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## 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 volition....

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 through 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, said in full knowledge of the fact that the decision will be against further addiction.

Most readers will pass this book by. Yet of 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.

### AMA Journal October 14, 1939

The seriousness of the psychiatric and social problem represented by addiction to alcohol is generally

### Journal of Nervous Mental Disorders September 1940

... This big, big book, i.e. big in words, is a rambling sort of camp-meeting confession of experiences, told in the form of biographies of various alcoholics who... have provisionally recovered, chiefly under the influence of the "big brothers get together spirit." Of the inner meaning of alcoholism there is hardly a word. It is all on the surface material.

Inasmuch as the alcoholic, speaking generally, lives a wish-fulfilling infantile regression to the omnipotency delusional state, perhaps he is best handled for the time being at least by regressive mass psychological methods, in which, as is realized, religious fervors belong, hence the religious trend of the book...

underestimated by those not intimately familiar with the tragedies in the families of victims or the resistance addicts offer to any effective treatment. Many psychiatrists regard addiction to alcohol as having a more pessimistic prognosis than schizophrenia. For many years the public was beguiled into believing that short courses of enforced abstinence and catharsis in "institutes" and "rest homes" would do the trick, and now that the failure of such temporizing has become common knowledge, a considerable number of other forms of quack treatment have sprung up. The book under review is a curious combination of organizing propaganda and religious exhortation. It is in no sense a scientific book, although it is introduced by a letter from a physician who claims to know some of the anonymous contributors who have been "cured" of addiction to alcohol and have joined together in an organization which would save other addicts by a kind of religious conversion. The book contains instructions as to how to intrigue the alcoholic addict into the acceptance of divine guidance in place of alcohol in terms strongly reminiscent of Dale Carnegie and the adherents of the Buchman ("Oxford") movement. The one valid thing in the book is the recognition of the seriousness of addiction to alcohol. Other than this, the book has no scientific merit or interest.