Excerpts from three reviews of the Big Book

The New York Times Book Review
June 25, 1939

Lest this title should arouse the risibles in any reader let me state that the general thesis of "Alcoholics Anonymous" is more soundly based psychologically than any other treatment of the subject I have ever come upon.

"Alcoholics Anonymous" is unlike any other book ever before published. No reviewer can say how many have contributed to its pages. But the list of writers would include addicts and doctors, psychiatrists and clergymen. Yet it is not a book of personal experience, except in a limited sense, any more than it is a book of rules and precepts. Whether the author of any given chapter can be physician or addict, the argument comes back to a single fundamental, and that is that the patient is unable to master the situation solely through what is termed "will power," or riling.

Here, then, is the key to "Alcoholics Anonymous," the great and indisputable lesson this extraordinary book would convey. The alcoholic addict cannot, by any effort of what he calls his "will," insure himself against taking his next "first dose."... There is one way for our authors, and but one way. The utter suffusion of the mind by an idea which shall exclude any idea of alcohol or of drugs.

...The thesis of the book is, if we read it aright, that this all-embracing and all-commanding idea must be religious. Yet here again should the reader pause: for the writers are talking of what William James called "Varieties of Religious Experience" rather than matters of individual faith. There is no suggestion advanced in the book that an addict should embrace one faith rather than another. He may fall back upon an "absolute" or upon "A Power which makes for righteousness" if he chooses. The point of the book is that he is unlikely to win in the contest unless he floods his mind with the idea of a force outside himself. So doing, his individual problem resolves itself into thin air. In the last analysis, it is the resigning word: Not my will, but Thine, be done, saved in full knowledge of the fact that the act will be against further addiction.

Most readers will pass this book by. Yet even such a majority many might not be amiss in turning its pages. There, but for the grace of God, goes... A few will reach for it furtively. It is a strange book. The argument, as we have said, has a deep psychological foundation.