd and 3rd editions (New York: A.A.W.S., 1955 and 1976), p. 62.
- xiii 12. *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 1st ed., p. 70; 2nd & 3rd eds., p. 58.
- xiv 13. The recent literature on story is vast; I rely especially on: Stanley Hauerwas, *Truthfulness and Tragedy* (Notre Dame: Univ. Press, 1977); Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. Press, 1981); Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis:

Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1983); Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: Univ. Press, 1984); Paul Veyne, *Writing History*, trans. Mina Moore-Rinoluceri (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1984). Arthur C. Danto, *Narration and Knowledge* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1985).

xv 15. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1949).

xvi 16. Concerning pilgrimage, cf. MacIntyre, pp. 203-204.

xvii

17. *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 1st ed., p. 72; 2nd & 3rd eds., p. 60.

xviii 18. In addition to the sources cited in note #14, cf. Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Penn. Press, 1983); also Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart* (Berkeley: Univ. of Cal. Press, 1985).

xix 19. Why this is true may perhaps best be grasped from a very insightful anthropology dissertation: Mary Catherine Taylor, *Alcoholics Anonymous: How It Works* (Univ. of California at San Francisco, 1977), Univ. Microfilms #79-13241.

xx 20. Edith Hamilton, *The Greek Way* (New York: Norton, 1930), p. 59.

xxi 21. Cf. Mark Edward Lender and James Kirby Martin, *Drinking in America* (New York: Free Press, 1982), pp. 9-21.

xxii 22. [William G. Wilson], *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (New York: A.A.W.S., 1953), p. 15; [Wilson], *As Bill Sees It: The A.A. Way of Life* (New York: A.A.W.S., 1967).

xxiii 23. Cf. Kurtz, *Not-God*, pp. 113, 185.

xxiv 24. Attributed to Friedrich Nietzsche by Susan Sontag, "When Writers Talk Among Themselves," *The New York Times Book Review*, 5 January 1986, p. 22.

xxv 25. The pre-1979 literature is best perused in Kurtz, *Not-God*; more recently, cf. especially Vaillant, *Natural History*, pp. 197-208, and also "Dangers of Psychotherapy in the Treatment of Alcoholism," pp. 36-54 in Bean and Zinberg (eds.), as well as Mack, pp. 160 ff. and Khantzian, p. 172, as cited. A less technical and more comprehensive view is offered by Milton A. Maxwell, *The Alcoholics Anonymous Experience: A Close-Up for Professionals* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984), especially pp 70-128.

-
- xxvi 26. Leszek Kolakowski, *Religion* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1982), pp. 175 ff.
- xxvii 27. Mack, "Governance," p. 144.
- xxviii 28. For an early example, *cf.*, e.g., R.F. Bales, "The Therapeutic Role of Alcoholics Anonymous as Seen by a Sociologist," *Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol* 5:267-278 (1944); further references on this and the preceding points may be found in Kurtz, *Not-God*, pp. 306, 314.
- xxix 29. *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 1st ed. (after the 1st printing), p. 400; 2nd & 3rd eds., p. 570.